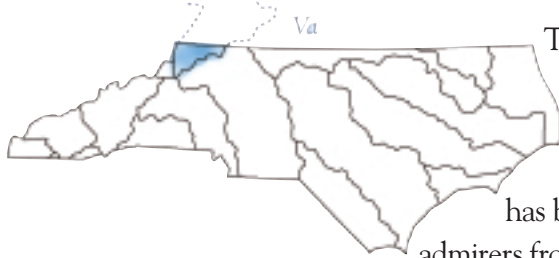


# NEW RIVER BASIN



The New River is thought to be one of the oldest rivers in the world. Some geologists estimate its age at 300 million years old. This clean, clear river begins as two streams on the western side of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Watauga County. The

North and South Forks converge in Ashe County as the New River, which flows northward into Virginia and loops back to tag North Carolina before continuing into Virginia.



The river winds and cuts its way through metamorphic rock over a billion years old. But its age is not all that distinguishes the river. A sense of proud ownership also surrounds the New, which has been embraced by residents in the basin and admirers from around the country.

In 1998, President Clinton visited and named the New River an American Heritage River, an honor he bestowed on only 13 other rivers in the nation. The designation brings with it federally funded but community-driven initiatives for protecting the river and for guiding sustain-

KEN TAYLOR, NCWRC



able growth in the basin. The lower South Fork New River and the North Carolina portion of the New's main stem have been designated a National Scenic River and a state Natural and Scenic River since 1976. That 26.5-mile stretch is also classified by the state as Outstanding Resource Waters because of its recreational and ecological importance and its excellent water quality. Several rare aquatic animals make their home in the basin, including the bog turtle. The region also has a large number of endemic species, meaning they have been found only in this place.

## profile:

Total miles of streams and rivers: 801 miles

Municipalities within basin: 6

Counties within basin: 3

Size: 753 square miles

Population: 49,653 (2000)

(in North Carolina)

## fast FACTS:

### Tiny Turtle

More bog turtles live in the New River Basin than any other river basin in the state. Weighing only 4 ounces, it is one of the rarest turtles in North America and is a threatened species in North Carolina. Destruction of habitat and illegal collection of turtles for the pet trade have caused populations to dwindle.



New River

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BLUE RIDGE  
MOUNTAINS,  
ASHE  
COUNTY



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*fast* FACTS:

**Rare Plants**

More than 70 percent of some 120 rare plants in the basin grow in the rich soil and high elevation of the Amphibolite Mountains.



JON C. LAKEY

*Although extreme white-water adventure is characteristic of the northern reaches of the New in West Virginia, several easy rapids make the New in North Carolina ideal for recreational paddling.*

Stewardship is a tradition in the New basin—in the early 1970s residents banded together to prevent dams from being built on the New in North Carolina and Virginia. The river’s multiple scenic designations now ensure that the river will continue to flow freely.

Steep terrain has protected the New River basin from human encroachment as well, naturally restricting the amount of development and limiting most farming to the valleys. One exception is the farming of Fraser firs along 15,000 acres of slopes. This crop makes the basin the largest supplier of Christmas trees in North Carolina.

A series of distinctive high-elevation mountains topping 4,600 feet stretches from central Ashe County through northeastern Watauga County. Unlike most of the Blue Ridge and much of the basin, these mountains are underlain by “mafic” rocks rich in magnesium, iron and calcium. Mafic rocks are more erosion-resistant than surrounding rocks; their weathering forms unusually nutrient-rich, high-pH soils. Because the peaks are largely made of the mafic rock amphibolite, the N.C. Natural Heritage Program informally named them the “Amphibolite Mountains.”

The basin also has the largest concentration of bogs remaining in the state. A rare type of wetland, bogs have acidic soils that are rich in decaying organic matter and usually topped with a layer of sphagnum moss. Nearly 90 percent of the state's original mountain bogs have been drained or converted. The bog turtle, North America's smallest turtle at 4 inches long, has been a casualty of that destruction and is now a threatened species in North Carolina.

Three small fish of the South Fork New River—the Kanawha minnow and the sharp-nose and Kanawha darters, are endemic. Old Field and Call creeks, two other Outstanding Resource Waters in the basin, have naturally reproducing populations of brook trout, North Carolina's only native trout species. "Brookies" are abundant only in clean, oxygen-rich waters at or above 3,000 feet and cooler than 68 degrees F.

## NEW RIVER BASIN

You may have noticed "New River Basin" signs posted along highways throughout the basin. The signs are part of a statewide educational program to raise public awareness that we all live in a river basin and that our individual actions affect the quality of its waters. Signs in all 17 river basins of the state are made possible by a partnership between the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources and the North Carolina Department of Transportation and funds from the Federal Transportation Enhancement Program.

Water quality concerns in the basin include increased erosion and runoff due to development and a growing need for more efficient municipal wastewater treatment. In many tributaries of the New River in North Carolina, fish and other aquatic life are being harmed by bank erosion and removal of streamside vegetation. As the population increases, so does the amount of developed area. Runoff from developed areas carries a wide variety of contaminants to streams. The increased volume and speed of stormwater runoff also can cause degraded water quality. However, citizens are working together to address these water quality concerns and to protect the unique natural, cultural and scenic qualities of the New River basin.

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*Appalachian bogs*

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JON C. LAKEY

## WHERE SHOULD I GO ?

What makes the New River Basin special? See for yourself. Visit these Environmental Education Centers to discover more about your ecological address:

- New River State Park
- Mount Jefferson State Natural Area

For more information about all the Environmental Education Centers in North Carolina, call the Office of Environmental Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, at (919) 733-0711, or check out the Web site at <http://www.ee.enr.state.nc.us/>.

## WHAT CAN I DO ?

- Do your part to positively influence water quality in the New River Basin.
- Get involved in basinwide planning or a local organization interested in rivers and streams in the river basin.
- Take the time to become more knowledgeable about the environmental consequences of your actions.

## WHO SHOULD I CONTACT ?

*The following contacts can provide information:*

- North Carolina Office of Environmental Education, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, (800) 482-8724 or (919) 733-0711, Web site <http://www.ee.enr.state.nc.us>
- New River Community Partners, (336) 372-8118, Web site <http://www.nrcp.org>
- National Committee for the New River, (336) 246-4871, Web site <http://www.ncnr.org>
- Stream Watch Program, Division of Water Resources, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, (919) 733-4064, Web site <http://www.ncwater.org>
- Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, Department of Environment and Natural Resources. Go to <http://www.enr.state.nc.us/DSWC/files/dos.htm> for a listing of all county offices, call (919) 733-2302 or check your local phone book in the county government blue pages.

To find out more about water quality in the New River Basin, contact the Division of Water Quality's Basinwide Planning Program, Department of Environment and Natural Resources, at (919) 733-5083, Web site <http://h2o.enr.state.nc.us/basinwide/>.