
CHOCTAWHATCHEE

RIVER BASIN

The Choctawhatchee River begins as the East Choctawhatchee Fork and West Choctawhatchee Fork join in Barbour County, Alabama. The river then flows through ten counties in Alabama and three counties in Florida before flowing into the Choctawhatchee Bay. The Choctawhatchee River flows for around 141 miles and its watershed has a drainage area of 3,484 square miles (Figure 1). A watershed is an area of land through which rainwater drains by flowing across, through, or under the soil surface to a common low point, typically a stream, river, lake, or ocean. (Brantley, Bell, & Dictson, 2019).

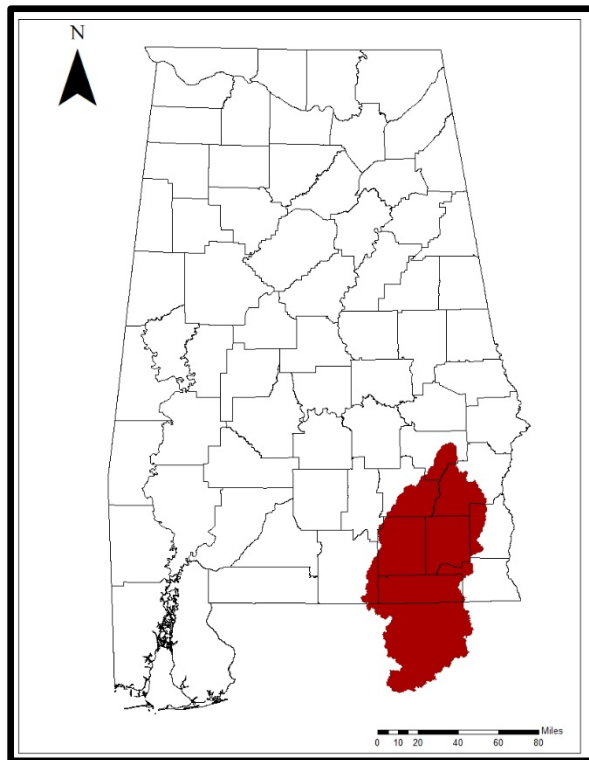


Figure 1. Choctawhatchee River watershed.

The Choctawhatchee River is mostly free flowing due to there being no major dams on the river. This allows the river to support largemouth bass, sunfish, redhorse suckers, and gulf sturgeon. The river also supports twenty-one species of native mussels and twenty-one species of snails. Along the banks of the Choctawhatchee River an abundance of whitetail deer, turkey, otter, and beaver can be found.

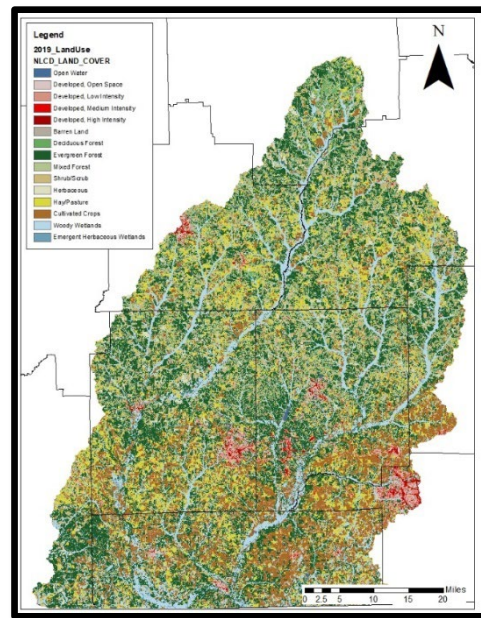


Figure 2. Land use map of the Choctawhatchee watershed in 2019.

The Choctawhatchee River was given its name by the Creek Nation that lived in the region prior to colonialism. The word “Choctawhatchee,” can be translated to “River of the Chatot.” The Chatot were a smaller tribe of Native Americans that lived in the area and were sometimes confused for the Choctaw Tribe once settlers occupied the area.

The Choctawhatchee watershed mostly consists of forest and pastureland but has a few areas that have been developed for urban use (Figure 2). The watershed contains the cities of Newton, Hartford, Dothan, and Geneva in Alabama. There are also several wildlife management areas throughout the watershed, such as the Choctawhatchee River Wildlife Management Area.

Travelers will have plenty of opportunities to experience nature, history, and urban life while visiting the watershed. The city of Geneva, Alabama contains the [Robert Fowler Memorial Park](#). The park provides overlooks for both the Choctawhatchee and Pea Rivers, where they meet (Figure 3), and provides visitors with boat ramps, walking trails, and camping spots. The park also contains the Constitution Oak, believed to be the oldest and largest live oak tree in Alabama. Arborists that researched the tree estimate it to be around 300 years old (Young, 2022). The city of Geneva also holds its annual Festival of the Rivers at the Robert Fowler Memorial Park. The festival began in 1975 and focuses on the historical significance of the city and how humans survived in the area prior to the industrial revolution.

The town of Florala, Alabama provides visitors with opportunities to experience Lake Jackson, Florala Wetland Park, and several attractions in town. Among one of the first settlers of the area was a man named McDade, who had constructed a house and grist mill near current day Lake Jackson. However, the lake was originally referred to as McDade's Pond since McDade was the first settler. In May 1818, during the First Seminole War, General Andrew Jackson, and his army of 1,200 men, camped along the banks of the lake on route to Pensacola. In response to General Jackson's military operations, the Spanish controlling the area formally surrendered to Jackson on May 28, 1818. Following the surrender, the lake's name was changed to Lake Jackson to commemorate the national importance of the event (Peacock, 2013). Florala Wetland Park sits along the northern point of Lake Jackson. The park provides visitors with access to trails along the lake's bank and surrounding areas containing the Spanish moss-draped Cypress Forest and Palmetto scrub. Visitors will also have a chance to see northern cardinals, northern mockingbirds, downy and red-bellied woodpeckers, and several types of herons.



Figure 3. Robert Fowler Memorial Park. Photo Credit: Heather Griffin

In 1881, John Henry Carmichael moved to Coffee County, Alabama and opened a small store in present day Enterprise, Alabama. By 1906, there were 3,750 patriotic residents in Enterprise, who created an Enterprise Banter, “Pull for Enterprise or Pull Out.” This banter was tested during the 1915 Mexican boll weevil infestation that resulted in almost 60 percent of Coffee County’s cotton production being destroyed. However, by 1917, its citizens began crop rotations and became the largest producer of peanuts in the United States. In appreciation for the city’s ability to overcome this obstacle, Enterprise constructed a boll weevil statue in their downtown named “[Herald of Prosperity](#),” (Figure 4). The statue is the only monument to an agricultural pest in the world.



Figure 4. Herald of Prosperity, Enterprise, Alabama.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker



Figure 5. Enterprise Farmers Market boll weevil statue.

Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker

Today, visitors can also experience Weevil Way, a series of twenty-five boll weevil statues decorated to promote various organizations in Enterprise (Figure 5). Enterprise was also selected to be a part of the United States’ Section of Painting and Sculpture from 1934 to 1943. The Section of Painting and Sculptures was a part of Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal. The deal allowed Paul Theodore Arlt to be commissioned to create two murals in the post office, *The Section* and *Saturday in Enterprise*. *Saturday in Enterprise* can still be viewed at the Enterprise Public Library.