
YELLOW

RIVER BASIN

The Yellow River is formed in Rose Hill, Alabama, an unincorporated community approximately 16 miles north of Opp, Alabama. The river flows southwest for 114 miles before flowing into Blackwater Bay near Pensacola, Florida. The Yellow River watershed contains Crenshaw, Coffee, and Covington counties in Alabama (Figure 1) and Okaloosa and Santa Rosa counties in Florida. The Yellow River watershed has a drainage area of 328,000 acres between both states. 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).

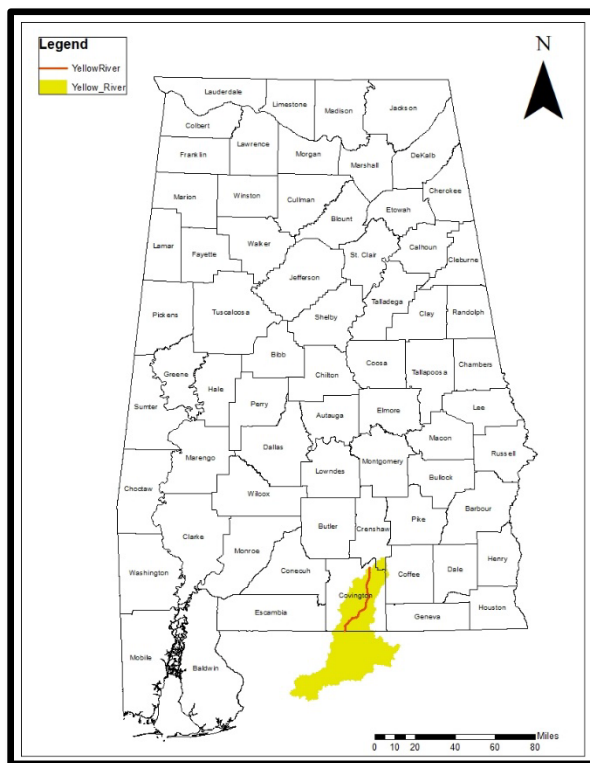


Figure 1. Yellow River and watershed in Alabama.

The Yellow River has received several other documented names throughout the past three centuries. The name Chester River was first seen in 1775, on Thomas Jeffery's *Map of the West Florida Coast and Louisiana*, that was commissioned by Great Britain's King George III (Drumsey). The river was given the name Rio Del Almirante by Anothny Finley in *A New General Atlas* in 1824, depicting maps of the globe. In 1845, Joseph Meyer, a French cartographer, published a book containing maps of all thirty states in the U.S. at the time, naming it the Yellowwater River. However, in the 1930s and 1940s, the United States Geological Survey published several books documenting the previous names and current recognized names of U.S. waterways, giving the river its current name of Yellow River (USGS, 1981).

The Yellow River watershed is comprised of around 60% forested area, 20% pastureland and cropland, and 20% urban and developed land (Figure 2). The developed areas are primarily cities, such as Andalusia, Opp, and Antioch in Alabama. The large areas of forest and pastureland allow for diverse wildlife to flourish in the watershed. Travelers could see white-tail deer, red and grey fox, North American river otter, and turkey throughout the watershed. The Yellow River is home to largemouth bass, spotted bass, longear sunfish, spotted sunfish, and warmouth. The Yellow River watershed also provides habitat for several threatened species, such as the Gulf sturgeon, Florida black bear, and American Alligator (Bagdad, 2020).

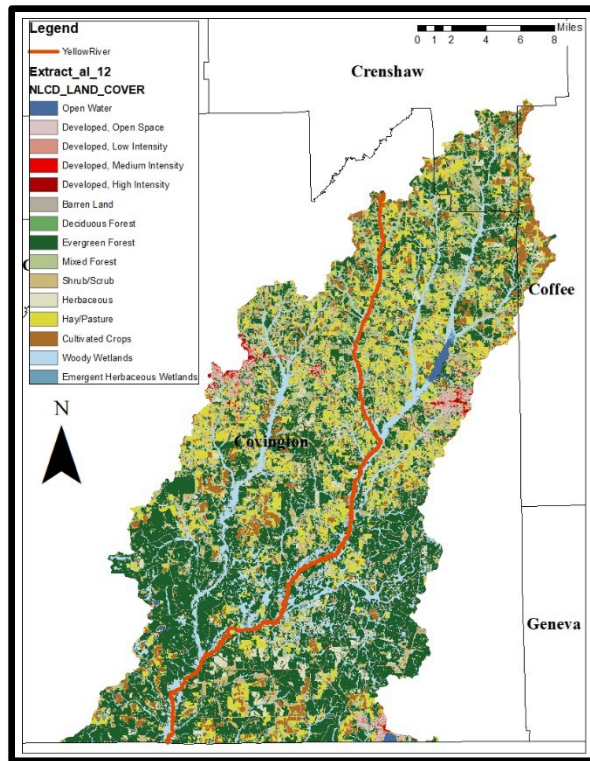


Figure 2. 2019 Land Use map of Yellow River watershed.

The Yellow River watershed contains several options for visitors to experience nature and history. One historical trail, Old Three Notch Road, follows the Yellow River from Pensacola, Florida to Rosehill, Alabama, and continues northward to Fort Michell. In 1823, Captain Daniel Burch requested to build a road from Pensacola, Florida to Fort Michell in Alabama to transport supplies and personnel more efficiently. The road was completed on August 19, 1824, and was given the name Old Three Notch Road due to the surveyors identifying the trail location by burning three notches in specific trees. However, according to local historian George Waits Jr., the road and its name had already existed for several years. Mr. Waits further explains that the local communities believe General Andrew Jackson and his army marched a very similar trail in the area, marking it with three notches during the War of 1812 on their journey from Fort Michell to Pensacola, Florida (Thomasson, 2010).

It is said that Andrew Jackson learned this marking technique from the Creek Nation, and locals believe the notching method was eventually passed onto surveyors. Currently, Old Three Notch Museum in Andalusia, Alabama has an original piece of wood that was notched when making the trail on display (Wilson, 2018).

If you follow the Yellow River south of Rosehill, you could have a chance to find a lost historical site in Covington County, Alabama. The Machis Lower Alabama Creek Indian Tribe (MLACIT) states a group of the Creek Nation secretly lived in a “rock house” or cave from 1834 to 1849 to avoid emigrating to Oklahoma. However, the Bureau of Indian Affairs researched this statement and could not find physical documentation supporting that the MLACIT had lived in the region at the time (Indian Affairs, 1987). The Creek Nation has occupied the Covington County area for centuries and there are several caves in the area, meaning the “rock house” could be a lost historical site.



Figure 3. Conecuh Trail in Conecuh National Forest.
Photo credit: Heather Griffin

A portion of the Conecuh National Forest can also be found in the Yellow River Watershed. The national forest contains over 84,000 acres and was first established in 1935. However, during the early 1900s the area had been almost completely clear cut and had been replanted with fast-growing slash pine trees. The local wildlife, such as the endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, was not able to thrive in that ecosystem. The slash pines are now being removed from the area and replaced with long leaf pine trees. These efforts have resulted in one of the largest red-cockaded woodpecker populations in the United States being found in the Conecuh National Forest. Since the 1930s there have been over 20 miles of hiking trails (Figure 3) built throughout the national forest, passing through hardwood swamps, pitcher plant bogs, cypress ponds, and coastal plain pine forest (Pasquill Jr., 2023).

The Frank Jackson State Park can be found just north of Opp, Alabama. The park contains areas for people to camp, hike, and attend special events within the Yellow River watershed. The 2,050-acre park contains the 1,000-acre Lake Jackson (Figure 4), thirty-two campsites, two boat launches, and three miles of hiking trails. The park hosts an annual bass tournament at Lake Jackson. The park has another annual event every November that allows local individuals, schools, and organizations to make and decorate scarecrows. The scarecrows are lined up along the hiking trails for visitors to see. Visitors can also see the park's Veterans Memorial overlooking Lake Jackson. The memorial consists of a structure where citizens can honor a loved one by putting their name on a placard, a table for the missing soldier, and a monument of local American soldiers that have lived in the Opp area since World War I.



*Figure 2. Lake Jackson, Frank Jackson State Park.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*