

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Asian clams in the Little Tennessee River

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

The Little Tennessee River between Franklin, North Carolina, and Fontana Reservoir is one of the best examples of a warm, Southern Appalachian river, with a surprising amount of its native fauna intact. Indeed, this stretch is home to three federally-protected animals- the Appalachian elktoe mussel, littlewing pearly mussel, and the spotfin chub, a tiny fish.

State and federal biologists recently donned wetsuits, masks, and snorkels as part of an ongoing effort by the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission to keep tabs on the state of mussel populations in the river. While native mussels were found, by far the most commonly found mussel was the Asian clam, also known by its genus name, *corbicula*.

The Asian clam is easily discerned from local mussels. It's smaller, reaching only up to two inches across, and it has very distinct concentric rings on its shell. These mussels are not new to the area, and indeed they can be found in nearly every sizable stream in the Southern Appalachians.

It was long thought that this invasive species, which has established itself in North American and European rivers, had little impact on the native aquatic ecosystem, an assumption that will be tested in coming years. The Little Tennessee River has seen an inexplicable decline in its population of the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel. Researchers are preparing to study whether this decline is linked to the abundance of Asian clams in the river.

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