



News Release

Great Lakes - Big Rivers Region External Affairs Office

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Draft Plan Outlines Steps to Help Rare Freshwater Mussel

A draft plan outlining steps to ward off extinction for the scaleshell mussel has been released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which seeks public comment on the plan. Found in streams in Arkansas, Missouri and Oklahoma, the Service listed the scaleshell as an endangered species in 2001.

The draft plan provides federal, state and tribal natural resource managers and their partners with a blueprint of actions needed to prevent extinction for the scaleshell and recover it to the point that protection of the Endangered Species Act is no longer needed. Recommended recovery actions in the draft plan include releasing mussels produced in captivity into existing populations and portions of the scaleshell's historic range. The draft also calls for protecting existing populations, restoring habitat in and adjacent to streams in the mussel's range, and raising public awareness about the scaleshell's role in stream environments.

In addition, the draft describes the goals that must be met to upgrade the scaleshell's status to threatened -- a less serious designation under the Endangered Species Act -- as well as criteria for achieving recovery and removing the mussel from the list of endangered and threatened species.

Once found in 55 rivers in 13 states in the Missouri River basin, the scaleshell is now limited to 14 rivers in three states. Remaining populations face threats from activities that modify its habitat, such as stream channelization, and may soon be affected by the invasion of the non-native zebra mussel. The species requires good water quality to survive and is threatened by declining water quality in the streams it inhabits.

Copies of the draft recovery plan for the scaleshell mussel are available from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Ecological Services, 101 Park DeVille Drive, Suite A, Columbia Missouri 65203; the plan may also be viewed on the Service's website at: <http://midwest.fws.gov/angered> . Comments on the plan may be made by writing to Andrew Roberts at the mailing address above, by fax (573-234-2181), or by e-mail to: andy_roberts@fws.gov. Deadline for comments is September 7, 2004.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 95-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge System, which encompasses 544 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 69 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resources offices and 81 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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