

Kenk's amphipod

Stygobromus kenki

Amphipod Who?

An amphipod is a small shrimp-like freshwater crustacean. The order name Amphipoda means “different feet” in Latin, referring to the many types of legs a single crustacean could have, including some for eating and some for swimming. The amphipod's sensitivity to water quality makes its presence an indication of cleaner water and healthy food webs.

The size of an adult Kenk's amphipod is about the width of a pinky fingernail (1/8 to 1/4 inch). Since it lives primarily underground, it is colorless and has no eyes. While much of the life history of the species remains a mystery, biologists believe it may eat bacteria and fungi found on dead and decaying leaves. Its underground habitat makes it very difficult to study until it is present in the spring outflows on the surface.



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Colorless, without eyes, and about the size of the tip of your pinky fingernail. While these amphipods aren't cute or cuddly, they are helpful warnings for water quality issues and are food for other animals like salamanders.

An Animal Once In Peril

Kenk's amphipod was first discovered by Dr. Roman Kenk in 1967. While surveying the National Park Service's Rock Creek Park, he found the species on leaves and fine soils where underground water comes to the surface in the waters of seepage spring outflows. Since that time, the species' story is mixed: the amphipod was difficult to find from many natural areas where it was once found in the nation's capital, yet it has also been discovered in multiple sites in two separate new areas over 60 miles away.

Before 2016, the species was only found in six sites in Washington, D.C., and Montgomery County, Maryland. Five of these sites are within the Rock Creek drainage, with four of those in Rock Creek Park managed by the National Park Service. The sixth is within the Northwest Branch drainage in the Northwest Branch Stream Valley Park managed by Montgomery County.

Data from multiple surveys between 2015 and 2017 did not find Kenk's amphipods at five of the six Washington, D.C. and Maryland sites, even though other common amphipod species have been present at most sites. While the species' future is unclear in the D.C. area, more recent surveys of publicly owned land in Virginia uncovered seven new Kenk's sites - six at the Army's Fort A.P. Hill in Caroline County, Virginia, and one at The Nature Conservancy's Voorhees Nature Preserve.

The Army has established buffers around the springs in which no land disturbing activities can occur without coordination with the Service. These buffers will prevent water quality impairment in the future and maintain



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Biologists search for Kenk's amphipods by overturning leaves and carefully digging in the fine soil of spring seepages.

the habitat characteristics that the Kenk's amphipod needs to feed and shelter. The Voorhees preserve, surrounded by forest and agriculture, is also protected from development and has no known land practices that would impact the species.

While the Kenk's amphipod may never be a common species, its discovery in seven springs over 60 miles away from the D.C. sites indicates that it is more widely distributed than once thought. Thanks to the compatible management of these areas, the Service expects the Kenk's amphipod to continue to have the water quality needed to survive in Virginia.

Following a review of the best available scientific and commercial information on the Kenk's amphipod, including information provided during the 60-day public comment and peer review period, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is withdrawing its 2016 proposal to list the species as federally endangered under the Endangered Species Act.

The amphipod is state-listed as endangered in Maryland, and was only recently identified in Virginia.

How You Can Help Keep Water Safe

- Dispose of trash properly.
- Do not dump trash, oil, or other products into storm water drains.
- Consider alternative methods for maintaining your lawn without the use of herbicides and pesticides.
- Report illegal dumping and discharges to community leaders.
- Plant native gardens or rain gardens to help reduce stormwater runoff.

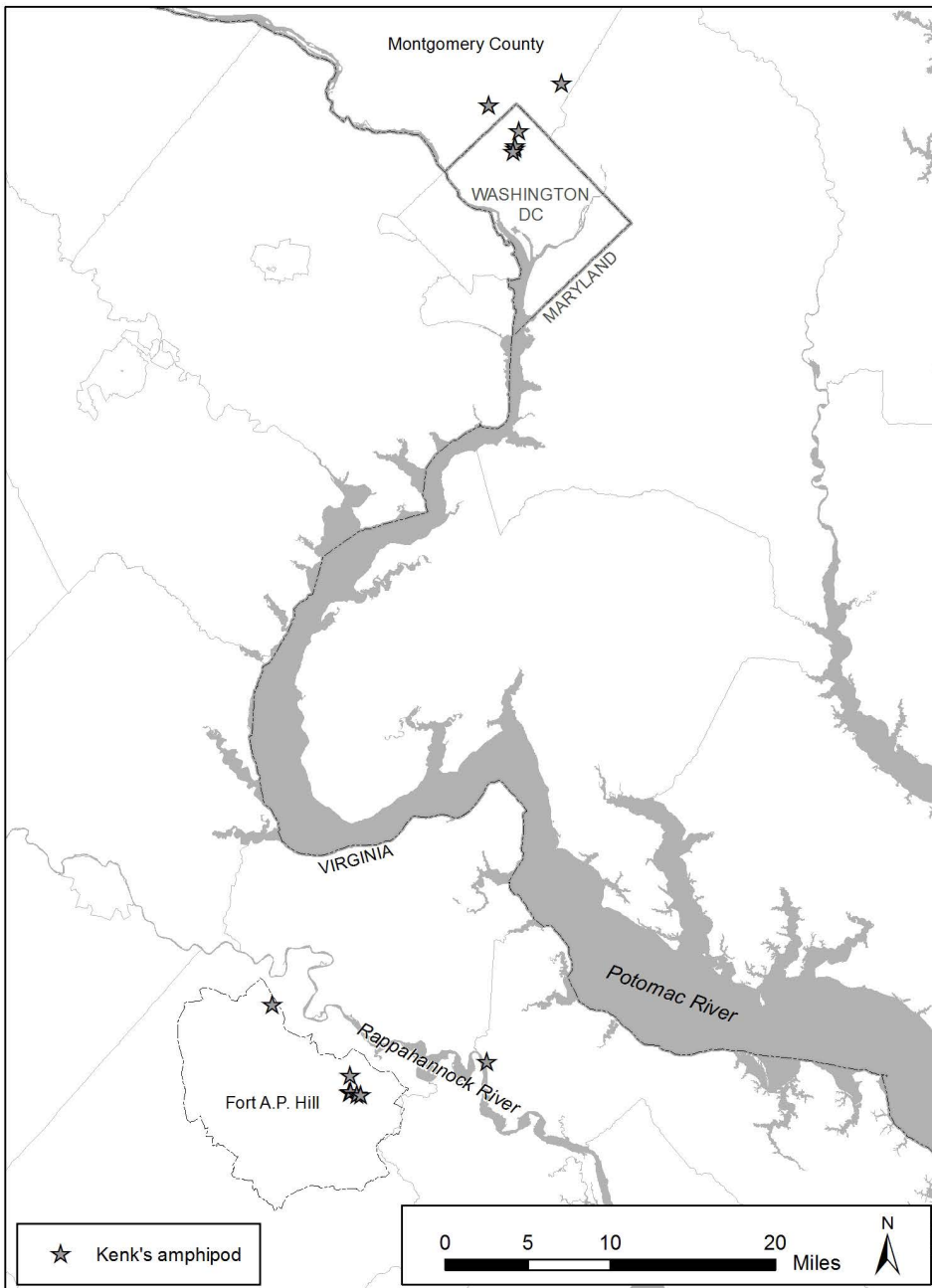
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September 2017



Current distribution of the 13 known sites of the Kenk's amphipod. The amphipod has not been recently found at five of the six Washington, D.C., and Maryland sites. Due to scale, some sites are obscured by the symbols of others.