

## Southern Appalachian Creature Feature Podcasts

### Train wreck

Greetings and welcome to the Southern Appalachian Creature Feature.

It's the telephone call a biologist never wants to get – the chemical spill, the fish kill, the accident that makes you stop everything else. The most recent was a train wreck along the North Toe River in Mitchell County. Fortunately no one was hurt.

The train, carrying ethanol and propane among other things, derailed on the banks of the North Toe River, home to the endangered Appalachian elktoe mussel. It's a popular fishing and paddling river, eventually feeding the Nolichucky, home to a major commercial paddling industry. Ethanol and propane in the river would've caused serious ecological and commercial impacts. Fortunately those cars remained intact and fell away from the river. Scrap metal and corn cars fell toward the river – not as bad, but corn can cause its own problems if it gets into the stream and begins rotting which would spike bacteria levels and use up the oxygen in the river.

Downstream, the North Toe River joins with the Cane River, a stream recently beset by problems from a malfunctioning wastewater treatment plant, an event implicated in the dramatic reduction in stream life for several miles below the plant.

Though we may think of water pollution as a number of small, dispersed impacts that add up over time and space, the train wreck and wastewater treatment plant episodes are reminders that a single bad incident can ruin a river.

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