



Trees and foliage towering above reflect off the crystal, clean water of Cypress Creek.

# Cypress Creek has an excess of mussels

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Despite allegations made by Texas Parks and Wildlife that there were no living mussels in Big Cypress Bayou in 1996, a trip down Cypress Creek two years later proves different.

The creek is abundant with wildlife, which not only includes juvenile and adult mussels, but fish, birds, deer, wild hogs and snakes.

Why is all the wildlife important? Besides contradicting TPWD's allegations, it proves a quote found on a Feb. 18 *Texas Parks and Wildlife* web page.

"Freshwater mussels are ecological indicators. When you find freshwater mussels, you can be pretty sure the water quality in the area is good!"

With this quote appearing in the web page, one could assume the water quality at Big Cypress Bayou at Highway 271 and 11 in Pittsburg is above average.

However, TPWD published a report on the freshwater mussel species found and sites examined in July 1996 in the Big Cypress Bayou at U.S. Highway 271 and State Highway 11 claiming otherwise.

It appears from the report TPWD blamed Pilgrim's Pride Corporation, but they later said they were not trying to point the finger at anyone or any industry.

"All mussels appear to have



**Mussel shells can be easily seen through the water on the banks at Cypress Creek.**

been eliminated by environmental degradation. A tributary stream entering just upstream from U.S. 271 reportedly carries discharges from an upstream poultry plant which may be at least partially responsible for these losses. If fish populations (necessary hosts for larval mussels and successful mussel reproduction) are also reduced in this area, it could account for the apparent lack of juvenile mussels in the area upstream, immediately downstream of Bob Sandlin Reservoir dam," the report states.

The report went on to say that the complete absence of mussels suggests major environmental problems which have been on-

going for some years and the poultry plant discharging effluent into a tributary stream in the area should be examined critically as a possible cause of these extinctions.

In the introduction of the preliminary survey, TPWD stated the Big Cypress Bayou system represents a unique ecosystem in northeastern Texas.

For the July 1996 survey, TPWD Heart of the Hills Research Station (HOH) teams joined with TPWD Inland Fisheries Management and Resource Protection personnel to examine areas of the Big Cypress system. Additionally, the Franklin County Water District (FCWD) which manages Cypress Springs

Reservoir on the upper reaches of Big Cypress Bayou accompanied the staff.

Survey efforts of the staff included examination of both reservoir and riverine environments by wading, snorkeling and examination of exposed bar and bank areas. On reservoirs in the upper drainage basin, several samples were taken. Due to limited mussel densities and restrictions on time and personnel available, sampling was generally non-quantitative.

Overall, through July 8-10 of 1996, over 20 sites were examined. Rain and lightning storms hindered four of the sites.

So while TPWD and HOH

teams report there is no evidence of freshwater mussels living in Cypress Creek in Pittsburg where a poultry plant still discharges into the stream, one can find an abundance of various living mussels in all life stages. This would indicate that the report appears to be wrong.

So why are freshwater mussels so important? Besides being ecological indicators, they are an important food source for many animals, including muskrats, minks, otters, fish and some birds.

With the abundance of freshwater mussels and various other forms of wildlife in Cypress Creek in Pittsburg, there is a plethora of trees, foliage and wild flowers all along the creek. Also, despite the discharge that has supposedly killed off all wildlife, the water is sparkling clear.

TPWD personnel made another trip down Cypress Creek in June. This time they found freshwater mussels.

"They said the previous report was merely a coincidence and it had nothing to do with the poultry plant," said Mark McKinney, who aided in the transportation of TPWD down Cypress Creek last week. "After their day's excursion, they gathered gallons of mussels to take back for further investigation."