

Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

State of the Fish

Welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature. This week, we'll look at the state of fish populations, both in the Southern Appalachians and across the nation.

The slender chub is a tiny fish known only from the Clinch, Powell, and Holston Rivers of eastern Tennessee and southwest Virginia. It hasn't been seen in the wild since 2002, despite searches by some of the best fish biologists in the region. Also in eastern Tennessee, a fish hatchery truck recently unloaded hundreds of small lake sturgeon into the French Broad River in an effort to restore that fish.

Both the slender chub and the lake sturgeon make a list of North America's most imperiled fish. The American Fisheries Society, the nation's premier organization of fisheries biologists, recently published a report examining the status of North American fish populations, and it wasn't encouraging. On a continent with the world's greatest temperate freshwater biodiversity, the report found 700 fish, or approximately 39% of its known fish species, are imperiled, and the Southeast stands out as an area of tremendous imperilment. This is the third time the society has taken a comprehensive look at the state of fisheries across North America, the first coming in 1979, when 251 fish were listed as imperiled; the second in 1989, when 364 fish made the imperiled list.

There are a lot of reasons for the decline and for most the common denominator is human impacts – water pollution, loss of riparian buffers, and introduced species.

For WNCW and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, this is Gary Peeples.