

ESCAMBIA

RIVER BASIN

The Escambia River watershed encompasses 3,848 square miles, 1,835 square miles being in Alabama (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). The major waterway in the river basin flows for 230 miles and consists of two major rivers. The Conecuh River is formed in Union Springs, Alabama, and flows through nine Alabama counties. Once the Conecuh River meets the Big Escambia Creek at the Alabama-Florida line, it forms the Escambia River, which ultimately drains into Escambia Bay near Pensacola, Florida.



Figure 1. Escambia River Watershed.

The portion of the Escambia River basin in Alabama mostly consists of forest land and pastureland, with a few areas developed for urban use (Figure 2). The Conecuh River passes through the Alabama cities of River Falls, Andalusia, Brewton, Troy, and Flomaton. The Escambia River passes through the Florida cities of Century, Pace, and Pensacola. Throughout the forested areas visitors can see whitetail deer, quail, bobcat, skunk, and turkey. Visitors could also see largemouth bass, chain pickerel, and white crappie.

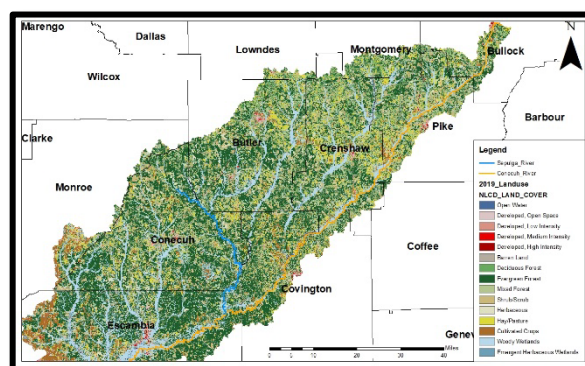


Figure 2. 2019 land use map for the Escambia River Basin.

It is said that the term, “Conecuh,” was derived from the Creek word, “Eeouneka,” and has evolved into Conecuh due to the colonizers’ accents and dialect. However, the two words have very different meanings according to Colonel M. H. Cruikshank. Colonel Cruikshank stated Eeouneka translates to “Land of Cane,” and Conecuh translates to “polecat’s head,” a regional name for skunks. The name, “Escambia,” originates from the Creek nation word, “Shambia,” which can be translated as “clearwater.”

The Creek Indians settled in the Union Springs area in the early 1700s and occupied it until 1832. It is said that there were twenty-seven springs in the area at the time, making it a prime agricultural area. Once the Creek Nation ceded the area, colonizers began occupying it and gave it the name, "Union Springs." Currently, there are forty-seven homes and businesses that have been preserved as standing monuments by the National Register, the oldest being the Hunter-Anderson-Yeomens House built in 1843. Union Springs is also considered the Field Trail Capital of the World due to the pristine quail and whitetail deer habitat. Starting in the early 1920s, Union Springs held annual field trail competitions, where dogs are judged on their ability to point out the hiding place of a quail. Today, visitors can attend the National Open Shooting Dog Championship and the National Amateur Free-For-All Championship every February. There is also a bronze English pointer statue in the center of their downtown, commemorating the members of the [Bird Dog Field Trail Hall of Fame](#) (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Bird dog statue in Union Springs, Alabama.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker

The city of Andalusia, Alabama was Covington County's first county seat in 1826. However, the town was originally given the name, "Montezuma" by its citizens. Historians believe the name Montezuma either came from the Spanish influence in the area or the possible refugees moving due to the Mexican Revolution. Montezuma experienced a large fire in 1841 that decimated most of its buildings, resulting in the town being rebuilt and established as Andalusia, Alabama in 1844. Currently, Andalusia contains the Three Notch Museum, commemorating the Three Notch Trail, several murals depicting Covington County and Andalusia's history, and the Pioneer Museum of Alabama.

The town of River Falls, Alabama sits along the Conecuh River and was given its name due to its proximity to a large waterfall on the Conecuh. Most of River Falls' residents were employed and lived in housing provided by the Horseshoe Lumber Company. The town constructed a post office in 1891 (Figure 4) and by 1902, the town was incorporated. However, due to the lumber mill burning down and the Conecuh River flooding in 1929, submerging the town in ten feet of water, the town was left abandoned. The original post office is one of the only buildings standing today in River Falls, Alabama.



Figure 4. River Falls, Alabama Post Office.
Photo credit: Jennifer Barker

The city of Troy, Alabama sits between the ridges of the Conecuh River (Figure 5) to the northwest and the Yellow River to the southeast. The city was first incorporated in 1843 and was named in commemoration of Alexander Troy, who was once an Attorney General of South Carolina. Visitors can experience the College Street Historic District to observe the pre-1870 church, cemetery, and seventeen other historic buildings. Visitors can also explore the Conecuh River Depot, which was historically a Confederate naval storehouse in 1861. The Depot was built with the purpose of receiving inventory from the Conecuh River and exporting the materials via railroad. Today, the depot is a military museum, housing artifacts from the Civil War, World War I and II, the Vietnam War, and Operation Desert Storm. The Depot also contains a fully restored Confederate gunboat, the CSS Chattahoochee (Adams, 2023). One can also explore the seventy-five acres of native plants at the Troy Arboretum, containing over 300 different species of plants native to southeast Alabama.

The Escambia River basin contains the [Conecuh National Forest](#), an 83,000-acre protected area along the Alabama-Florida state line. The Youth Conservation Corps has built over twenty miles of trails throughout the forest, passing through hardwood swamps, pitcher plant bogs, and southern coastal pine forest. The forest also contains one of the United States' largest populations of the red-cockaded woodpecker. However, during the 1930s the forest was clear-cut and reforested with slash pines, which are not ideal for red-cockaded woodpeckers to nest in. The forest is currently being reforested with long leaf pine trees in hopes to bolster the woodpecker's population. Visitors can experience the trails and explore the Open Pond Fire Tower and Open Pond Recreation Area, which historically supplied drinking water to the workers in the area.



*Figure5. Conecuh River in Escambia County, Alabama.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*