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# BLACK WARRIOR

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## RIVER BASIN

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The Black Warrior River begins as the Mulberry Fork and Locust Fork merge west of Birmingham, Alabama along the southern boundary of Walker County and Jefferson County. The [Black Warrior River](#) (Figure 1) contains 6,274 square miles and flows north to south for approximately 180 miles where it merges with the Upper Tombigbee River to form the Lower Tombigbee River north of Demopolis, Alabama. The Black Warrior River is named for Chief Tascaluca. Tascaluca derived from the words *tasska* and *luska*, which means black warrior. (Alabama Museum of Natural History, 2001) It was also named

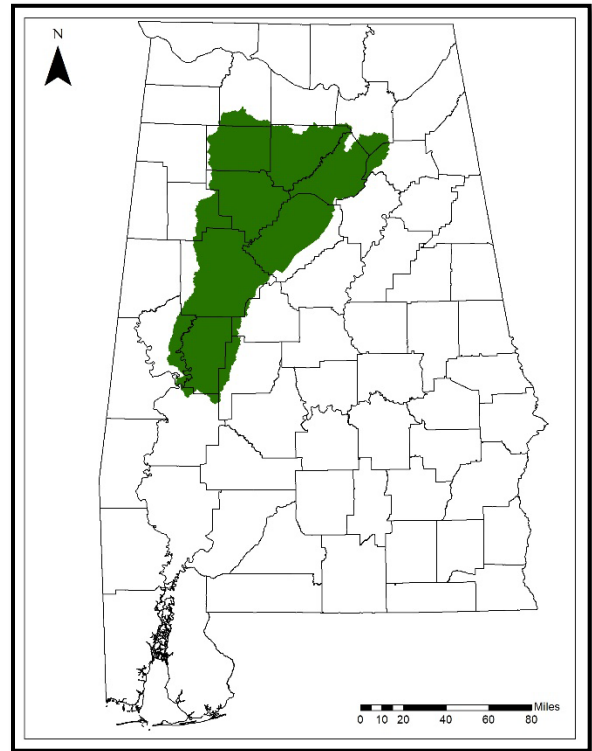


Figure 1. The Black Warrior River Basin Watershed.

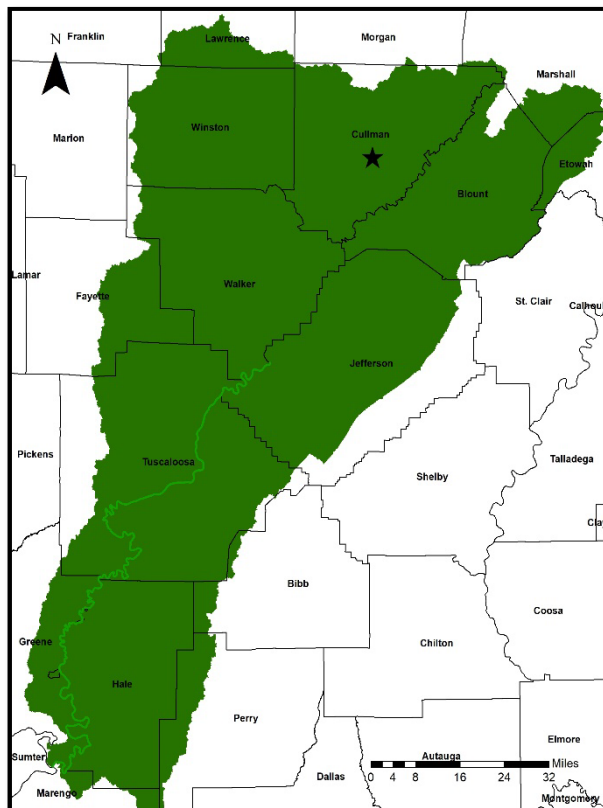


Figure 2. The Black Warrior River in Alabama.

*Apotaka hacha* or “border river” in the 1700s as it was the boundary between the Indian territories of the Choctaw, Chickasaw, and Creek.

The Black Warrior River watershed (Figure 2) encompasses seventeen counties and is the largest watershed contained wholly within Alabama. A watershed is an area of land through which rainwater drains by flowing across, though, or under the soil surface to a common low point, typically a stream, river, lake, or ocean. (Brantley, Bell, & Dictson, 2019) The Black Warrior River watershed contains the cities of Cullman, Jasper, Birmingham, and Tuscaloosa in Alabama (Figure 3).

As stated by the Encyclopedia of Alabama, the Black Warrior River “is considered one of the country’s most critical watersheds”.

The Black Warrior River has a series of locks and dams that form reservoirs (Bankhead Lake, Holt Lake, Oliver Lake, and Selden) which provide hydroelectricity, drinking water, and navigation. The Black Warrior River has over 200 miles of navigable waterways from Demopolis to North of Birmingham into the Mulberry Fork and Locust Fork. The river provides access for tugboats and their barges, which tow items such as coal, steel products, and wood products. (Black Warrior Riverkeeper, 2020)

The Black Warrior River Basin is home to multiple freshwater fish such as the Warrior Darter that can be found in the upper reaches of the river, mussels, crayfish (i.e., Digger Crayfish and Crisscross Crayfish), turtles, snails, and salamanders (i.e., Black Warrior waterdog). The river begins on the southern edges of the Southwestern Appalachians (Cumberland Plateau) at the Shale Hills and flows south through the Southeastern Plains of the Fall Line Hills and Black Prairie (East Gulf Coastal Plain). This provides a unique diversity to the watershed allowing many outdoor and recreational activities.

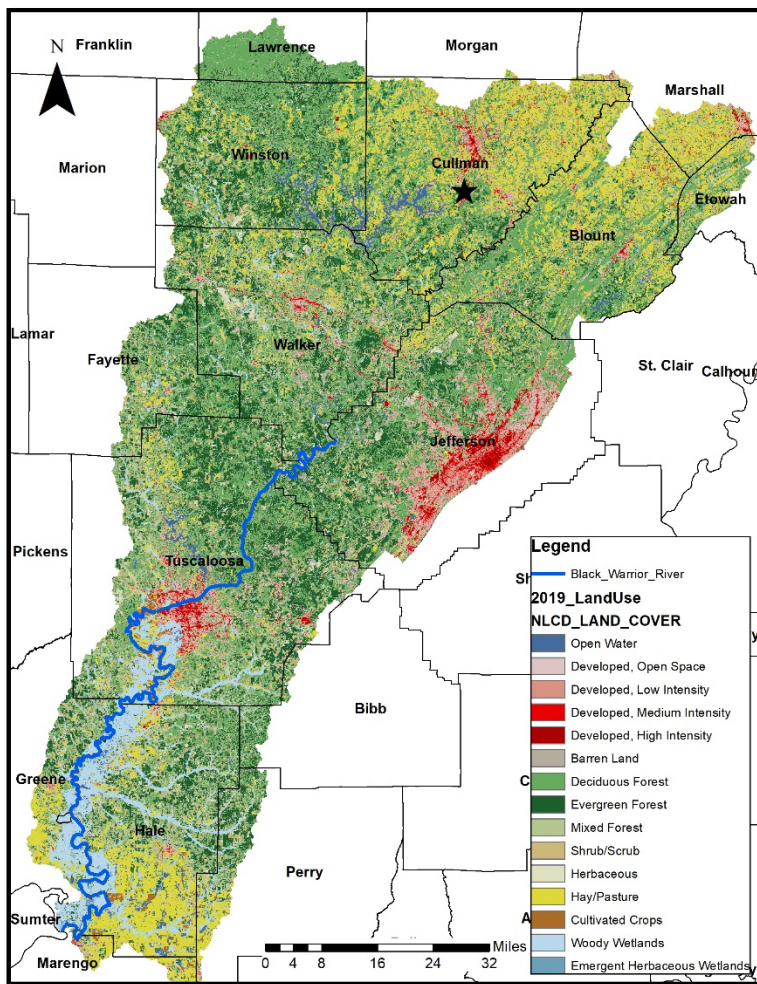


Figure 3. 2019 Land use data for the Black Warrior River Basin.

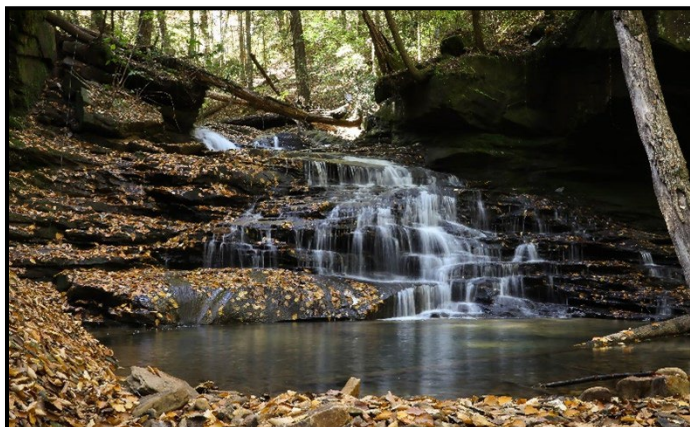


Figure 4. Bankhead National Forest  
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker

Natural wonders can be seen at the Turkey Creek Nature Preserve in Pinson and the William B. Bankhead National Forest in Double Springs. The [Turkey Creek Nature Preserve](#) (Figure 5) is a 466-acre property that provides educational programs for all age groups, hiking, picnic areas, and swimming. [Bankhead National Forest](#) (Figure 4) provides campgrounds, hiking, fishing, bird watching, canoeing, and swimming. It’s also home to a horse camp and shooting range. If you’re looking for a more immersive experience, [Camp](#)





*Figure 5. Turkey Creek Nature Preserve  
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*

[McDowell](#) (Figure 6) on the edges of the Bankhead National Forest provides summer camps for family groups of all ages and school groups. Instructional classes for quilters, musicians, blacksmiths, etc. are also provided year-round. The camps provide nature courses, hiking, camping, canoeing, swimming, farming, and food sustainability.

If you are more in line for tourist destinations, check out the [Ave Maria Grotto](#), [Smith Lake Park](#) or the [Clarkson Covered Bridge](#) in Cullman. The Ave Maria Grotto is home to the Benedictine Abbey and miniatures of famous spots from around the world such as

Monteserrat and St. Peter's Basilica. Maintained by the Cullman County Parks and Recreation Department, Smith Lake Park offers 500 miles of shoreline and year-round camping. The Clarkson Covered Bridge was built in 1904 and was used by visitors and locals to cross Crooked Creek. Damaged in 1921, the bridge was restored in 1975 and named to the National Register of Historic Places in 1974.



*Figure 6. Clear Creek at Camp McDowell. Photo Credit: Heather Griffin*

Tuscaloosa, located on the banks of the Black Warrior River, provides a variety of popular destinations. The [Moundville Archaeological Park](#) looks at Native American culture through the Jones Archaeological Museum, educational exhibits, and nature trails with views of the mounds. Annually, the park hosts the Moundville Native American Festival. Tuscaloosa is also home to the [Alabama Museum of Natural History](#). The museum provides exhibits on ancient fossils, skeletons, rocks, and minerals. The [Children's Hands-On Museum of Tuscaloosa](#) offers STEAM learning through play exhibits which encourages children of all ages to touch, move, and learn with each exhibit.