Mussels are an important food source for several different kinds of animals, including mammals and fish, as well as several species of birds. For many mussel species, larvae are released into the water and then settle out to form new mussel beds. Most mussel species are found in freshwater, but a few also live in saltwater. Many mussels feed on plankton and other small animals, and they are an important source of food for many other animals, including fish, birds, and mammals. Mussels are also important economically, as they are used in the production of pearls and other products.

How do mussels live?
Mussels spend most of their time in a small area of the lake or stream where they are attached. They usually have the ability to move with the use of their foot, which is used to burrow into the substrate and then to move through the water. Mussels have a special organ called the mantle, which secretes a thin layer of mucus that sticks to the substrate and allows the mussel to remain in one place. The mantle also secretes a layer of calcium carbonate, which hardens and forms the shell of the mussel.

Why are mussels in trouble?
The survival of freshwater mussels is threatened by several factors, including pollution, habitat loss, and overharvesting. Pollution can kill or remove mussels from their habitat, while habitat loss can reduce the availability of suitable areas for mussel growth. Overharvesting can also be a significant factor in the decline of mussel populations, as it can remove large numbers of mussels from the population, leaving fewer individuals to reproduce and maintain the mussel population.

What do the future hold for mussels in Minnesota?
As with many other species, the survival of freshwater mussels in Minnesota depends on the protection of their habitats and the prevention of threats such as pollution and overharvesting. It is important to continue monitoring mussel populations and to implement conservation measures to ensure their continued survival.

References:
- Minnesota Historical Society—Burke Museum.
- Minnesota Natural History—Field Museum.
- Minnesota Natural History—University of Minnesota Press, Knoxville, Tenn. 328 pp.