



Altamaha River Basin



Photo from www.americanrivers.org

“The name Altamaha...is from an immigrant Yamassee Indian group descended from an interior chiefdom originally known as the Altamaha or Tama, located on the Oconee River just below Milledgeville, visited by Hernando de Soto in 1540.” It is also known as Georgia’s little Amazon.

Quick Facts about the River:



- The Altamaha has been declared the 7th most endangered river in the United States due to the loss of water flow that has resulted from reservoirs and power plants along the shoreline.
- The river is 137 miles long and runs from central Georgia to the southeastern coast of the state.
- The Altamaha Watershed contains about ¼ of the state of Georgia, making it one of the 3 largest river basins on the Atlantic Seaboard.
- The estimated population in the watershed is about 180,000.

Map from the Nature Conservancy Website

Environmental Concerns:

- There are 11 endangered mussel species and over 120 species of rare or endangered plants or animals in the Altamaha. Seven of these mussel species are found nowhere else in the world.
- While there are currently no dams along the river, proposals to build five dams will have severe environmental effects including the loss of important habitat areas, reduced populations of aquatic species, increased pollutant concentrations, and reduced recreational opportunities.
- The continued growth of Atlanta puts a strain on the amount of freshwater demanded and extracted from the river, especially with some areas growing by 300%. Each day, just under three million gallons of water are taken from the Altamaha River for the public sector alone.
- Chemical seepage of many contaminants including mercury by LCP Chemicals-Georgia Inc. for 15 years immediately placed the building and its surroundings on the federal Superfund list.
- In the Altamaha River Basin, there are approximately 19 rivers and streams listed on the 2002 303(d) list as waters not meeting designated uses. These impaired waters include roughly 192 miles of the Altamaha River Basin.

Georgia River Network

Economic Ties to the River:

- The Altamaha supplies thermoelectric power, nuclear thermoelectric power, livestock use, irrigation, wastewater treatment, hydroelectric power, and more.
- About a third both of Georgia's commercial and recreational fisheries are based in the Altamaha. However, the effects of lower river flows and increasing salinity in the estuary already have taken their toll and the value of the catch has fallen considerably in recent years.

Tourist Sites / Significant Parks Pertaining to River

- Botanical oddities attract naturalists, who know the legend of the *Franklinia alatamaha*, a flowering tree that was identified and collected by 18th century naturalist Bartram and never seen again.
- In 1972, the state acquired the 6,177-acre Big Hammock Natural Area and the 5,633-acre Lewis Island Natural Area, which consists mainly of bottomland hardwoods and sloughs, and an 800-acre sand hill community that supports the largest population of the Georgia plume. Lewis Island Natural Area contains virgin cypress tidewater forest, with Georgia's oldest trees.
- Barrington County Park provides access to the river and a beautiful setting for picnicking, camping, or fishing on the Altamaha River near a historic colonial fort.
- The 27,078-acre Altamaha Wildlife Management Area/Altamaha River Waterfowl Area (ARWA) is the second largest waterfowl area east of the Mississippi (the largest being the Chesapeake), and is visited by more than 30,000 ducks from mid-October through mid-April.
- Butler Island and its southern neighbor Champney Island are readily accessible to the visitor without a boat and are good sites for bird-watching during waterfowl migrations.
- Wolf Island National Refuge is a three-island wildlife refuge in the mouth of the Altamaha River and consists mainly of salt marsh and provides critical sanctuary for rare migrating birds.
- The ruins of more than 1,000 Indian sites along the river are evidence of how important the river was to Indians, who relied on it for food and transportation.
- The Nature Conservancy of Georgia and the Georgia DNR are working together to protect several thousand acres of unique longleaf pine forest and Altamaha River bottomlands. Moody Swamp is an area that is rich in species diversity and includes many 300 year old trees and several threatened wildlife species.