DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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McGarvey 202/343-5634

TAN RIFFLE SHELL DETERMINED TO BE ENDANGERED

The tan riffle shell mussel--a small creature that looks like an ordinary clam--has been determined by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to be an endangered species.

This final rulemaking was published in the August 23, 1977, Federal Register.

The tan riffle shell was listed as endangered for two major reasons: (1) the construction of a dam at Columbia, Tennessee, threatens to inundate 50 miles of the Duck River and wipe out the tan riffle shell and three other rare mussel species there as well as two fish and three snail species; (2) pollution. In addition, there is a considerable amount of international commerce in freshwater mussels, particularly with the Japanese pearl industry which long has relied on freshwater mussels ground up as the actual seeds for pearl production. Small bits are placed in the oyster to irritate it and stimulate the growth of pearls.

Listing the tan riffle shell as endangered will prohibit commerce in it, and require agencies of the Federal Government to ensure that their actions or programs do not jeopardize the animal or modify critical habitat. It is also listed in an Appendix to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora, a treaty ratified by the United States in 1974 which prohibits trade in endangered wildlife listed in its appendices.

The tan riffle shell formerly was common in the small and large streams of the Cumberland and Tennessee River systems. It is presently found only in the lower Red River of the Cumberland system in Kentucky and Tennessee, in the middle fork of the Holston River in Virginia, possibly in the Stones River in Tennessee where it would be very rare, in the Duck River in Tennessee from Wilhoite Mill downstream to Columbia, and possibly in the Clinch River in Virginia and Tennessee.

Pollution of these river systems from mine acids and municipal wastes is one of the major culprits. Problems include low dissolved oxygen below Adairville and untreated effluent from a meat packing plant in the Red River system. Mercury and lead are found in the middle fork of the Holston River. Low dissolved oxygen is the cause at Murfreesboro in the west fork of the Stones River. Lead, mercury, and a history of accidental spills of toxic materials are the causes in the Clinch River. Channelization of the Upper Clinch River and a dam under construction on the Duck River will probably destroy these populations.

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