



Albemarle County

Legislation Text

File #: 22-282, **Version:** 1

AGENDA DATE: 5/18/2022

TITLE:

Resolution to Support Reintroduction of the James Spynymussel

SUBJECT/PROPOSAL/REQUEST: Adopt a resolution to support efforts by the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources to reintroduce the federally-endangered James Spynymussel in Albemarle County.

ITEM TYPE: Consent Action Item

STAFF CONTACT(S): Richardson, Walker, Hudson, Herrick, Filardo, Rapp, Perkins, Maliszewski, Biasioli

PRESENTER (S): Kim Biasioli and Brian Watson (DWR)

LEGAL REVIEW: Yes

REVIEWED BY: Jeffrey B. Richardson

BACKGROUND: North America has over 300 species of freshwater mussels; the majority reside in the southeastern United States, making it a worldwide diversity hotspot. Virginia, which contains 80 species, is one of the most diverse and important states for mussels. Freshwater mussels provide important ecosystem services, including maintaining water quality - each individual mussel filters upwards of 12 gallons of water per day. They are also one of the most imperiled groups of animals, with roughly 75% of all species being either extinct, endangered, threatened, or a species of concern. In Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, 64 species are considered species of greatest conservation need.

The James Spynymussel (JSM) primarily resides in the James River watershed in Virginia, but also in West Virginia and the Dan River watershed in Virginia and North Carolina. The JSM is a federal and state endangered species, and a priority species for recovery for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources (DWR). An estimated 90% of JSM populations have been lost across the species' range, including from the James River. The federal recovery plan for JSM is provided as Attachment A.

DWR has been working on freshwater mussel recovery through propagation since the late 1990s, and directly with the endangered JSM for the past 15 years. The USFWS and the DWR are raising JSM at the cooperative VA Fisheries and Aquatic Wildlife Center at the USFWS' Harrison Lake National Fish Hatchery to help restore wild populations. Existing JSM populations have been augmented in six streams in Amherst, Bath, Buckingham, Botetourt, and Nelson Counties, but to truly recover this endangered species, the mussel also needs to be reintroduced to waterbodies from which it has been lost. The James River falls into this category, as no live JSM have been found in the river since the late 1960s. Future downlisting or delisting of JSM from its endangered status will not be possible without re-established populations in places like the James and Rivanna Rivers.

STRATEGIC PLAN: Natural Resources Stewardship - Thoughtfully protect and manage Albemarle County's

ecosystems and natural resources in both the rural and development areas to safeguard the quality of life of current and future generations.

DISCUSSION: Virginia Code § 29.1-103(6) states that the DWR may “introduce any new species of game birds, game animals, or fish on the lands and within the waters of the Commonwealth, with the authorization and cooperation of the local government for the locality where the introduction occurs.” The DWR is requesting support and cooperation from Albemarle County to release JSM in the County, specifically the James River and its tributaries. Suitable habitat has been identified through DWR surveys, and mussels may be released as early as fall of 2022 at the James River near Scottsville, and potentially in other locations in the County.

A resolution supporting the reintroduction of James Spiny mussel in Albemarle is attached (Attachment B).

BUDGET IMPACT: There is no direct budget impact from supporting DWR’s efforts to reintroduce the James Spiny mussel.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Board adopt the attached resolution (Attachment B) to support efforts by the DWR to reintroduce the federally-endangered James Spiny mussel in Albemarle County.

ATTACHMENTS:

A - James Spiny mussel (*Pleurobema collina*) Recovery Plan by USFWS

B - Resolution