

BACK CREEK FRESHWATER SPONGES

These photographs were taken by [Glenn Nelson](#) during a 2008 mussel survey of Back Creek. This colony of sponges was concentrated downstream of the Jones Springs [public access](#).



Sponges are multicellular animals consisting of masses of cells embedded in a gelatinous matrix. The matrix is bound together by minute, spine-like structures of calcium or silica called spicules and spongy organic fibers called spongin. There are about 150 species of freshwater sponges. Freshwater sponges are pitted with pores and often are yellow, brown or greenish. Sponges filter large volumes of water through their pores, capturing tiny particles for food. Freshwater sponges vary in size from a few millimeters to more than a meter across. All species have a free-swimming, microscopic larval stage, but are attached as adults. They are widely distributed in well-oxygenated lakes and streams where they grow on plant stems, pieces of wood, rocks and other submersed objects. They will overwinter in a dormant state, but are most commonly seen in summer or fall. They may be lobed, composed of finger-like projections, or quite irregularly shaped and are robust enough to be picked up without falling apart, unlike many kinds of algae. - <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/programs/wq/plants/plantid2/descriptions/bryozoan.html>