
ESCATAWPA

RIVER BASIN

The Escatawpa River headwaters begin in Washington County, Alabama, and flow southwest to join the Pascagoula River in Mississippi near Moss Point, Mississippi where it drains into Pascagoula Bay. While the Escatawpa River starts in Washington County, its watershed extends north into Choctaw County (Figure 2). 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 Escatawpa River watershed contains the cities of Vinegar Bend, Deer Park, Wilmer, Semmes, and Grand Bay in Alabama.

The majority of the Escatawpa River is in Alabama (Figure 1). The river flows for 129 miles through Washington County and Mobile County in Alabama

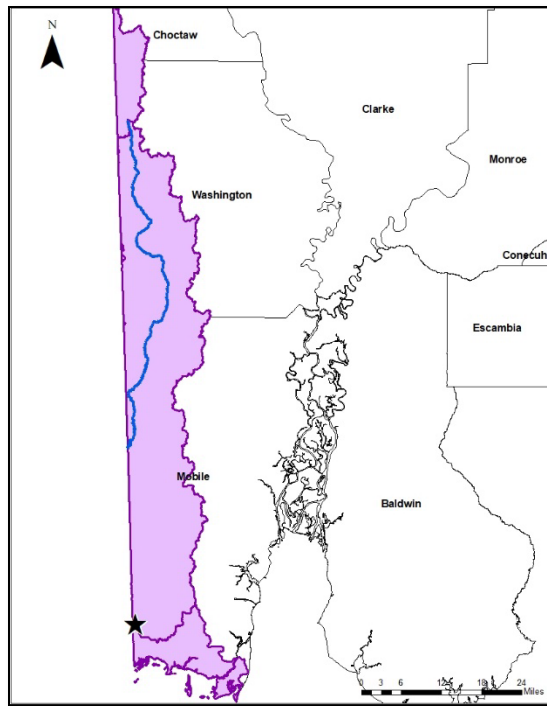


Figure 1. The Escatawpa River in Alabama.

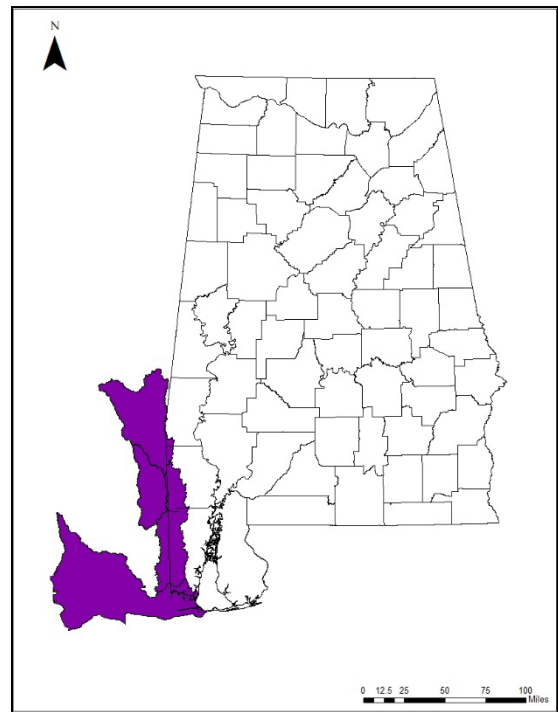


Figure 2. The Escatawpa River Basin.

southwest through George County and Jackson County in Mississippi. The name Escatawpa comes from the Choctaw word "Uski-a-Tapà"; meaning "a place where cane is cut." (Press-Register, 2022) Choctaw Indians who inhabited a large part of the now Mississippi and Alabama states made an annual pilgrimage to the river to cut cane for making baskets. The banks of the Escatawpa were inhabited well before the civil war. The settlement officially became "Escatawpa" in 1855 when the first Post Office opened in the city. Naturally, the spelling was also adopted for the river. The Escatawpa is classified as a 'Blackwater' stream, the watercolor resembling a glass of tea. The

reason for the coloring is the tannin content, as the river slowly moves through vegetative areas, tannins leach into the water. (Lewis, 2019)

In June 1984, the National Park Service, considered designating the Escatawpa River as an official “Wild and Scenic River”. Seventy-four miles were recommended for scenic and/or recreational status. However, many of the landowners, local industries, the governors of both Alabama and Mississippi, and local citizens strongly protested the classification. (Lewis, 2019)

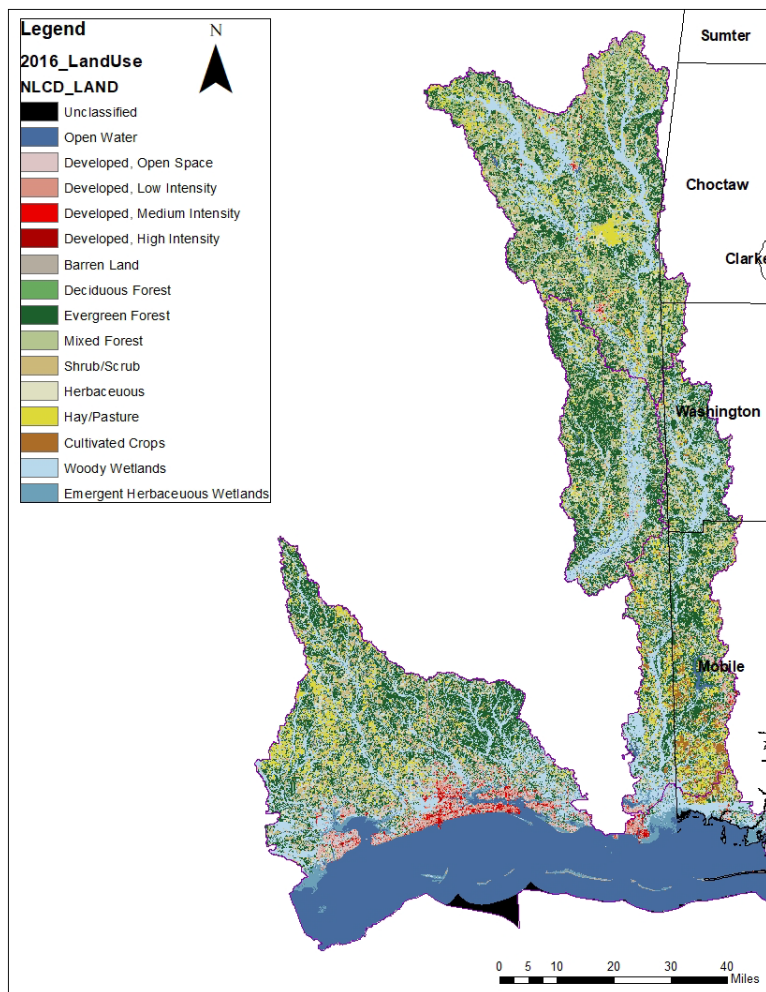


Figure 3. 2016 Landuse data for the Escatawpa River watershed.

The Escatawpa River Basin contains many species of fish including, saltwater, freshwater, and anadromous species. Species include longnose gar, hogchoker, striped bass, rainwater killifish, skipjack herring, chain pickerel, and longear sunfish. The River is a popular spot for those who love to canoe and kayak with an abundance of wildlife, with evidence of deer, turkey and raccoon tracks on almost every sandbar. Yellow bellied turtles sunbathe on logs and plop into the water when paddlers approach. Numerous snake species sun on the sandbars and swim the river. (Paddler, 2007)

The [Grand Bay National Wildlife Refuge](#), established in 1992, helps to protect the wet pine savanna habitat located in Coastal Mississippi and Alabama. The 10,188-acre refuge partially overlaps the [Grand Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve](#). Together, they protect nearly 18,000 acres of relatively undisturbed wildlife habitat. (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,

2022) Other habitats found in the refuge include salt marshes, saltpans, bays, bayous, tidal and non-tidal wetlands, and maritime forests. Wildlife found in the refuge include the American alligator, the western cottonmouth, the eastern box turtle, the barking tree frog, the southern water snake, the eastern glass lizard, and many others. Activities to explore and enjoy at the refuge include hunting, birding, boating, and hiking.

Big Creek Lake (Figure 4), also called Converse Reservoir, is a 3,600-acre reservoir in west Mobile County that serves as the public water supply for the Mobile metropolitan area and popular fishing areas for bass and crappie. The lake was formed by impounding Big Creek, which flows into the Escatawpa River. (Alabama Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, 2022)



Figure 4. Big Creek Lake. Photo Credit: reddit

The City of Semmes provides opportunities for the history lover at the City of Semmes [Honor Park](#) (Figure 6) and Semmes [Heritage Park](#) (Figure 5). The Honor Park was constructed in remembrance of the country's veterans



Figure 5. Honor Park. Photo Credit: City of Semmes



Figure 6. Heritage Park. Photo Credit: City of Semmes

including placement of bricks along walkways in memory of those who have served. The park also provides a walking paths and picnic areas. Heritage Park was founded to preserve early historical landmarks of the City of Semmes. The one-room schoolhouse build in 1902 is the oldest continuous-in-use school in the State of Alabama. The schoolhouse is listed on the Alabama Historical Landmarks list as of August 25, 1994. (City of Semmes, 2022) Heritage Park is home to many yearly events such as the [Camellia Show](#), Semmes Heritage Day, and the Semmes Old Fashioned Christmas.