

## NOTICE

# U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service relocates endangered Mississippi River mussels – Seeks public comment on extended effort

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) are relocating the endangered Higgins' eye pearlymussel in the Upper Mississippi River System to save the endangered species from zebra mussels. Some limited pilot relocation efforts were completed in 2000 and 2001 to evaluate the feasibility and refine the relocation methods being proposed.



The Corps and USFWS want public comments on plans for an extended project. “The goal of the project is to ensure that at least five new populations are established,” said Dennis Anderson, a biologist and project manager for the relocation effort lead by the US Army Corps of Engineers. The project will attempt to establish new populations at 10 sites in Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin and Minnesota. The Corps expects to spend \$2.5 million, if funded, for the mussel relocation in the next 10 years.

The Mussel Coordination Team (MCT), made up of 9 federal and state government agencies and 1 private non-profit entity, has been extensively involved in the development of the relocation plan and other on-going mussel related activities. The MCT members include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers; the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the U.S. Geological Survey; the National Park Service; the U.S. Coast Guard; the department of natural resources from the states of Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa and Illinois; and the Science Museum of Minnesota. The partner federal-state agencies will also be contributing extensive staff time and money to the Higgins' eye relocation effort and related mussel activities.

“The Higgins' eye pearlymussel relocation plan is only one part of the overall effort,” said Anderson. “The Corps of Engineers is also undertaking a reconnaissance study of long-term measures for controlling zebra mussels in the Upper Mississippi River system. Additional mussel work that is under way or will be conducted over the next several years includes monitoring the health and status of Higgins' eye and other mussels; protecting existing Higgins' eye within Essential Habitat Areas; monitoring the abundance and distribution of zebra mussels; evaluating the opportunity for fish passage at locks and dams for fish species that are hosts of the *L. higginsii* glochidia (young); a relocation plan for winged mapleleaf mussels; and public outreach.”

The Corps and USFWS want public comment on the newly released “Draft Definite Project Report and Environmental Assessment for a Relocation Plan for the Endangered Higgins' Eye Pearlymussel (*Lampsilis higginsii*), on the Upper Mississippi River and Tributaries in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, and Illinois.”

The report stems from the April 2000 USFWS final biological opinion report that said continued operation of the nine-foot channel project on the Upper Mississippi River system would likely jeopardize the continued existence of the Higgins' eye pearlymussel.

The Corps' locks and dams form pools or reservoirs on the river to facilitate navigation on the river. "Due to the upstream transport by commercial barges and recreational craft, zebra mussels are now found in the Upper Mississippi River system and have a significant adverse impact on Higgins' eye and other native freshwater mussels," said Anderson. "The zebra mussels came from Europe and were introduced into North America by ships discharging their ballast water into the Great Lakes. The zebra mussels eventually got into the Illinois River through the Chicago Sanitary and Shipping Canal, and then the Mississippi River, by attaching themselves to other ships and boats coming out of the Illinois River." Zebra mussels attach to native mussels and are threatening the continued survival of Higgins' eye.



The USFWS biological opinion listed a reasonable and prudent alternative (RPA) believed to be necessary to avoid jeopardy. "The RPA calls for the Corps to develop an *L. higginsii* Relocation Action Plan and conduct a reconnaissance study to control zebra mussels in the Upper Mississippi River," Anderson said.

The plan's objective is to establish a minimum of five new and viable populations, each with a minimum of 500 individuals of Higgins' eye pearly mussel in the upper river or tributaries. The plan involves collecting adult Higgins' eye from areas heavily infested with zebra mussels, where survival of the Higgins' eye is in question, and cleaning and moving them to areas with no or low levels of zebra mussel infestation.

Relocation efforts will also involve raising juvenile mussels on host fish species and at hatcheries, with subsequent stocking at selected relocation sites. Attempts to establish new populations will occur at 10 sites, to ensure that at least five new populations are established. Targeted sites include the following potential areas: Rock and Kankakee Rivers in Illinois; Iowa, Cedar, Des Moines, Upper Iowa, Wapsipinicon, and Turkey rivers in Iowa; Wisconsin, Chippewa, and Black Rivers in Wisconsin; from the head of navigation to Monticello, Minn.; pools 2 through 4 on the Upper Mississippi River, and the first 30 miles of the St. Croix River above Taylors Falls, Minn. A monitoring program to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of the relocation efforts is also part of the plan.

The Draft Definite Project Report/Environmental Assessment can be obtained electronically by clicking on the following file: [relocation](#). Any interested parties that may be affected by the proposed action are invited to submit to this office facts, arguments, or objections to the proposal by April 30, 2002. These statements should bear upon the adequacy of plans and suitability of locations and should, if appropriate, suggest any changes considered desirable. Statements should indicate that they are in response to this notice. All replies should be addressed to the District Engineer, St. Paul District, Corps of Engineers, ATTN: PM-E, 190 Fifth Street East, St. Paul, Minnesota 55101-1638. Mr. Dennis Anderson, telephone number (651) 290-5272 and email [dennis.d.anderson@mvp02.usace.army.mil](mailto:dennis.d.anderson@mvp02.usace.army.mil), can be contacted for additional information or to obtain a hard copy of the Draft Definite Project Report/Environmental Assessment.