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Fish and Wildlife Service Announces Five-Year Review Regarding Status of Three Endangered Southeastern Mussels

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service today released a five-year status review that recommends removing three endangered mussels from the list of endangered and threatened species because they are believed to be extinct.

The three endangered Southeastern mussels are the turgid-blossom pearl mussel, yellow-blossom pearl mussel, and green-blossom pearl mussel.

The turgid-blossom pearl mussel lived in the Tennessee River and Cumberland River drainages in Tennessee, in Spring Creek, the Black River, and White River in Arkansas, and in Shoal Creek and Bear Creek in Alabama. The yellow-blossom pearl mussel lived in the Tennessee River and Cumberland River drainages in Tennessee and Alabama. The green-blossom pearl mussel lived in the upper Tennessee River drainage in Tennessee and Virginia. All three species were listed as endangered in 1976.

Findings from the five-year review indicate that live or fresh-dead individuals of the green-blossom pearl mussel have not been found throughout its range for 26 years. Live or fresh-dead individuals of the yellow-blossom pearl mussel and turgid-blossom pearl mussel have not been collected for 41 years and 43 years, respectively, and reproducing populations of all three species have not been reported for more than 50 years. Biologists have conducted comprehensive mussel surveys in rivers historically supporting these species, but have not found them despite the fact that some of the rivers currently support good populations of other mussel species. While not targeted for these blossom mussels, these surveys were thorough, and have been conducted throughout the past several decades as part of, for example, section 7 consultations or state conducted surveys.

Habitat fragmentation, alteration, and destruction are the leading probable causes for the three mussel species' decline.

Under the Endangered Species Act, species are designated as endangered when they are in danger of becoming extinct throughout all or a significant portion of their range. Although the Service has made a recommendation to delist these three mussel species, a five-year review is not a decision-making document. A decision to delist requires a separate rulemaking process providing ample opportunity for public review and comment.

A copy of the review is on the Service's website at www.fws.gov/cookeville.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting, and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. Visit the Service's website at <http://www.fws.gov> and in the Southeast: <http://www.fws.gov/southeast>.