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Bob Boensch, The Nature Conservancy

Freshwater Mussels Science Café at the Logon Cafe

On September 1, 2011 Bob Boensch, Southeast Texas Preserve Manager of The Nature Conservancy, shared a Freshwater Mussels presentation at the Logon Café in Beaumont, Texas. Bob participates as a leader in the Thicket of Diversity All Taxa Biodiversity Inventory coordinated through a partnership between the Big Thicket Association and the Big Thicket National Preserve. Freshwater Mussels are good indicators of water quality and are often the first organism to decline during adverse conditions.

Mussels are possibly the most threatened and fastest declining species with approximately 80% extinct, endangered or threatened. Six of the threatened 15 species identified by Texas Parks and Wildlife were found in Big Thicket mussel surveys. Common names for local mussels are most interesting. They include names such as Texas Heelsplitter, Giant Floater, Louisiana Fatmucket, Washboard, Threehorn Wartyback, Lilliput and Sandbank Pocketbook.

The Asian clam is an invasive found in every survey. Big Thicket inventories are also on the lookout for another invasive, the zebra mussel. It first arrived in the America's in the 1980's in the ballast of a ship and has since spread to 27 states. It attaches to almost anything underwater and can quickly colonize rocks, boat docks, water intake pipes and boats.

Local mussels have been impacted by extreme weather conditions. In 2006 Boensch noted that in some areas literally six feet of banks disappeared as a result of flooding. Current drought conditions have left mussel colonies exposed and an increase in the number of dead specimens has been noted.

Bob closed his presentation with an invite for volunteers to pursue training in mussel inventory techniques offered by Texas Parks and Wildlife. He offered to be a guide for those who liked to dig in the mud for a good cause.





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Texas Nature Trackers: Texas Mussel Watch Texas Parks and Wildlife

Freshwater mussels are one of the most imperiled groups of animals in the United States. Texas hosts more than 50 species of native freshwater mussels. Because scientists have only recently become aware of the severe decline in mussel populations, some species may have become extinct before their decline was even documented. Currently, 15 mussel species are listed as threatened at the state level. Six of those 15 species are now Candidate for listing under the U.S. Endangered Species Act. By becoming a Texas Mussel Watch Volunteer, you can help us gain a better understanding of the distribution and status of these invertebrates in Texas.

http://www.tpwd.state.tx.us/huntwild/wild/wildlife_diversity/texas_nature_trackers/mussel/