

FIGHTING FOR SURVIVAL

Six Mussels



Photo: © R.G. Howells. The Texas Pimpleback mussel, one of six mussels petitioned for Endangered Species Act protection.

MUSSELS IN PERIL

Freshwater mussels are the most threatened and rapidly declining group of freshwater organisms in North America. The southern hickorynut, smooth pimpleback, Texas pimpleback, false spike, Mexican fawnsfoot, and Texas fawnsfoot are six species of freshwater mussels that are rapidly disappearing from watersheds in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas as well as in Mexico. Because of habitat destruction from sedimentation, channelization, impoundment of rivers, sand and gravel mining, and chemical run-off, these freshwater mussels are at risk of extinction. Without federal protection, we may lose these species and their contributions to the web of life forever.

PROTECTING PRECIOUS WATERWAYS

Free-flowing rivers and streams make the best habitat for these freshwater mussels, but much of our waterways are already at risk, as evidenced by the decline in freshwater mussel populations. Because they are extremely sensitive to environmental disturbances, freshwater mussels serve as barometers of health in aquatic ecosystems and are essential components of these ecosystems. Mussels serve as filter-feeders, improving water quality as they remove phytoplankton and suspended matter from waterways. If listed under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), these freshwater mussels should be given habitat protections that will not only ensure their survival for future generations, but other co-existing aquatic species as well.

KNOW YOUR MUSSELS

- **Movement:** While a mussel can move by extending a muscular foot between its valves, their range of movement is limited and they tend to stay in place for extended periods of time.
- **Home:** Adult mussels remain partially embedded in the bottom of water bodies for most of their lives.
- **Vulnerability:** because of their limited range of movement, freshwater mussels are extremely vulnerable to human activities that disturb their habitat.

CLIMATE CHAOS

Increased scouring floods caused by climate change poses a severe risk to these vulnerable animals.



Freshwater Mussel Historic Range

