**May 23, 2011** **Contact**

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The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee

**Federal, State Agencies and Nature Conservancy Sign**

**Historic Freshwater Mussel Agreement for Tennessee**

*Memorandum of Understanding Will Coordinate Protection and Restoration Efforts Statewide*

**Nashville, TN** — Today representatives from six state, regional and federal agencies and from The Nature Conservancy signed a historic Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that is intended to focus and coordinate freshwater mussel protection and restoration across Tennessee.

To protect Tennessee’s at-risk populations of mussels and snails inhabiting the state’s rivers and streams, the MOU brings together for the first time the combined scientific expertise and authority of the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency, the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the National Park Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Tennessee Valley Authority and The Nature Conservancy.

“Overall freshwater mussels are the most imperiled single group of animals in the United States and in Tennessee,” said Gina Hancock, Interim State Director for The Nature Conservancy in   
Tennessee. “Industrial development and impoundment of rivers have been major causes of mussel declines in Tennessee and across the nation. Yet we find that mussels are thriving in Tennessee rivers like the Duck and the Hatchie, where overall the water quality is good and impoundments are minimal. We want to replicate these success stories across the state because clean water that supports mussels and snails means clean drinking water for people too.”

Historically, Tennessee’s rivers and streams supported 129 of the 300 species of freshwater mussels in the United States. Tennessee is still among the richest of all states in varieties of freshwater mussels. The Duck River alone, which is wholly contained in Tennessee, is home to 55 species of freshwater mussels. Other Tennessee rivers, such as the Clinch and the Hatchie, also support large varieties of mussels. Freshwater mussels are important indicators of water quality.

The signatories to the MOU have agreed chiefly to identify and protect high-quality freshwater mussel habitat; to identify historic habitats that should be restored; and to reintroduce mussels to river and stream habitats through cooperative propagation programs. To focus these actions and prioritize them using the best available science, the signatories are developing a Statewide Strategic Plan for Freshwater Mussel Conservation.

The MOU takes effect as of today, May 23, 2011, and remains in effect until October 1, 2015.

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**The Nature Conservancy** is a leading conservation organization working around the world to protect ecologically important lands and waters for nature and people. The Conservancy and its more than 1 million members have protected nearly 120 million acres worldwide and more than 270,000 acres in Tennessee. Visit The Nature Conservancy in Tennessee on the Web at [www.nature.org/tennessee](http://www.nature.org/tennessee).