

Things to Learn about a River

Geography and Physical Characteristics

- Where are the headwaters of the river, its forks, and its major tributaries?
- What geologic forces formed this river?
- How have the natural flows been altered by agriculture, roads, and railroads?
- How prone is the river to flooding, and why?
- What becomes of these waters after this river ends downstream?
- What dams and diversions alter(ed) the stream's natural flow?
- Where are the divides that mark the watershed's edge, and where does water on the other side go?
- What access points, parks, and other public lands are along the river?
- How has the river's course changed, or been changed, over time?
- How wide was the natural floodplain?
- Vital statistics: length, volume, elevation change
- What is the riverbed made of? How does it look and feel?
- How much sediment is in the water? What else is in the water?

Wildlife and Habitat

- What birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians live here, and how do they use the habitat?
- What fish and mussels live in the water?
- What creatures lived here previously?
- Are there any unusual habitats or plant communities along the river or in its watershed? What types of wetlands are in the watershed?
- Have any habitat restoration projects been done here? Are any planned?
- What are the names of the trees and other plants that grow here?



Land Use

- What is the history of crops and agricultural use along the banks and in the floodplain? What is grown there now?
- What industries and businesses owe (or owed) their existence to the river?
- Are their pollution or erosion problems, and what are their effects, here and downstream?
- Does the river face any present or future conservation threats?
- Is there much irrigation of farm land in the river's watershed?

History and Culture

- What Native peoples lived by this river and relied on it in centuries past?
- Who were the first immigrant settlers, and do any of their descendants still live around here?
- What is the history of the cities and towns that grew up on the river's banks?
- How does the river affect life in those towns and cities today (e.g., parks, river walks, water supply, treatment plants)?
- Are there any museums, nature centers, or similar sites that would provide information about the river's history and/or habitats?
- What research studies or investigations have been done, are any ongoing, or are any planned in the river, floodplain, or watershed?
- Are there local non-profit organizations that focus on the river or its environs?
- Have any books been written about the river or about things that have happened in the area?
- What writers, artists, or musicians have worked in this area? How has the river figured in their work?

