

Imperiled Aquatic Species Conservation Strategy for the Upper Tennessee River Basin

Purpose

The purpose of the Imperiled Aquatic Species Conservation Strategy for the Upper Tennessee River Basin (UTRB) (Strategy) is to guide the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) in the management of Federal candidate, proposed, and listed (herein collectively referred to as imperiled) aquatic species in the UTRB. Because nearly all imperiled aquatic species in the UTRB are fishes and mussels (Appendix 1), the Strategy is focused on these two faunal groups at present. The Strategy will (1) identify, prioritize, and guide implementation of on-the-ground actions, including population and habitat management, monitoring, and research, towards the recovery of imperiled aquatic species; and (2) integrate the efforts of internal and external partners, as appropriate. It is understood that implementation of many of the conservation and management actions outlined in the Strategy will directly or indirectly benefit other species that comprise aquatic communities in the UTRB. It is important to note that the USFWS does not seek to direct the work of our partners with this Strategy; rather, we seek to prioritize USFWS efforts so that we can make the most effective use of a limited budget and continue to complement the work of our conservation partners.

The USFWS will work cooperatively internally and externally to implement and monitor the progress of this Strategy. Through the Strategy, the USFWS seeks to coordinate implementation and monitoring of efforts intended to (1) conserve and recover imperiled aquatic species and the UTRB ecosystem upon which they depend, (2) lead to imperiled species stabilization and/or recovery, (3) provide information to all stakeholders and partners involved in conservation efforts, (4) encourage collaborative efforts among agencies and partners towards imperiled species conservation, and (5) help ensure compliance with pertinent laws, regulations, and policies. The goals, objectives, and management actions in this Strategy were developed for conservation implementation over a 20-year period, with periodic review and revision as needed.

Introduction and Geographic Scope

The geographic scope of this Strategy is the UTRB, which drains portions of the Blue Ridge, Ridge and Valley, and Appalachian Plateau physiographic provinces of the southern Appalachian Mountains (Figure 1). This includes southwestern Virginia, western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and small portions of northeastern Alabama and northern Georgia (Figure 1). The UTRB in Virginia, North Carolina, and Tennessee is the focus of the Strategy. As defined herein, the basin encompasses 22,360 square miles (an area about the size of West Virginia), and is made up of the entire Tennessee River basin upstream of its confluence with and including the Sequatchie River drainage (Figure 1). Major tributaries of the UTRB include the French Broad (5,124 square miles), Clinch (4,413 square miles), Holston (3,776 square miles), Hiwassee (2,700 square miles), Little Tennessee (2,627 square miles), and Sequatchie (602 square miles) Rivers.