

CHATTAHOOCHEE

RIVER BASIN

The Chattahoochee River's headwaters can be found in the Blue Ridge Mountains within the Chattahoochee National Forest in Georgia. The river flows southwest to the Alabama-Georgia line (Figure 1) and continues south until it joins Flint River, forming the Apalachicola River in Chattahoochee, Florida. The Chattahoochee River flows for 434 miles and has a drainage area of 8,770 square miles. 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).

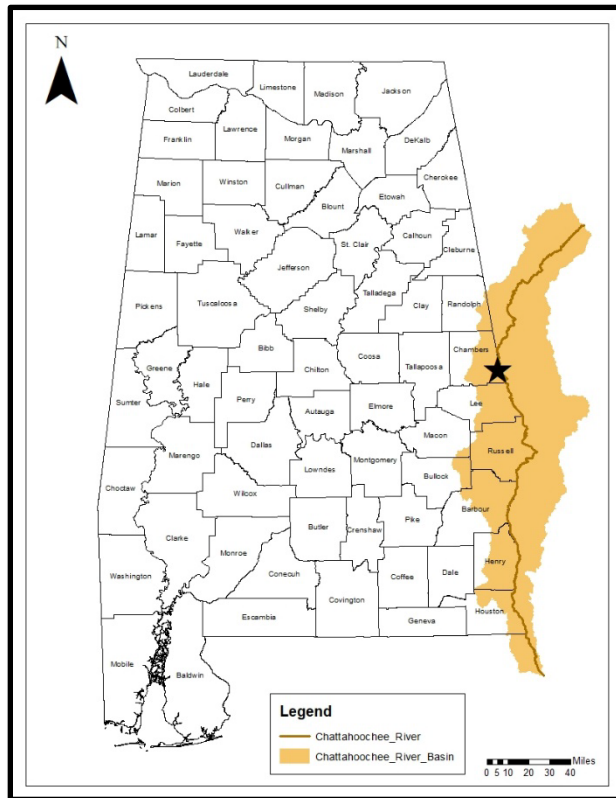


Figure 1. Chattahoochee River and watershed

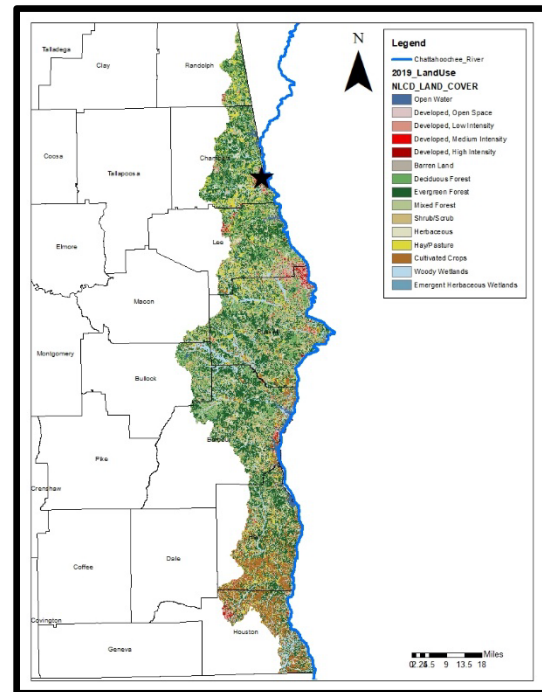


Figure 2. Land use map of the Chattahoochee watershed in 2019.

The Chattahoochee River got its name from two Creek Nation words “chat” and “ho-che,” which is translated to “painted rock.” From 800 to 1600 A.D. at least sixteen significant Creek settlements were established along the Chattahoochee’s banks. Currently, the watershed encompasses 20 counties in Georgia and 9 counties in Alabama. The watershed mostly consists of forested land, with centralized urban areas in Alabama (Figure 2). The river basin contains the cities of Phenix City, Cottonton, Dothan, Lanett and Eufaula in Alabama.

The Chattahoochee River supports a plethora of wildlife throughout its watershed. The river contains around 24 species of turtles, 37 species of salamanders and sirens, 30 species of frogs and toads, and the American alligator. On land, the river supports over 240 bird species, whitetail deer, feral hogs, bobcats, and raccoons. There are many opportunities for travelers to observe the wildlife in the watershed.

Lanett is one of the first Alabama towns the Chattahoochee River passes through. However, the area was first known as Bluffton, Alabama from 1864 to 1895. The name “Bluffton,” results from the north side of the town being above the river and the floodplain. In 1894, Lafayette Lanier and Theodore Bennett opened the Lanett Mill in Bluffton along the river. By 1895, Lanett Mill was so prosperous the town was renamed as Lanett to capitalize on the popularity of the mill. The name Lanett derived from the last three letters of Mr. Lanier’s and Mr. Bennett’s last names.

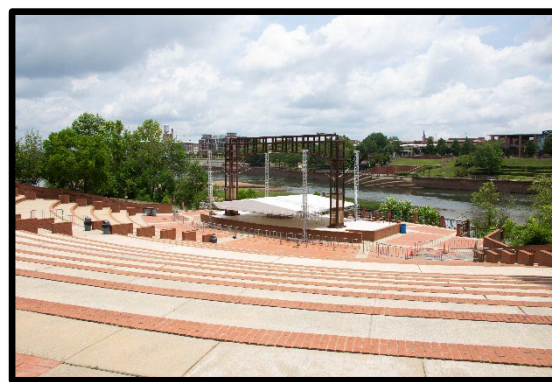


*Figure 3. West Point Dam in Lanett, Alabama.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*

People visiting Lanett can explore the West Point Lake and Dam (Figure 3), Fort Tyler, and the mallard duck statue at the Lanett Welcome Center. During the early to mid-19th century, an area to the south of Lanett was being developed, but regularly experienced flooding from the Chattahoochee River. As a result, the U.S. Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1962, authorizing the construction of West Point Dam.

Since its completion in 1975, the dam has assisted in flood control, power generation, fish and wildlife management, and provided areas for recreation. On the Alabama/Georgia state line in Lanett sits Fort Tyler, constructed in 1863. Fort Tyler was used by the Confederate Army to protect the bridge crossing the Chattahoochee River into Georgia. On April 16, 1864, Union and Confederate troops battled over the fort and control of the Chattahoochee River. Ultimately, the Union soldiers would take control of Fort Tyler. Fort Tyler was the last Confederate fort to be captured by the Union during the American Civil War (Cox, 2015).

Less than twenty miles south of Lanett is Phenix City, Alabama. Travelers can visit the Phenix City Riverwalk, a 1.21-mile walking trail. The trail offers access points to the Chattahoochee River for viewing, and pathways to venture into the city to explore the Phenix City Amphitheater (Figure 4) or the Girard Historic District. The Girard Historic District was Russel County’s first established community. Additionally, on the outskirts of southern Phenix City, travelers can explore the ruins of the Abercrombie Mound. The Abercrombie Mound is believed to have been built by the Creek Nation around 900 AD. Archeologists believe the mound was the political capital of the Creek Nation between 900 and 1,400 AD.



*Figure 4. Phenix City Amphitheater.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*

Continue following the Chattahoochee River south to Eufaula, Alabama to experience the Walter F. George Lake (Lake Eufaula) and a few world-famous fish. Lake Eufaula is a 45,181-acre reservoir on the Chattahoochee River and is controlled by hydroelectric flow. The area of the lake in Eufaula is considered the, “Big Bass Capital of the World” by some due to the large population and size of largemouth bass, and the annual Bassmaster Tournament. There are two famous largemouth bass that have been memorialized in Eufaula’s Downtown. In 1973, Tom Mann, owner of Tom Mann’s Fish World, caught a largemouth bass, named it Leroy Brown, and kept it in the bait shop’s fish tank for seven years. Leroy Brown became a popular local attraction. When Leroy Brown passed away, over 800 people attended the fish’s funeral, and a life size marble statue was erected and placed on Broad Street in Eufaula. Less than half a mile from Leroy stands Manny, a 12-foot-tall largemouth bass statue (Figure 5). Manny was erected in remembrance of Tom Mann, Leroy’s caretaker, televised fishermen, and local celebrity.



*Figure 5. Manny the bass statue.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*

The town of Dothan, Alabama also provides visitors with rich historical and natural attractions. The city of Dothan was originally given the name Poplar Head, Alabama when it was established in 1885. However, Alabama had already established a Poplar Head, resulting in the town being named Dothan. The name “Dothan” originated from religious texts. In 1903, a railroad system was constructed in Dothan, leading to the town becoming a large agricultural trading center. However, in the early 1900’s Dothan farmers experienced large scale crop loss due to a boll weevil infestation and poor soil conditions. During that time, Dr. George Washington Carver had been conducting research about crop rotation and its efficiency. Dr. Carver encouraged the city of Dothan to begin crop rotations to replenish the soil with nutrients and provide alternative cash crops. Currently, Dothan provides visitors with the opportunity to see several peanut statues scattered throughout the city, the National Peanut Festival (Figure 5), the George Washington Carver Interpretive Museum, and several murals conveying the town’s history.



*Figure 6. National Peanut Festival in Dothan, Alabama.
Photo Credit: Jennifer Barker*