The 200-mile Cape Fear River is the main tributary and namesake of the state’s largest river basin. It is the only river in North Carolina that flows directly into the ocean. The river draws its name from the treacherous offshore shoals (dubbed the “Cape of Feare” by early mariners). The shoals stretch for miles into the Atlantic Ocean from the river’s mouth. The Cape Fear River and its tributaries were important pathways for early commerce through the historic ports of Brunswick, Charlestown and Wilmington. In the mid-1800s, the Cape Fear was an outlet for the commercial products of more than 28 counties. River trade extended up to Fayetteville through a series of three locks and dams that raised the water level. Throughout the 19th century, shallow-draft steamboats called at more than 100 local landings between Fayetteville and Wilmington.

The Cape Fear River Basin is one of four river basins completely contained within North Carolina’s borders. The headwaters (origin) of the basin are the Deep and Haw rivers. These rivers converge in Chatham County just below B. Everett Jordan Dam to form the Cape Fear River. The river ends as a 35-mile-long coastal estuary.
that is an important nursery area for juvenile fish, crabs and shrimp. Large industries lining the lower Cape Fear make the basin North Carolina’s most industrialized. The basin also contains one-fifth of the state’s population. Major tributaries include the Black River, which flows into the Cape Fear River in Pender County, and the Northeast Cape Fear River, which flows into the Cape Fear at Wilmington. These are both “blackwater” streams that drain the acidic soils of hardwood swamps.

Hundreds of turpentine distilleries once dotted the historically vast longleaf pine forests of the region. The products of these trees—tar, pitch, turpentine and rosin—distinguished Wilmington as the world’s leading exporter of naval stores in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Many different aquatic ecosystems in the Cape Fear River Basin support at least 95 species of commercial and recreational fish. Estuaries, blackwater rivers and rocky streams in the basin support 42 rare aquatic species. The Cape Fear shiner, a fish that is federally listed as endangered, has been found nowhere in the world except the Cape Fear River Basin. Other endangered species include the shortnose sturgeon,
the red-cockaded woodpecker, the Saint Francis’ satyr (a butterfly) and the West Indian manatee, a visitor to coastal estuaries. The American alligator and the loggerhead sea turtle are listed nationally as threatened species, meaning they are at risk of becoming endangered.

The basin has 33 reservoirs, including B. Everett Jordan Reservoir (“Jordan Lake”), the largest lake in the basin at 46,768 acres. Constructed in the 1970s, it is the main source of drinking water for the town of Cary and a major recreational spot for the fast-growing Triangle region. The most populated regions of the basin are in and near the Triad area (Greensboro-High Point), the Durham-Chapel Hill area, Fayetteville and Wilmington. The 26 counties contained within or overlapping the borders of the Cape Fear River Basin are expected to grow in population from 3 million to about 5 million over the next 20 years.

The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. The Cape Fear shiner is a small, endangered minnow that is unique to the Cape Fear River Basin. 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Large-scale livestock operations also compete for the region’s natural resources—the basin contains the most swine of any North Carolina river basin (58 percent of the state’s total hog population). Growth in human population and livestock numbers can stress aquatic systems because so much polluted runoff washes into streams and rivers.

Fertilizers and animal waste in runoff—from lawns, urban developed areas, farm fields and livestock operations—increases the flow of nutrients (such as nitrogen and phosphorus) into nearby waters. These nutrients can stimulate algae growth and decrease the amount of oxygen that is available in the water for aquatic animals. Such conditions can cause fish kills and the loss of other vital aquatic species. Both Jordan Lake and the Haw River are designated by the state as “nutrient sensitive waters.” The state placed stricter limits on the amounts of nitrogen and phosphorus that wastewater treatment plants can discharge into these waters.

The Cape Fear estuary has experienced fewer instances of nutrient-related algae blooms and fish kills than waters of the adjacent Neuse River Basin. Both regions, however, face similar pressures caused by nonpoint source pollution (polluted runoff from land). For example, stormwater runoff makes the water unsuitable for various aquatic species. Cities and towns throughout the river basin are developing strategies to reduce and treat runoff.
As population and industry in the watershed continue to increase, conservation groups, municipalities and other stakeholders are cooperating to manage growth, monitor water quality, restore wetlands and protect the other valuable resources of the Cape Fear River Basin. There are many opportunities for people to get involved with grassroots efforts to protect community creeks, streams and rivers. (See the list of contacts on the back of this brochure.) Individuals can also help by managing the quality and quantity of runoff by reducing the use of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals and controlling erosion on their properties.

The least bittern sways and points its bill upward to camouflage its streaked body among marsh grasses.

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Hiking & Biking

Hiking and biking are popular activities in the Cape Fear River Basin. The basin offers a variety of options for nature lovers, including walking trails, interpretive nature trails, and biking trails. Many sites provide views of streams, rivers, creeks, lakes, and wetlands. Some trails are wheelchair-accessible, and many are suited for people of all ages and abilities. Here is a list of some of the main sites in the Cape Fear River Basin:

1. Airlie Gardens
2. Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve
3. Bladen Lakes State Forest
4. Boiling Spring Lakes Nature Preserve
5. Cape Fear Botanical Garden
6. Cane Creek Reservoir
7. Carolina Beach State Park
8. Carroll Howard Johnson Environmental Education Park
9. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area
10. Greensboro Public Gardens
11. Hank Anderson Community Park
12. Haw Slopes State Natural Area
13. Holly Shelter Game Land
14. James Goodwin Forest
15. Johnston Mill Nature Preserve
16. Chapel Hill Parks/Greenways
17. Jones Lake State Park
18. Jordan Lake State Recreation Area
19. Lake Michael Park
20. Lake Rim Park
21. Moores Creek National Battlefield
22. North Carolina Botanical Garden
23. Raven Rock State Park
24. Singletary Lake State Park
25. Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest
26. UNC-W Arboretum
27. White Pines Nature Preserve
28. Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve
29. Zeke's Island Coastal Reserve

Some trails designated as wheelchair accessible:

- Airlie Gardens
- Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve
- Boiling Spring Lakes Nature Preserve
- Cape Fear Botanical Garden
- Cane Creek Reservoir
- Carolina Beach State Park
- Fort Fisher State Recreation Area
- Greensboro Public Gardens
- Hank Anderson Community Park
- Haw Slopes State Natural Area
- Holly Shelter Game Land
- James Goodwin Forest
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- North Carolina Botanical Garden
- Raven Rock State Park
- Singletary Lake State Park
- Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest
- UNC-W Arboretum
- White Pines Nature Preserve
- Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve
- Zeke's Island Coastal Reserve

For more information about Environmental Education Centers and the opportunities they offer, visit www.conewnorthcarolina.org.
The Cape Fear River Basin offers many opportunities for paddling creeks, ponds, streams, rivers, lakes and estuaries. The places included here offer public access areas maintained by state, federal or local governments. Privately operated marinas and boat docks may also be available. These trails and lakes are suitable for easy to moderate paddling.

1 Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve*
   www.nccoastalreserve.net/
2 B. Everett Jordan Lake*
   www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/jord/main.php
   ● 46,768 acres ● 16 public boat ramps.
3 Bass Lake
   ● 80 acres ● Canoe and boat rental available.
4 Black River*
   http://www.nature.org
5 Boiling Spring Lakes
   (910) 845-3693
6 Bynum Canoe Access (Haw River)
   www.trianguland.org/what-we-do/page/lower-haw-state-natural-area
7 Cabin Lake
   http://www.duplincountync.com/qualityOfLife/recreation.html ● 69 acres
8 Cape Fear River Paddle Trail*
   (highlighted in yellow above) www.ncsu.edu/paddletrails/southerncoast/nc10.html ● 147-mile trail from Fayetteville to Southport. For a map, call (910) 395-4553.
9 Cone Creek Reservoir
   www.owasa.org/whatwedo/recreation.aspx
   ● 540 acres ● Boats on car tops only; no trailers.
10 City Lake*
    www.highpointnc.gov/pr/city_lake_park.cfm ● 340 acres
11 Deep River via McIver Landing
    www.trianguland.org/what-we-do/nature-preserves/mciver-landing
12 Glenville Lake at Mazarick Park
    www.fcpr.us/parks.aspx ● 26 acres
13 Graham-Mebane Lake*
14 Greenfield Lake
   www.capefearriverwatch.org/education/greenfield-lake ● 90 acres
15 Harris Lake*
    www.wakegov.com/parks/harrislake/Pages/default.aspx ● 4,100 acres ● Boats on car tops only; no trailers.
16 Haw River Trail
   (highlighted in yellow above) www.thehaw.org/
   ● 110-mile trail from Greensboro to Jordan Lake
17 Jones Lake
   www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/jone/main.php ● 224 acres
18 Lake Brandt
19 Lake Higgins
20 Lake Mackintosh
   http://burlingtonnc.gov/index.aspx?NID=245 ● 1,100 acres
21 Lake Michael*
    www.cityofmebane.com/lakemichaelpark.aspx ● 59 acres
22 Lake Reidsville
    www.ci.reidsville.nc.us/government/lake_reidsville/index/ ● 750 acres
23 Lake Rim*
    www.fcpr.us/outdoor_programs/lake_rim_park.aspx ● 50 acres
24 Lake Townsend
    www.greensboro-nc.gov/index.aspx?page=1310 ● 1,542 acres
25 Oak Hollow Lake*
    www.highpointnc.gov/pr/oak_hollow_festival_park.cfm ● (336) 883-3494 ● 800 acres
26 Ramsour Lake*
    www.townoframseur.org/parks_recreation.htm ● (336) 824-4646 ● 127 acres
27 Reservoir Lake
   www.southernpines.net/Recreation/Parks.aspx ● 95 acres
28 San-Lee Environmental Education and Recreation Park
   www.leecountync.gov/Departments/SanLeePark.aspx ● Two 10-acre lakes
29 Stoney Creek/Old City Lake*
30 Sutton Lake*
    ● 1,100 acres
31 Horseshoe Lake/Suggs Mill Pond
    Game Land
    www.nature.org/ourinitiatives/regions/northeast/northamerica/unitedstates/northcarolina/index.htm ● 600 acres
32 University Lake*
    www.owasa.org/whatwedo/recreation.aspx ● 213 acres
33 Zeke’s Island National Estuarine Research Reserve.
    www.nccoastalreserve.net/
*Denotes site with public access points maintained by the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission. For directions to boat ramps, visit www.ncwildlife.org and click on Boating/Waterways, then Maps/Location.
For more information about trails along coastal creeks, rivers and the Intracoastal Waterway, visit www.ncsu.edu/paddletrails.
What makes the Cape Fear River Basin special? See for yourself. Visit these Environmental Education Centers to discover more about your ecological address:

- Agape Center for Environmental Education
- Airlie Gardens
- American Livestock Breeds Conservancy
- Betsy-Jeff Penn 4-H Educational Center
- Cape Fear Botanical Garden
- Cape Fear Museum of History and Science
- Cape Fear River Watch Inc.
- Carolina Beach State Park
- Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World at Timberlake Farm
- Children’s Museum of Wilmington
- Clark Park Nature Center
- Frank Sharpe Jr. Wildlife Education Center
- Halyburton Park
- Harris Energy and Environmental Center / Harris Plant Visitors Center
- Harris Lake County Park
- Haw River Program/Haw River State Park
- Jones Lake State Park
- Jordan Lake Educational State Forest
- Jordan Lake State Recreation Area
- Jordan Lake Visitor Assistance Center
- Karen Beasley Sea Turtle Rescue and Rehabilitation Center
- Kathleen Clay Edwards Family Branch: Environmental Education Focus Library
- Lake Higgins Environmental Education Center
- Lake Rim Park
- Marine Quest: UNC-W Center for Marine Science
- Morehead Planetarium and Science Center
- Natural Science Center of Greensboro
- New Hanover County Arboretum
- North Carolina Aquarium at Fort Fisher
- North Carolina Botanical Garden
- North Carolina Coastal Reserve Program
- North Carolina Zoological Park
- Piedmont Biofuels
- Piedmont Environmental Center
- Public Works Commission Watershed Education Center
- Raven Rock State Park
- San-Lee Environmental Education and Recreation Park
- Screech Owl Farm School
- Singletary Lake State Park
- Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest
- Weymouth Woods – Sandhills Nature Preserve

For more information about Environmental Education Centers in North Carolina, check out the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs’ website at www.eenorthcarolina.org.

You can gain a sense of community pride by learning more and helping to protect streams, rivers and lakes in the Catawba River Basin. The contacts listed below can help you do just that. To find out about local river organizations and conservation groups, contact your local soil and water conservation district. To find out about how you can get involved in local waterway and other litter cleanups, contact North Carolina Big Sweep.

Clean Water Management Trust Fund
www.cwmtf.net/

Cape Fear River Basinwide Plan*
http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq/ps/bpu/basin/capefear

Division of Water Quality, Stormwater and Runoff Pollution
www.ncstormwater.org/

North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
www.ncaswcd.org

North Carolina Big Sweep
www.ncbigsweep.org/

North Carolina Stream Watch
www.ncwater.org/Education_and_Technical_Assistance/Stream_Watch

North Carolina Water Science Center
http://nc.water.usgs.gov/

*Basinwide water quality planning is a nonregulatory, watershed-based approach to restoring and protecting the quality of North Carolina’s surface waters. The N.C. Division of Water Quality welcomes community input.

To order additional brochures on any of North Carolina’s 17 river basins, a general river basin booklet or a poster, fill out the online order form at www.eenorthcarolina.org.