

Meet a Wildlife Biologist

“The French Broad is like a lot of other places in WNC – way better off than it was 50 years ago! There is a lot of hope for improving the water quality of the French Broad. There isn't a magic fix, but we can restore water quality by working together as a community.”



Meet Luke Etchison, the Western Region Aquatic Wildlife Diversity Coordinator at the NC Wildlife Resources Commission. “I am a conservation biologist for mussels, native fishes, crayfishes, and aquatic snails. I am responsible for keeping common things common and helping the species that are of conservation need,” says Luke.

Freshwater mussels are an at-risk group animals that are in need of conservation. Because mussels are filter feeders, they are directly exposed to pollutants in the water. High levels of rain runoff and improper stormwater management can increase water temperatures, pollutants, and excess sedimentation.

However, the last several years have been very exciting for the **Appalachian Elktoe**, a federally endangered species of mussel (see photo below). “We’re seeing them expand upstream and downstream in the French Broad River, which is thrilling,” says Luke. “In the last few years, we’ve found them in several new places that we didn’t expect them, which may indicate those streams are improving.”

Did you know?

The French Broad was once full of mussel shoals. Mussels are an ‘indicator species,’ showing that the water is healthy and clear enough for them to thrive.



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