

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

Grandfather Mountain crayfish

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is the keeper of the federal endangered species list. One of the species we're considering adding to that list is the Grandfather Mountain crayfish.

A new species, first described by science in December of 2005, the Grandfather Mountain crayfish sheds light on a fascinating part of Southern Appalachian prehistory.

The species was first described by Roger Thoma at The Ohio State University, who became aware of the possibility of a new species in 1978 when specimens were brought to the Ohio State University's Museum of Zoology.

This aquatic species has an exceptionally limited known distribution – the Linville River upstream of Linville Falls. In addition to the notion that North Carolina is probably the only place in the world this species is found, part of what makes it fascinating is that Dr. Thoma states that the Grandfather Mountain crayfish is most closely related to crayfish found in the New River and Tennessee River basins. The Linville River flows into the Catawba River, and eventually into the Atlantic Ocean. The Tennessee and New rivers eventually flow into the Gulf of Mexico. The fact the distribution of these closely related crayfish straddles the Eastern continental divide points to the belief held by many that the Linville River once flowed west into the Nolichucky River system, before it was captured by the Catawba River and began flowing east.

For WNCW and the USFWS, this is Gary Peebles.