

Peer Review Plan for Three Eastern Mussels Species Status Assessment Reports

About the Documents

Titles:

- (1) Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Longsolid Mussel (*Fusconaia subrotunda*), Version 1.0
- (2) Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Purple Lilliput Mussel (*Toxolasma lividus*), Version 1.0
- (3) Draft Species Status Assessment Report for the Round Hickorynut Mussel (*Obovaria subrotunda*), Version 1.0

Estimated Timeline of Peer Review: Fall 2018

Determination Regarding Species' Status: These reports will inform decisions on whether the longsolid, purple lilliput, and round hickorynut mussels warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act. This decision is expected approximately March 2019. If we determine that any of these three species warrant listing, we will publish a proposed rule to list the species and designate critical habitat with appropriate opportunities for public review and comment.

About the Peer Review Process

In accordance with our July 1, 1994 peer review policy (59 FR 34270), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's (Service) August 22, 2016, Director's Memo on the Peer Review Process, and the Office of Management and Budget's December 16, 2004, Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review, we will solicit independent scientific reviews of the information contained in our Species Status Assessment Reports for the longsolid, purple lilliput, and round hickorynut mussels. The purpose of seeking independent peer review is to ensure use of the best scientific and commercial information available, and to ensure and to maximize the quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of the information upon which the reports are based, as well as to ensure that reviews by recognized experts are incorporated into the Species' Status Assessment process.

We will request peer review from three or more independent experts. We will consider the following criteria:

- **Expertise:** The reviewers should have knowledge of or experience with longsolid, purple lilliput, or round hickorynut mussels, or similar mussel fauna biology, stream and river ecosystems, stream or river habitat degradation (e.g., impoundments, dredging, toxicity), and/or climate change.
- **Independence:** The reviewers should not be employed by the Service. Academic, consulting, or government scientists should have sufficient independence from the Service if the government supports their work.
- **Objectivity:** The reviewers should be recognized by his or her peers as being objective, open-minded, and thoughtful. In addition, the reviewers should be comfortable sharing his or her knowledge and perspectives, and openly identifying his or her knowledge gaps.

- **Conflict of Interest:** The reviewers should not have any financial or other interest that conflicts or that could impair his or her objectivity or create an unfair competitive advantage. If an otherwise qualified reviewer has an unavoidable conflict of interest, the Service may publicly disclose the conflict.

While expertise is the primary consideration, we will select peer reviewers (considering, but not limited to, these selections) that add to a diversity of scientific perspectives relevant to the Species Status Assessment Reports for the longsolid, purple lilliput, and round hickorynut mussels. We will not be providing financial compensation to peer reviewers. We will solicit reviews from at least three qualified experts for each analyses.

We will provide each peer reviewer with information explaining their role and instructions for fulfilling that role, the Species Status Assessment Reports, and a conflict of interest form. Peer reviewers will be asked to comment specifically on the quality of the scientific information and analyses, and whether the best available information was used or relied on in the document; identify oversights, omissions, and inconsistencies; provide advice on reasonableness of judgments made from the scientific evidence; help ensure that scientific uncertainties are identified and characterized; provide advice on the overall strengths and limitations of the scientific data used in the documents; and inform us of any scientific information that we did not use. Peer reviewers will be advised that they are not to provide advice on policy.

Peer reviewers will provide individual, written responses to the Service. Peer reviewers will be advised that their reviews, including their names and affiliations, will: (1) be included in the decisional record of our determinations regarding this species' status (i.e., final rules or withdrawals); and, (2) be available to the public upon request once all reviews are completed. We will summarize and respond to the issues raised by the peer reviewers in the record supporting our determinations. A decision on whether or not the longsolid, purple lilliput, and round hickorynut mussels warrant listing under the Endangered Species Act is by expected by approximately March 2019.

About Public Participation

This peer review plan is made available to allow the public to monitor our compliance with the Office of Management and Budget's Final Information Quality Bulletin for Peer Review. The Species Status Assessments along with the final decision document(s) will be made available to the public through a news release, direct mail to interested parties, and posts on our websites (with solicitations for public comment if we prepare a proposed rule to list the species' as endangered or threatened and designate critical habitat). If appropriate, we will publish a final listing(s) and designation of critical habitat(s) following consideration of all comments received from the public.

Contact

For more information, contact Janet Mizzi, Field Supervisor, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Asheville Ecological Services Field Office, 828-258-3939 or janet_mizzi@fws.gov.