

Frequently Asked Questions

Proposed Listing and Proposed Critical Habitat for Canoe Creek Clubshell

What action is the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service taking?

Based on a review of the best available science, the Service is proposing to list the Canoe Creek clubshell as endangered under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). We are also proposing to designate critical habitat for the species. The [ESA defines endangered](#) as a species that is likely to become extinct in the foreseeable future throughout all or a significant portion of its range.

What are the primary threats to the Canoe Creek clubshell?

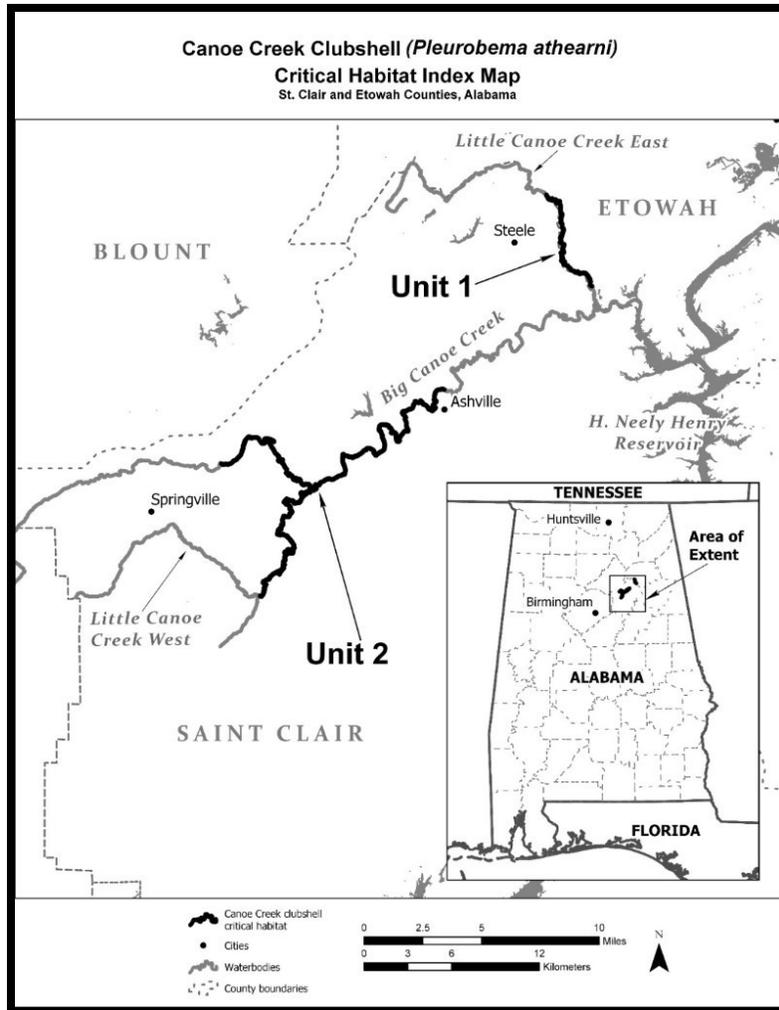
Sedimentation, poor water quality and events like droughts and floods that have been exacerbated by climate change have devastated Canoe Creek clubshell populations. Also, clubshell populations in both the eastern and western range are comprised of a critically low number of older individuals with no recently documented recruitment. The severity and frequency of drought events in the past two decades, combined with other ongoing habitat-related stressors and the mussel's failure to naturally reproduce new young recruits, has likely caused the decline of the species.

What is the Canoe Creek clubshell and where does it occur?

The Canoe Creek clubshell is a narrow-ranging freshwater mussel endemic to the Big Canoe Creek watershed in northeastern Alabama. The species' current distribution is similar to its historical distribution, which has been very small. Its current distribution is split into two areas of Big Canoe Creek – an eastern and western range. These ranges are separated by an uninhabited stretch of river that includes a part of the Neely Henry Reservoir, which likely excludes the dispersion of the species' host fish (the clubshell's primary mode of dispersal). As a result, we believe there is no genetic exchange occurring between the western and eastern portions of the species' range, and we characterize these two areas as subpopulations.

What is the proposed critical habitat designation for the Canoe Creek clubshell?

The Service is proposing to designate 58.5 kilometers (36.3 miles) of river across two units (subpopulations) as critical habitat for the Canoe Creek clubshell. Unit One, the eastern portion, includes Little Canoe Creek East (which serves as a county line between Etowah and St. Clair counties, Alabama), and Unit Two, the western portion, includes Big Canoe Creek/Little Canoe Creek West in St. Clair County, Alabama. Both units are occupied by the species. (See below map for more details.)



What is critical habitat?

The Service is required by the ESA to identify critical habitat when it proposes to list an animal or plant as endangered or threatened. The ESA defines critical habitat as the specific geographic areas that contain features essential to the conservation of an endangered or threatened species that may require special management and protection. Critical habitat may also include areas that are not currently occupied by the species but will be needed for its recovery.

What protection does a critical habitat designation provide?

When an area is designated as critical habitat for a listed species, federal agencies are required to ensure that any action they fund, authorize or carry out is not likely to result in the destruction of the habitat. This is carried out through consultation with the Service under Section 7 of the ESA. This only affects projects that require a federal permit or other actions funded or conducted by a federal agency.

The designation will have no impact on private landowners taking actions on their land that do not require federal funding or permits.

The designation of critical habitat does not affect land ownership or establish a refuge, wilderness, reserve, preserve or other conservation area. A critical habitat designation also does not allow the government or public to access private lands, nor does it require implementation of restoration, recovery or enhancement measures by non-federal landowners.

How do I submit comments on this proposal?

The public is invited to submit written comments on the proposal to list the Canoe Creek clubshell and designate critical habitat up to 60 days from its November 3, 2020 publication in the Federal Register. Please submit comments by January 4, 2021. The Service will post all comments on [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov). This generally means the agency will post any personal information provided through the process.

All relevant information received during the open comment period from the public, government agencies, the scientific community, industry, or any other interested parties will be considered and addressed in the Service's final listing determination and critical habitat designation for the Canoe Creek clubshell.

The complete listing proposal can be obtained by visiting the Federal eRulemaking Portal: [regulations.gov](https://www.regulations.gov) at Docket Number FWS-R4-ES-2020-0078.