

Springtime: A busy season for AFHA AmeriCorps!



Appalachian Forest Heritage Area June 2013 E-Newsletter

Greetings,

This summer our knees are deep in all kinds of projects! We are still making progress on our "Discovering the Appalachian Forest" exhibit at the Darden Mill (more updates to come!), and we've even been experimenting with our "look." What do you think of our updated logo (right column, up top)??

Besides what's going on in the office, our AmeriCorps volunteers have been busy serving at their sponsoring sites throughout AFHA. This season is moving quickly, and we're already beginning to think about next year's AmeriCorps program. Read below if you're interested in getting involved!

AFHA AmeriCorps Needs YOU!



SITES



~OF THE~ MONTH

Experience the heritage of your area! *Sites of the Month* spotlights events and locations within the region, based on AFHA's four themes: forestry, history, culture, and nature.

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AFHA AmeriCorps program is recruiting now for members to serve starting in September 2013. Members serve in fields of conservation, heritage development, and hands-on service including historic preservation. Skills and experience sought include wildlife, forestry or environmental studies related degree for conservation positions; history, museum, communications or community development background for heritage positions; and construction and/or outdoor work experience for the hands-on team. Expected locations will include Elkins, Pocahontas County, Tucker County, Lewisburg, Buckhannon and Arthurdale. The commitment is for one year, and members receive a living stipend and education award that can help with college tuition or paying student loans.

AFHA AmeriCorps has received word that our primary AmeriCorps grant has been approved, and we are still waiting on word for the second grant. In the meantime, our recruitment interviews are full steam ahead. If you are interested, please see more info at <http://appalachianforest.us/ameri-corps.htm> or email phyllisb@appalachianforest.us.

AFHA's Creatures, Great and Small

By Kristin Haider

AFHA AmeriCorps Conservation Volunteer



[Tea Creek Area and Campground](#)

The Tea Creek Area resides among the Yew Mountains just north of the Cranberry Wilderness Area. Tea Creek drains the steep canyon southeast into the Williams River, a river renowned for its trout fishing. Due to the ruggedness of the terrain, the area remained wild long after the lowlands had been settled; the last mountain lion killed in West Virginia was shot on the creek in 1887. The region was logged around the turn of the century and is today part of the Monongahela National Forest.



[Berkeley Springs State Park](#)

Long before Europeans discovered the warm waters of Berkeley Springs, it was already a famous mecca that attracted Native Americans from the St. Lawrence Seaway, the Great Lakes, and from the Carolinas. Around 1730, settlers learned the uses and value of the springs from Native Americans and began

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Freshwater mussels play an important role in their ecosystems, but many species are in decline. Photo credit: USFWS

If someone had asked me to tell them about freshwater mussels before I started my AmeriCorps position with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, I would have been at a loss.

Despite studying biology and ecology, I never gave much thought to freshwater mussels. Sadly, I think this is true for most people. Freshwater mussels are an underappreciated group of organisms that most people know little, if anything, about. Our lack of knowledge is understandable, however; freshwater mussels are not cute, cuddly, or charismatic like dolphins, eagles, pandas, or tigers. Instead they are cryptic organisms that live in the sediment at the bottom of lakes, rivers, and streams and often resemble rocks.

Despite the lack of attention paid to them, freshwater mussels play a vital role in our freshwater ecosystems. Mussels are one of the few animals that improve water quality. As filter feeders, freshwater mussels remove things such as plankton, fungi, algae, and bacteria from the water column. Additionally, waste excreted back into the water by freshwater mussels is in a form that provides readily available nutrients for plants and algae, and waste deposited into the sediment by freshwater mussels provides food for some bottom dwelling invertebrates and fish. The mussels themselves are an important food source for muskrats, river otters, and some fish, and the mussel shells provide habitat for algae and some insects. Furthermore, freshwater mussels are an important indicator of water quality. Since mussels are relatively sedentary organisms, they cannot escape changes to their ecosystem. The loss of mussels from an ecosystem provides us with a critical warning sign of pollution or other environmental problems.

settlements of the east. Perhaps the most notable and influential advocate of the curative powers of the springs was George Washington, who visited the site regularly.



[Augusta Heritage Center](#)

Located at Davis & Elkins College in Elkins, Augusta Heritage Center is known nationally and internationally for its activities relating to traditional folklife and folk arts of many regions and cultures. Augusta offers intensive week-long workshops that attract several hundred participants annually. Thousands more attend the public concerts, dances, and festivals also offered. These world-renowned workshops and festivals bring together masters and enthusiasts of all ages. Sign up for one today!



[Spice Run Wilderness Area](#)

Not for the faint of heart, the

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approximately 300 freshwater mussel species are in decline. In West Virginia alone, there are eight species of freshwater mussels that are listed as endangered under the Endangered Species Act. Like many other species, the decline in freshwater mussels is largely driven by human activities. Some of the main threats include the use of pollutants that make their way into our freshwater ecosystems, sedimentation of our waterways resulting from by activities such as construction and deforestation, the construction of dams and other impoundments that alter the natural flow of streams and rivers, the introduction of exotic species such as zebra mussels, the decline of some fish species that freshwater mussels use as a hosts for their larval stage, and the direct poaching or harvesting of freshwater mussels.



Haider, teaching youth about the importance of freshwater mussels at Seneca Rocks Discover Invasive Species Day.

One of the first steps in reducing the threats to freshwater mussels is educating people about the importance of freshwater mussels and about how our actions can threaten them. This has been the main focus of my service with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service this year, and I have had the opportunity to travel to numerous parts of West Virginia to talk with people of all age groups about freshwater mussels. As I previously mentioned, I did not know much about freshwater mussels before I began my year of AmeriCorps service and I was surprised at how interesting they are. Luckily, many of the people I have had the opportunity to speak with about freshwater mussels seem to feel the same way. To give you a taste I will close with a few mussel trivia questions:

Q: *How long can freshwater mussels live?*

of Calvin Price State Forest and does not include any system trails. The area is about 2 miles in length and 3.5 miles wide and is found within portions of the Alvon, Anthony, Denmar, and Droop USGS quadrangle maps. The wilderness is filled with oak, hickory, maple and some pockets of hemlock with an dense understory of rhododendron, grasses and ferns. Elevations range from 2,000 feet along the Greenbrier River to over 2,800 feet throughout interior portions of the area.

Do you have a suggestion for *Sites of the Month*?

Email us at:

info@appalachianforest.us

and let us know your favorite sites throughout AFHA!

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rings, similar to those found in trees, which can be counted to determine the age of the shell.

Q: *Approximately how many species of freshwater mussels are found in North America, Europe, and Africa respectively?*

A: There are approximately 300 species of freshwater mussels in North America, only 12 species in Europe and less than 100 found in Africa. As you can see, North America is a biodiversity hot spot for freshwater mussels. More are found here than anywhere else in the world!

Q: *Why do mussels need fish?*

A: Mussels need fish to complete their life cycle. The larval stage of the mussel attaches to the gills or fins of a host fish. The larval mussels are then able to hitch a ride to different areas of a stream. Without this association it would be difficult for freshwater mussels to disperse upstream. To attract the needed host fish, some mussel species have developed specialized lures that look like fish, worms, or even crayfish.

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