

# BRASS FUNDED FOR SURVEYS FOR MUSSELS & SEDIMENT

In late February, the Lake Champlain Basin Program funded BRASS to conduct mussel and sediment embeddedness surveys. The native mussel survey will collect important data for wildlife managers in the Lake Champlain Basin. Mussels (the class of *Pelecypoda*) - those creatures who are natural water filters with hinged shells, siphons, a muscular foot that propels it like an underwater hunchback, and some colorful names like "pig toe," "pimple back," and "slop bucket" - are one of the most endangered groups of animals in the U.S. Usually their demise is attributed to dams, pollutants, and river channelization. But another threat looms in the Lake Champlain Basin: the zebra mussel.

These tiny zigzag striped non-native mussels attach themselves to any hard surface underwater, including native mussels. In the Great Lakes, a researcher found at least 10,000 zebra mussels on a single native mussel. The extra weight when attached, and competition for food, will likely have serious ramifications on our already dwindling native populations. In addition, zebra mussels are prolific breeders and their larvae don't require a host fish species, as does successful reproduction processes of native mussels.

In case zebra mussels do begin to wreak havoc, wildlife managers need to determine ways to protect or give refuge to native species. To do so requires knowledge of the identity and location of native mussels. Survey work along Vermont rivers has intensified in the last couple of years. But, except for delta areas, there has been no systematic native mussel survey in New York rivers. Therefore, BRASS expects its survey data to be extremely useful.

Siltation, heavy sediment impacts, and shifting streambeds are considered to degrade mussel habitat. Therefore, as BRASS begins its fifth year of sediment embeddedness studies, it will document the extent of fine sediments in mussel survey areas.