


LITTLE WYOMING

FLEX YOUR MUSSELS



Mussels are shelled, aquatic invertebrates that rarely move. They are found on the bottom of rivers, creeks, streams and ponds. Wyoming's waters are home to seven species of mussels. Some can live for more than 100 years! They are incredible animals that help keep our freshwater systems clean and healthy. Mussels eat by filtering microscopic food particles out of the water. By simply eating, mussels clean the water of bacteria, algae and other particles.



SUPER SHELLFUL

Mussels have several other roles in the environment. They are food for many wildlife species like birds and otters, they provide habitat for other aquatic invertebrates, and when mussels die, their shells become important homes for fish and crayfish. Then, when the shells decay, they slowly release vital nutrients like calcium into the water.



WATER WOES

Unfortunately, mussels are one of the most endangered groups of animals. Of North America's 300 mussel species, 70 percent are at risk of extinction. Drought, dams, pollution and invasive species all pose serious threats to the survival of our native mussels. If boating in Wyoming waters, make sure to follow all Wyoming Game and Fish rules to keep our water clean and safe for native mussels!



PROBLEM SOLVERS

Sedentary mussels have a unique way of multiplying and spreading. The female mussel keeps eggs safe until they develop into mussel larvae, called glochidia. She then forcefully expels the glochidia, launching them into the water where they must latch on to the gills of specific fish species, where they can continue to develop. Some mussels, like the plain pocketbook, have tissue outside their shells which looks like a minnow. They wiggle this tissue to lure fish over, which gives their glochidia a better chance of latching onto the correct fish host. When mussel larvae are fully developed, they drop off the fish and start their adult life.



If you're interested in learning more about Wyoming's mussel species, visit the Biodiversity Institute online store at wyobiodiversity.net to purchase a mussel guidebook—and then head to a nearby stream or lake to see what you can find! Free mussel stickers are available for the first 10 people to fill out the online form here: www.wyobiodiversity.org/index.php/wren.

