

## 2 Tennessee mussel species may be listed as endangered

By Pam Sohn

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed Endangered Species Act protection today for two species of freshwater mussels, and the agency wants to designate 1,380 miles of the Tennessee River and some of its tributaries as “critical habitat.”

The designation would affect rivers in Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, Tennessee and Virginia.

Biologists say water pollution and dams have caused the steep decline of the once-plentiful Tennessee River native mussels — the slabside pearlymussel and fluted kidneyshell.

The decisions to protect the slabside pearlymussel and fluted kidneyshell are a result of a 2011 settlement with the Center for Biological Diversity that requires the agency to speed protection decisions for 757 species around the country. The proposal offers specific plans to finalize that protection, according to Tierra Curry, a conservation biologist at the center.

Tennessee Valley Authority spokesman Bill Sitton said TVA does not expect the new additions to the Endangered Species List will effect the production of electricity on the region’s rivers.

“The Tennessee Valley has an abundance of mussels, and some of those species are endangered and threatened. We recognize that, and we have a long history of trying to protect them,” Sitton said. “So we don’t expect adding a couple more to have a significant impact.”