

New River ^[1]

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New River in western North Carolina is formed by the convergence of two smaller rivers, the North Fork New River (43 miles long) and the South Fork New River (72 miles long), which flow out of the Blue Ridge Mountains of [Watauga](#) ^[2] and [Ashe](#) ^[3] Counties. It flows north from the Ashe-Alleghany ^[4] County line into Virginia and West Virginia, entering the Kanawha River at Charleston, W.Va. The New River is unique among North Carolina rivers for several reasons. It is one of the few major rivers in the continental United States to flow north. Other major rivers that flow northward include the [Bighorn River](#) ^[5] in Montana or the [Red River of the North](#) ^[6] in Minnesota. In addition, and in contradiction to its name—the result of its discovery in 1749 in “new” sections of North Carolina and Virginia—the New River is one of North America’s oldest rivers, created between 10 million and 360 million years ago. Some geologists believe the New to be the second-oldest river in the world, behind the Nile River in Egypt.

The New River is one of the state’s least-industrialized rivers, populated by relatively small towns and flowing practically untouched through many miles of bucolic highland terrain. In 1976, 26 miles of the South Fork New River was declared a National Scenic River by the federal government, and the following year the state of North Carolina established the [New River State Park](#) ^[7] in an effort to protect the river’s natural beauty and resources. The New was named an American Heritage River in 1998. Conservation groups, including the National Committee for the New River, continue to work to protect the river from possibly harmful development projects and to improve the environment of its more than 765 squares miles of watershed in the state.

Reference:

John Manuel, "New River Rhythm," *Wildlife in North Carolina* 63 (November 1999).

Additional Resources:

Burgess, Carla, ed. "New River Basin." Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs. Raleigh, NC: N.C. Department of Environmental Quality. 2018. Accessed February 7, 2023 at: <https://files.nc.gov/deqee/documents/files/new-river-basin.pdf> ^[8].

Misachi, John. "Rivers That Flow North." *Worldatlas.com*. May 6, 2021. Accessed February 7, 2023 at: <https://www.worldatlas.com/rivers/rivers-that-flow-north.html> ^[9].

"New River." Virginia Department of Wildlife Resources. 2023. Accessed February 7, 2023 at: <https://dwr.virginia.gov/waterbody/new-river/#overview> ^[10].

Subjects:

[Rivers](#) ^[11]

Authors:

[Mazzocchi, Jay](#) ^[12]

Origin - location:

[Alleghany County](#) ^[13]

[Ashe County](#) ^[14]

[Watauga County](#) ^[15]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[16]

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