Florida's Freshwater Mussels and Clams

More than 60 species of mussels and clams live in Florida's freshwaters. They usually inhabit shallow, sandy, bottoms of lakes and streams and are an important functional component of freshwater ecosystems. Their filter-feeding activity cleanses the water by removing bacteria, algae, and organic material. They are an important food source for many fish, birds, and mammals. Freshwater mussels and clams are affected by poor environmental conditions, therefore, their populations serve as valuable indicators of water quality and the overall health of aquatic ecosystems.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has protected seven Florida mussel species by listing them as Threatened or Endangered. These listed species occur from the Suwannee River system north and west to the Georgia and Alabama borders. Possessing or disturbing listed species is prohibited and can result in substantial penalties. The listed species are illustrated in this pamphlet and include Gulf Moccasinshell, Ochlockonee Moccasinshell, Chipola Slabshell, Shinyrayed Pocketbook, Fat Threeridge, Oval Pigtoe, and Purple Bankclimber.

Mussel species not listed as Threatened or Endangered by the USFWS may be collected for personal use by persons in possession of a valid Florida fishing license. The daily bag limit for these unlisted mussels is 10 per person (or 20 half-shells). The possession limit is two days bag limit (20 live individuals or 40 half-shells). Mussels can be taken by hand-picking only. Use of tools or power equipment for collection is prohibited. Freshwater mussels, live or dead, may not be taken for later sale. Contact the local office of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission if you have questions concerning mussel identification.
**Freshwater Mussels - Family: Unionidae**

Harvest of unlisted species is restricted to 10 individuals (or 20 half-shells) per day

- **Florida Shiny Spike**
  *Elliptio buckleyi*
  
  Maximum length: 3”
  Interior: iridescent
  Exterior: brown

- **Choctaw Bean**
  *Villosa choctawensis*
  
  Maximum length: 4”
  Interior: bluish white
  Exterior: yellowish brown with thin rays

- **Tapered Pigtoe**
  *Fusconaia burkei*
  
  Maximum length: 3”
  Interior: iridescent
  Exterior: dark green to black with ridges & rays

- **Paper Pondshell**
  *Utterbackia imbecillis*
  
  Maximum length: 4”
  Very thin shell
  Interior: iridescent
  Exterior: green-yellow to brown

**THREATENED OR ENDANGERED FRESHWATER MUSSELS**

Harvest is illegal

- **Gulf Moccasinshell**
  *Medionidus penicillatus*
  
  Maximum length: 2”
  Interior: greyish
  Exterior: brown with faint ridges

- **Ochlockonee Moccasinshell**
  *Medionidus simpsonianus*
  
  Maximum length: 2”
  Oval
  Interior: bluish
  Exterior: brown with ridges & rays
Threatened or Endangered Freshwater Mussels

Harvest is illegal

Chipola Slabshell
*Elliptio chipolaensis*
- Maximum length: 3”
- Oval
- Interior: iridescent
- Exterior: light brown

Shinyrayed Pocketbook
*Hamiota subangulata*
- Maximum length: 3”
- Oval
- Interior: iridescent blue
- Exterior: green-yellow with rays

Fat Threeridge
*Amblema neislerii*
- Maximum length: 4”
- Oval
- Interior: iridescent
- Exterior: brown with heavy ridges

Oval Pigtoe
*Pleurobema pyriforme*
- Maximum length: 2”
- Oval
- Interior: bluish white
- Exterior: brown

Purple Bankclimber
*Elliptoideus sloatianus*
- Maximum length: 8”
- Oval
- Interior: iridescent
- Exterior: reddish brown with numerous ridges

This species is one of the two largest in the state.
Native Species and Their Invasive Look-alikes

Native Species

Atlantic Rangia
*Rangia cuneata*
- Maximum length: 3”
- Interior: bluish white
- Exterior: yellow to brown

Carolina Marshclam
*Polymesoda caroliniana*
- Maximum length: 3.5”
- Interior: white with purple
- Exterior: yellow to brown

Fingernail Clam or Pea Clam
*Eupera, Musculium, Sphaerium or Pisidium sp.*
- Harvest not restricted.
- Maximum length: 0.5”
- Interior: creamy grey
- Exterior: light brown

Dark Falsemussel
*Mytilopsis leucophaeta*
- Maximum length: 1”
- Interior: bluish white
- Exterior: yellow to brown

Harvest is not restricted.

Invasive Species!

Zebra Mussel
*Dreissena polymorpha*
- Not known to occur in Florida
- Possession prohibited. If you think you see a Zebra Mussel in Florida, please report to 1-352-955-3220 Ext 110

Asian Clam
*Corbicula fluminea*
- Harvest not restricted.
- Maximum length: 2”
- Ridged shell
- Interior: purplish
- Exterior: yellow to brown

The Asian Clam is common throughout Florida.