

Freshwater Mussel Release Video Transcript

We're here today to release 6500 mussels of seven species,
and what makes this significant
is that we're going to release 3500
of two Federally Endangered Species,
the oyster mussel and the Cumberlandian combshell,
and all these mussels were propagated and raised
by the Virginia Game Inland Fisheries Aquatic Wildlife Conservation
Center,
and the facility of Virginia Tech.
This is a cooperative effort,
but we have many other partners...
the U.S. Fish-&-Wildlife Service,
the Nature Conservancy,
and also a lot of other public and private partners
and nonprofits.

MAN: Come on, do you have more mussels?

BOY: I found fish!

MAN: We really need your help here.

We really appreciate it.

MAN: The real significance of this
is that this is the largest release of larger-sized muscles
in the Eastern United States,
so it's quite an accomplishment
that we've learned how to culture these mussels,
that we have come up with the facilities

to raise them to this level,

and the fact that we're putting them back in significant numbers that we think can actually start to make a difference.

PINDER: Good water quality and a good mussel population are synonymous.

To have good water quality means you're going to have a good healthy mussel population, and the mussel population is going to help benefit that by cleaning the water itself.

It's going to filter out particulates in the water like algae and bacteria and actually clean the water up.

There's studies that have been done that say when you have a good mussel bed, it actually produces a good, healthy aquatic insect population, and that increases the fish population, and then everybody likes to go out there and go fishing for that small-mouthed bass.

So there's a connection with all these animals.

MAN: Everybody likes the river.

What do we use the river for?

BOY: Swimming and fishing!

MAN: That's right... swimming and fishing.

Believe it or not, we use a lot of it for drinking.

A lot of the water that you drink comes right from this river.

So do we want to keep it clean?

KIDS: Yes!

MAN: All right!

And what's an animal that keeps the river clean?

BOY: Mussels.

MAN: It's a mussel - mussels clean the water.

Okay.

We're going to start, and the biologists,

they're going to help you,

and they're going to put a flag

right near where you put the mussels.

As a biologist working for the Fish~&~Wildlife Service,

I think what is really important here

is that after the passage

of the Endangered Species Act in the early 1970s,

recovery plans were developed for these Endangered Species,

including these many endangered freshwater mussels,

and so what we're doing here today

is we're implementing aspects of the Endangered Species Act.

Not only is the Act intended to prevent extinction,

but it's also intended to recover species

and ultimately get them off the Endangered Species list.

So bring them from Endangered, Threatened

and then ultimately off the list.

And so what we're doing here is part of that process.

And so when you put it into the substrate,

it's foot-down.

Typically you bury it so that only this end of the mussel is sticking out of the substrate.

PINDER: I would say it's very significant for freshwater mussels.

The United States itself historically had about 300 species, and most of those were concentrated in the rivers of the Southeast.

Now, many of those have declined throughout the range, either by water pollution or damming or other factors.

The Clinch River right behind me is part of the Upper Tennessee, and it's one of the last free-flowing sections of river.

So we do see good populations of mussels, good species numbers, from Norris Reservoir to Tazewell County.

There's roughly 45 species of mussels here.

Unfortunately, 31 of those have some level of endangerment.

I do water quality assessments with DEQ.

I look at the water quality data that we collect all over this region on surface waters, analyze that data, and determine the state of the waters, or if the water is impaired or not.

WOMAN: How is Southwest Virginia doing overall?

Southwest Virginia continues to have impaired waters added to the dirty waters list

each time we do an assessment.

But part of the reason

is because we are doing more monitoring.

WOMAN: I understand we're working,

we've got some partners that are helping us out now

to clean up those waters?

We have some great partners.

We have, as represented here today, Betty from VDOT,

We have The Nature Conservancy.

We've really benefited from the collaborations

we've had with the representatives

from Alpha Natural Resources and Arch Mineral

that have participated

in the Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative.

What we'd like to see is for that to expand out

and get more and more participation and involvement

from some of the other coal companies

that operate in these areas.

That would also apply to the gas industry.

You know, gas development

is occurring in this region as well.

They all share the same resource interests.

They all share the same resources themselves.

and if we can get more of that dialogue

and more of that solution-oriented effort

put to the task,

I think we could really find
some significant conservation gains
that will really benefit us all
at relatively modest cost for any of us.
So that's one of the big goals
of the Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative,
is to keep that dialogue open and going.

WOMAN: Do you have to go back and teach now?

We're going to go back,
and we're going to write what we saw today.

MAN: All right, kids!

Let's come on out.

You're getting really wet.

WOMAN: I believe the kids are taking a swimming break.

BOY: Yeah, it's fun!