

## **MBSS Mussel Taxonomy Certification Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Why is the Department of Natural Resources offering a mussel taxonomy certification?**

The Department of Natural Resources can require a mussel survey for projects needing a state permit that occur within the habitat of a state listed species. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service can also require surveys involving federal permits within the habitat of a federally listed species. Survey protocols exist in Maryland for listed terrestrial species. The surveyor qualifications are typically experience-based because the main issue is detecting the species, not identifying them from another non-listed species. Mussels present both a detection and identification challenge. Identification proficiency testing and standard survey protocols provide a level of quality assurance, particularly for listed species, where false positives and false negatives could impact the findings of a biological assessment that is required in order to issue a permit.

### **I need to collect threatened and endangered freshwater mussel data. What is required?**

1. Follow the appropriate mussel survey protocols being developed by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources' Wildlife and Heritage Service and U.S. Fish and Wildlife's Chesapeake Bay Field Office to collect and report data. These protocols are based off of [West Virginia DNR's mussel survey protocols](#).
2. Identifications made during the survey must be from a certified mussel taxonomist (i.e., qualified surveyor).
3. Obtain appropriate state and/or federal permits prior to conducting the survey.

### **What is the mussel taxonomy certification?**

This certifies a person to conduct surveys in rivers and streams with threatened and endangered mussel species in Maryland using specific protocols. This certification of identification proficiency is valid as long as annual continuing education reporting requirements are met or the certification lapses and the process must be restarted. Requirements for certification are:

1. You must score  $\geq 90\%$  on the mussel taxonomy test and 100% on threatened and endangered mussel species, which will be administered at the MBSS Summer Training session. No other mussel species can also be misidentified as a threatened and endangered species.
2. After testing, you must provide documentation of adequate prior experience conducting surveys similar to the Maryland mussel survey protocols. You must have conducted at least 20 surveys within the last 10 years or 10 surveys within the last five (5) years with two (2) letters of reference.

**How much will certification cost?**

In addition to the MBSS Summer Training registration fee, the mussel taxonomy certification will cost \$50. This cost is for the time to complete the review of prior experience documentation.

**Can our firm/organization/agency become certified?**

No. Only individuals can be certified in mussel taxonomy.

**Must I pursue all certifications?**

No. The certifications are *a la carte*. You can choose one or all.

**How can I pay for certification?**

Payment for MBSS trainings and certifications may be made via credit card on DNR's online store. Payment for training registration must be made in advance (see website for deadlines). No registration payments will be accepted at the door and we cannot admit walk-ins. Do not submit certification payments prior to your test. DNR will not accept payments for certification fees from individuals who register for mussel taxonomy certification until after the written tests (administered at training) have been passed. Once written tests are passed, DNR will initiate the review of surveyor experience and begin accepting the payments for these services. If the written test is not passed the applicant cannot be certified and no certification payment is required.

**Can I attend MBSS Summer Training without certification? If so, what are the costs?**

Yes. MBSS training will continue, as in previous years, to be open to those who are not seeking certifications. Please check the MBSS training website for current registration costs.

**Will MBSS training continue to be open to non-professionals?**

Yes. However, MBSS training registrations will continue to be accepted on a first come-first served basis

**If I submit payment for registration or certification, but then cannot attend the training, can I get a refund?**

Training fee refunds will be approved on a case-by-case basis. To eliminate the need for certification fee refunds, DNR will only accept payment for certifications after written certification tests are passed.

### **How long does certification last?**

Mussel taxonomy certification for a surveyor is valid as long as they provide documentation that they are maintaining a minimum level of experience with the [threatened and endangered mussel species of Maryland](#) through training or fieldwork on an annual basis. The certification will lapse and the process must be restarted if these minimum requirements are not met.

The minimum requirements are based on a running two year average as:

1. You must handle five (5) individuals of each threatened and endangered mussel species of Maryland per year in the field or 0.5 hours per species in a natural history museum reference collection.
2. You must provide the number of surveys conducted and the number of each threatened and endangered species handled each year in the field. This can include surveys and specimens found in other states using similar methods to the Maryland survey protocol.
3. You must provide training hours and location of reference collection with the accession number of each threatened and endangered species handled each year. This can include specimens from outside Maryland.
4. You must report to DNR on the above continuing professional experience requirements for the prior year by February 15.

### **What will I receive if I pass all requirements for certification?**

Following completion of the two part mussel taxonomy certification process, your name and affiliation will be posted, with your permission, on the MBSS Certification Registry on the DNR website <http://dnr.maryland.gov/streams/Pages/mbssregistry.aspx>. The DNR and USFWS can require surveys in streams with threatened or endangered mussel species making mussel taxonomy certification a requirement for obtaining appropriate permits and working on certain stream impact assessment projects in Maryland. The taxonomic certification documents that the individual has met the surveyor qualifications for identification proficiency.