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Mussels Returned to Their Native Range After More Than 100 Years

CHAMPAIGN III. Populations of two endangered mussel species, the northern riffleshell (*Epioblasma rangiana*) and the clubshell (*Pleurobema clava*), are being re-established in Illinois by transplanting mussels from western Pennsylvania’s Alleghany River.

As part of the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Species Recovery Plans for the species, Prairie Research Institute scientist Jeremy Tiemann of the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) and a team of scientists identified rivers within the historic Illinois range of the northern riffleshell and the clubshell, that contain protected areas, diverse high-quality mussel assemblages, and populations of host fish.
In August 2013, INHS researchers collected 1,000 mussels from a planned construction site in Pennsylvania and brought them to Illinois to be tagged and released at sites in Vermilion County between August 30th and September 2nd. Tiemann said, "We are hoping our efforts will lead to the establishment of two species that are extirpated from Illinois. If we are successful, our project will be another step in recovering these species with the ultimate goal of being able to delist them."

This project is one of the first to study the viability of translocating populations of mussels displaced by construction and is being done in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the USFWS, the Ohio Department of Natural Resources Division of Wildlife, and the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources.

In 2010, researchers gathered 150 individuals from Pennsylvania, tagged, and released them in the Salt Fork Vermilion River and Middle Fork Vermilion River in central Illinois. After a year and a half, 80% of the individuals in this pilot study were able to be located again.

In 2012 a multi-state team gathered another 3,900 mussels from Pennsylvania. After tagging, 200 clubshells and 1000 northern riffleshells were hand-planted by a team of volunteers in the Salt Fork and Middle Fork Rivers.
http://wwx.inhs.illinois.edu/collections/mollusk/news/project/

**Funding for this project:**

This mussel project is being funded, in part, by a State of Illinois natural resource damage assessment (NRDA) settlement: Hegeler Zinc—Lyondell Basell Companies. Through the NRDA process the State of Illinois Trustees (IDNR & IEPA) received a settlement as compensation for injuries to natural resources in Vermilion County along the Vermilion River watershed. A portion of these settlement funds are being used in support of the mussel reintroduction effort.

**About Freshwater Mussels**

Mussels are often referred to as “the livers of the rivers” because of their ability to filter particles and contaminants from the water. Mussels are also an important part of the food web, consuming detritus, bacteria, and plankton and in turn being eaten by minks, otters, muskrats, raccoons, birds, and fish. Species like the northern riffleshell are sensitive to environmental conditions and serve as a “canary in the coalmine,” — their population declines indicating problems with water quality.

http://wwx.inhs.illinois.edu/outreach/mussels/

Established in 1858, the Illinois Natural History Survey (INHS) mission is to investigate and document the biological resources of Illinois and other areas, and to acquire and provide natural history information that can be used to promote the common understanding, conservation, and management of these
resources. With a staff of over 200 scientists and technicians, it is recognized as the premier natural history survey in the nation.

The Prairie Research Institute at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is the home of the Illinois State Scientific Surveys: Illinois Natural History Survey, Illinois State Archaeological Survey, Illinois State Geological Survey, Illinois State Water Survey, and Illinois Sustainable Technology Center. Established by statue July 1, 2008 it builds on the Surveys' reputations for basic and applied research and service. With 700 employees and a budget of more than $65 million in applied science, the Institute is one of the largest institutes within the University. Prairie Research Institute scientists work to support economic development and natural and cultural resource sustainability for Illinois and beyond. www.prairie.illinois.edu

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