



Clinch Valley

PROGRAM

Protecting our nation's most important river for imperiled freshwater animals and supporting local economies.

The Clinch and Powell rivers run nearly parallel courses through the remote mountains and valleys of southwestern Virginia and northeastern Tennessee. These last free-flowing tributaries of the Tennessee River system harbor the nation's highest concentrations of globally rare and imperiled fish and freshwater mussels. They are truly a global hotspot for biodiversity.

For nearly three decades, The Nature Conservancy has worked with local communities, agencies and many other partners to protect the special lands, waters and wildlife of the Clinch Valley.

TOP TO BOTTOM Clinch River mussel survey © Jack Looney; Pipevine swallowtail © Daniel White/TNC

The Nature Conservancy 

The mission of The Nature Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends.

Our vision is a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve nature for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.





Community Conservation

Since 1990, the Conservancy's Clinch Valley Program has worked collaboratively with local communities. Together, we support sustainable economic development and recreational opportunities that are consistent with protecting the region's lands, waters and way of life.

As part of the Clinch River Valley Initiative, for example, we are leading efforts to create a new Clinch River State Park. With support from our legislators, we are working with the Virginia Department of Conservation and Recreation and localities to acquire park lands and river access sites from willing sellers across four counties. Hundreds of acres of new public land will eventually be open for hiking, canoeing, camping, fishing and other activities. A new state park will create jobs and is projected to generate at least \$2-3 million annually in economic activity.

We support rural economies and work with farmers to protect water quality in streams, rivers and caves. Since 1995, we have assisted more than 250 landowners in implementing economically sensible agricultural best management practices such as fencing cattle away from waterways.

We are currently spearheading a \$4.5-million initiative to improve agricultural practices and water quality on farms spanning five counties in southwestern Virginia and northeastern Tennessee. This project area encompasses more than 4,000 farms and 350 miles of impaired streams, and it hosts some of the most diverse and imperiled aquatic wildlife in the nation.

Restoring Globally Rare Mussels

Freshwater mussels are filter feeders, removing bacteria, algae and sediment to clean the waters in which they live. This function makes them vulnerable to contamination and, thus, key indicator species for river health and water quality.

In the Clinch River alone, we have protected seven key shoal habitats that support some of the world's most diverse assemblages of mussels. But boosting populations of these beneficial creatures remains critical to their survival, so we work with numerous agency and university partners to increase mussel populations. Our partners at Virginia Tech's Freshwater Mollusk Conservation Center and the Aquatic Wildlife Conservation Center in Marion raise the juvenile mussels we release into targeted sections of the Clinch and Powell rivers.

Sustainable Forestry

To maintain healthy forests that protect water quality for people, fish and mussels, we launched our Conservation Forestry Program in 2002 and now manage 22,000 acres to model sustainable forestry. Our program emphasizes long-term stewardship, providing an economic return to landowners and making forests healthier, more diverse and more resilient in the face of climate change.

Our on-the-ground operations are designed to enhance forest resources such as soil and water quality, high-value timber, sensitive wildlife habitat and carbon storage. In 2014, the program became the first Conservancy project to earn and market certified forest-carbon credits under California's Global Warming Solutions Act.



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The Energy Intersection

The Clinch Valley's rare river animals and habitats overlap with valuable energy resources, including an estimated 250 million tons of coal and significant natural gas reserves. This convergence spurred us to develop strategies for reducing impacts from coal mining, natural gas infrastructure and other energy development.

To increase scientific understanding of historic and current mining impacts on streams and other resources, we helped launch the Clinch-Powell Clean Rivers Initiative in 2008. The members—representing state and federal agencies, industry, academia, and conservation organizations—are focused on improving water quality and river health.

We also work with mining regulators to track the region's inventory of abandoned mine lands and to rank priorities for restoration. We have partnered with the Virginia Department of Mines, Minerals and Energy to complete reclamation projects that rejuvenate compacted soils, reduce erosion, improve water quality and restore native trees.

We seek to engage energy companies in efforts to protect our forests and rivers. We map critical habitats for online apps that energy companies can use in the earliest stages of siting projects to avoid or minimize impacts to our natural resources.



Visit the Clinch Valley



From outdoor recreation to frontier history to the roots of Appalachian music and art, the Clinch Valley region offers something for everyone.

The Clinch—known as “Virginia’s Hidden River”—offers a variety of outdoor experiences, including paddle and tube trips, bird and wildlife watching, fishing, and environmental education. River towns are revitalizing to provide venues where visitors can relax and recharge while enjoying the region’s rich mountain culture.

In addition to the forthcoming Clinch River State Park and river trail, the Conservancy has worked for many years to help protect the region’s iconic public lands, including Pinnacle Natural Area Preserve in Russell County and The Channels Natural Area Preserve and State Forest spanning Russell and Washington counties.

For guides to outdoor recreation and travel across the region, go online to www.clinchriverva.com and www.heartofappalachia.com. For more information on conservation areas and activities, including volunteer opportunities, contact the Conservancy’s Clinch Valley Program office in Abingdon.

The Nature Conservancy 
Protecting nature. Preserving life.

Clinch Valley Program
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SUPPORT THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Your support as a member, donor, volunteer or partner is essential to our conservation work in the Clinch Valley, across Virginia and around the world. Together, we share an opportunity to protect and restore some of our most extraordinary river and forest systems for the benefit of nature and people. We invite you to join with the Conservancy in protecting special places such as the Clinch Valley on which the lives and livelihoods of people today and future generations depend. For information on how you can help us protect America’s most important river for imperiled wildlife and support local communities, contact our office in Abingdon or visit us online at nature.org/virginia.