

The Passaic River

is the largest river system in New Jersey. Its main stem is 80 miles (129 km) long and its tributaries drain 935 square miles in both New York and New Jersey. From its source in Mendham Township in Morris County, the River flows south through the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and then turns northeast. In



Paterson, the River plunges over the Great Falls, the second largest waterfall east of the Mississippi after Niagara Falls, and then flows southeast into Newark Bay and, ultimately, the Atlantic Ocean. The major tributaries include the Ramapo River rising in New York State, and the Wanaque, Pequannock, Rockaway, Whippany, Pompton and Saddle Rivers. In its upper reaches, the river system contains miles of pristine headwaters, valuable wetlands, wildlife habitats, historic sites and important water supplies flowing from the New Jersey Highlands. In its lower reaches, the watershed of the River is heavily developed and has a rich and varied cultural history.

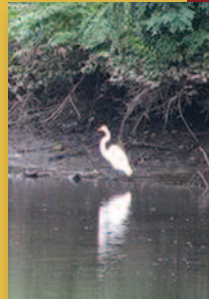
The Past

- The Passaic River's history evolves from the end of the last ice age. The retreating glacier left behind millions of tons of debris and reconfigured old drainage patterns. At the glacier's southern edge, a huge lake formed, fed by the melting ice. As the ice retreated, the waters found new outlets at Moggy Hollow, Little Falls and later at Millington Gorge, then rushed toward what is now Newark Bay, thus establishing the course of the modern river approximately 13,000 years ago.
- Native Americans used and altered the rich natural environment as they traveled along and on the River for thousands of years. Often, their agricultural clearings became the locations for later European settlements and their transportation routes remain in use today. Traces of their culture and names of their settlements remain as precious windows into the area's human past.
- In the 17th century European settlers used the River for transportation, and a source of food, water supply and power for early industries. Settlers cut the original forests for lumber and to produce charcoal to fuel the iron industry, which was the principal driver of settlement in much of the region. Small streams and larger rivers were dammed to provide water power for the iron forges, grist mills and a host of other industries, including Paterson's silk industry. In tidal portions of the River, the salt marshes were slowly but relentlessly drained, diked and ultimately filled.



The River Serves Us

- The River is a source of **drinking water** for millions of northern New Jersey residents. Interconnected systems deliver water primarily through the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission serving 107 municipalities, the Passaic Valley Water Commission serving Clifton, Passaic and Paterson and numerous surrounding towns, and the NJ American Water Company serving about 42 towns.
- The River and its thousands of acres of wetlands serve as **habitat** for threatened and endangered species including the wood turtle, bog turtle, barred owl, the blue-spotted salamander (in New Jersey found only in the Passaic watershed), and other species like the great blue heron. It also provides important nesting, feeding, and resting areas for migrating birds.
- The **harbor** into which the Passaic flows provides one of the most flexible multi-purpose cargo centers in the United States. Port Newark's facilities include wharves, deep-water ship berths, and 3 million square feet of distribution buildings, specialized facilities, roadways and direct rail access.



To Enjoy

- The extensive wetlands along the River afford places for watching **migrant birds**, as they stop for rest and food on their journeys. You can see them at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, Great Piece Meadows, Somerset County Environmental Education Center and the Morris County Outdoor Education Center. These areas have access ways for hiking and provide opportunities for photography. New Jersey Audubon Society (www.njaudubon.org) is an excellent source of information for other locations.
- **Recreational** use of the River has been increasing. The Passaic provides boating opportunities as well as a chance to enjoy the scenery. Many boating enthusiasts canoe and kayak on the River. You can find out about some easy-to-reach access points from the Passaic River Coalition (www.passaicriver.org), the Lower Passaic Riverboat Club (www.passaicriverboatclub.org) and the Pequannock River Coalition (www.pequannockriver.org).
- The Passaic River has many **natural and historic resources** to appreciate, enjoy, and help support.
 - The *Morris Canal* once allowed boats to travel across New Jersey between Newark Bay and the Delaware River. The canal was unique worldwide, traversing changes in elevation of 1,674' over the NJ Highlands from the Delaware to Newark Bay. The Canal Society of NJ (www.canalsocietynj.org) continues to highlight, preserve and restore the canal's history.



- *Pyramid Mountain* in Kinnelon, part of the Morris County Parks (www.morrisparks.net), features Tripod Rock, a 160-ton boulder balanced atop three smaller rocks, thought to be used ceremonially by Native Americans.
- *Moggy Hollow* in Far Hills, Somerset County, is a National Natural Landmark denoting the land formation that provided a gap through which glacier waters partially drained Lake Passaic. It can be seen at the Leonard J. Buck Gardens, a County Park (www.somersetcountyparks.org).
- *Morristown National Historical Park* (www.nps.gov/morr) features Jockey Hollow, where the Revolutionary Army encamped during the winter of 1777. Historic reenactments and a visitor center add to the visit.
- *The Great Falls* in Paterson, Passaic County, has recently been named a National Historical Park. It rivals Niagara Falls in size and was the first planned hydro-powered project in the country.
- Newark is proud home to Branch Brook Park designed by Frederick Olmsted and a favorite during cherry bloom time.



Many other areas are worth enjoying. The organizations listed on the reverse side sponsor educational programs, events and produce publications to inform the public about their resources and their part of the watershed.

LET'S HELP RESTORE ALL THE ASSETS OF THE PASSAIC RIVER

EPA has identified non-point source pollution from runoff as the primary source of water resource contamination. Preventing pollutants and litter from getting into the River means less treatment is necessary for it to supply drinking water and the River's beauty is preserved for recreation and other activities.

- Don't litter – reduce, reuse and recycle!
- Don't flush pills or other medications down the toilet
- Join river clean-ups
- Support river bank restoration
- Support groups working for a healthy river
- Keep stormwater runoff in your yard to reduce flooding and/or feed groundwater

Cautionary Notes.

- In recent years, water testing reveals that traces of pills flushed down toilets end up in our water supply. They can disrupt human endocrine functions.
- In the main stem of the Passaic River, the state and federal governments have issued several advisories that caution the public about the kinds of fish unsafe to eat. The information can be found at www.state.nj.us/dep/dsr/njmainfish.htm

For more information:
www.passaicbasin.org

Know Our River

Passaic River Watershed

Brochure made possible through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency