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 Fear” 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.
Three lock-and-dam structures on the lower Cape Fear River once allowed barges and large boats to navigate waters that would otherwise be too shallow. As a vessel traveled upriver, gates would open and close to release more water and allow passage. These structures eliminated 160 miles of the river from the migration routes of shad, striped bass, sturgeon and other “anadromous” fish—ocean-dwelling species that swim up into freshwater streams to reproduce. Today the locks are no longer operated for navigation but remain an obstacle to these fish, including the shortnose sturgeon, which is on the Endangered Species List. State and federal fisheries agencies are pursuing the removal of the dams so that migratory fish can return to their historic spawning grounds in the upper Cape Fear River Basin. Though the dams were not designed for water supply, cities such as Wilmington and Fayetteville draw water from the impoundments. Fisheries officials hope to work in partnership with municipalities and citizen groups to simultaneously satisfy water-supply needs and re-open routes for migratory fish species.

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-Burlington-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.

**A Scarce Minnow**

The Cape Fear shiner is a small minnow (rarely exceeding 2 inches) that is federally listed as endangered and also is endemic (found nowhere else) to the Cape Fear River Basin. It lives in shallow, rocky shoals within main river channels only in sections of the Deep, Haw and Rocky rivers. During spring spawning season, the males’ gold color intensifies and females take on a silvery cast. Dam construction in the Cape Fear River Basin has most significantly affected shiner populations by flooding the fish’s habitat. Changes in flow regulation could further threaten the few remaining populations of this species.
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.

The charming Wilmington waterfront
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 property.

Old pier on estuary, Bald Head Island, N.C. (above); fishing on the Cape Fear (right).

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

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The Cape Fear River Basin offers many opportunities to enjoy and explore nature through walking, hiking and biking. This list includes places for easy to moderate activity. Many sites include views of streams, rivers, creeks, lakes and wetlands. Remember that some trails are multi-use, serving pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians and other recreational users.

**HIKING & BIKING**

1. Airlie Gardens  
   www.airlie.org
2. Bald Head Woods Coastal Reserve  
   www.nccoastalreserve.net
3. Bladen Lakes State Forest  
   www.dfr.state.nc.us  ● 33,017 acres  ● 150 miles of multi-use roads.
4. Boiling Spring Lakes Nature Preserve  
   www.nature.org  ● 6,157 acres  ● 2-mile nature trail.
5. Cabin Lake County Park  
   www.duplincountync.com/government/offices/parks  
   Recreation.html  ● 2.2 mile trail around lake and through park
6. Cape Fear Botanical Garden  
   www.yourgarden.org
7. Cane Creek Reservoir  
   www.dfr.state.nc.us/cnr/ncsu.edu/forestlands/dept/jgoodwin.html  
   cnr.ncsu.edu/forestry/ FACILITIES/CANE_CREEK_RES.aspx
8. Carolina Beach State Park  
   www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=351
9. Carroll Howard Johnson Environmental Education Center  
   www.wakeenvironmentalcenter.org/parks/carrboro/  
   3 miles of trails.
10. Fort Fisher State Recreation Area  
    www.nps.gov/mocr  ● 1 mile of walking trails; wheelchair-accessible.
11. Greenbrier State Park  
    www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=352
12. Hank Anderson Community Park  
    www.carrboro.org/  
    28 UNCW Arboretum  
    www.cnr.ncsu.edu/forestry/ENTX/Handicapped/handicapped
13. Hope Valley Experimental Forest  
    www.cnr.ncsu.edu/forestry/ENTX/Handicapped/handicapped
14. Hope Valley Experimental Forest  
    www.cnr.ncsu.edu/forestry/ENTX/Handicapped/handicapped
15. James Goodwin Forest  
    http://cnr.ncsu.edu/fer/dep/jgoodwin.html  
    cnr.ncsu.edu/forestry/ENTX/Handicapped/handicapped
    www.wakeenvironmentalcenter.org/parks/carrboro/  
    3 miles of trails.
17. Jones Lake State Park  
    www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=353
18. Jordan Lake Educational State Forest  
    www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=354
19. Jordan Lake State Recreation Area  
    www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=355

● "some trails designated as wheelchair accessible

**HIKING**

21. Lake Michael Park  
   www.cityofmebane.com/lakemichaelpark.asp  ● 200 acres  ● 1.5 miles of nature trails.
22. Lake Rim Park  
   www.fcp.us/outdoor_programs/lake_rim_park.aspx
23. Moores Creek National Battlefield  
   www.nps.gov/mocr  ● 1 mile of walking trails; wheelchair-accessible.
   www.botanical.garden.org  
   2.2 mile trail around lake and through park
25. Raven Rock State Park  
   www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=356
26. Single Lake State Park  
   www.dcr.state.nc.us/contact/travel/travelersguide/descriptions.cfm?area=357
27. Turnbull Creek Educational State Forest  
   www.fcpr.us/education/for_schools/  
   www.fcpr.us/parks/Facilities/regionalparks/  
   28-miles of trails around the lake and through the park
28. UNC-W Arboretum  
   www.fcpr.us/education/for_schools/  
   www.fcpr.us/parks/Facilities/regionalparks/  
   28-miles of trails around the lake and through the park
29. Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve  
   www.westcliffsports.com
30. White Pines Nature Preserve  
    www.nccoastalreserve.net/  
    50,120 acres  ● 2.5 miles of trails; wheelchair-accessible.
31. Zekes Island Coastal Reserve  
    www.nccoastalreserve.net

**HIKING AND BIKING**

32. American Tobacco Trail  
    www.ata.org/trails/northcarolina/american_tobacco_trail/  
    414 miles; wheelchair-accessible.
33. Bass Lake Park  
34. Burlington Parks and Recreation Park  
    www.burlingtonnc.gov/departments/parks/facilities/parksandrec/parks  
    20 acres  ● 1 mile of walking trails; wheelchair-accessible.
35. Cape Fear River Trail  
    www.fcpr.us/lake_rim_park.aspx  ● 4-mile, wheelchair-accessible trail.
36. Cedarock Park  
    www.alamance-nc.com  ● 414 acres  ● 4 miles of nature trails and 1.5-mile bike trail; .5-mile wheelchair-accessible trail.
37. Chapel Hills Parks/Greensways  
    http://chapelhills.org/  ● 11 miles of trails; some wheelchair-accessible.
38. Duke Forest  
    http://www.env.duke.edu/forest/  ● 7,050 acres  ● 30 miles of paved access roads.
39. Dunn-Enwill Trail  
    www.harnett.org/health/physical-910.asp  ● 5.3-mile trail crosses Black River.
40. Durham Greenway Trails  
    www.bikewalk.durham.org/  ● 14 miles of trails.

**Biking**

41. Fayetteville Parks  
    www.fcpparks.org/  
    376 acres  ● 1 mile of trails; some wheelchair-accessible.
42. Greenfield Lake  
    www.fcpr.us/greenfieldlake.html  ● 5 mile path around 90 acre lake.
43. Greensboro Watershed Trails  
    www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Parks/facilities/trails/watershed/  ● 36 miles of trails around city lakes.
44. Guilford Courthouse Battlefield Trail  
    www.nps.gov/guico/index.htm  ● 2.5-mile trail.
45. Hagan-Stone Park  
    www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Parks/facilities/haganstone/  ● 3409 acres  ● 38.7 miles of trails.
46. Halyburton Park  
    www.hollyspringsnc.us/departments/parks/facilities/halyburtonpark/  ● 40 acres  ● 1 mile of trails; wheelchair-accessible.
47. Harris Lake Park  
    www.mebane.org/departments/parks/greenways/harrislakepark/  ● 103 acres  ● 1 mile of trails; wheelchair-accessible.
48. Oak Island Nature Center/ Southport Paths and Greenways  
49. Piedmont Environmental Center  
    www.piedmontenvironmentalcenter.com  ● 376 acres  ● 1 mile of trails; wheelchair-accessible.
50. Rassier-Wicker Park  
    www.villageofpinehurst.org/  ● 103 acres  ● 1 mile of trails; wheelchair-accessible.
51. Reservoir Park/Southern Pines Greenways  
    www.southernpines.net/Recreation/Parks.aspx  ● 13 miles of trails and greenways; wheelchair-accessible.
52. San-Lee Environmental Education and Recreation Park  
    www.sanleeeducation.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.org

2 B. Everett Jordan Lake*  
www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/jord/main.php  
46,768 acres  
16 public boat ramps.

3 Bass Lake  
www.hollyspringsnc.us/dept/park/basslake/index.asp  
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.triangliland.org/lands/partnership/bynum_property.shtml

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/sc10.html  
147-mile trail from Fayetteville to Southport. For a map, call (910) 395-4533.

9 Cane Creek Reservoir  
www.owasa.org/Facilities/CaneCreekRes.aspx  
540 acres  
Boats on car top only; no trailers.

10 City Lake*  
www.high-point.net/pr/citylake.cfm  
340 acres

11 Deep River via Mciver Landing  
www.triangliland.org/lands/ttc/mciver_property.shtml

12 Glennville Lake at Mazarick Park  
www.fcpr.us/parks.aspx  
26 acres

13 Graham-Mebane Lake*  
650 acres

14 Greenfield Lake  
www.cfr.ws/greenfieldlake.html  
90 acres

15 Harris Lake*  
www.wakegov.com/parks/harrislake/default.htm  
4,100 acres  
Boats on car top 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  
www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Parks/  
816 acres

19 Lake Higgins  
www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Parks/  
226 acres

20 Lake Mackintosh  
1,100 acres

21 Lake Michael*  
www.cityofmebane.com/lakemichaelpark.aspx  
59 acres

22 Lake Reidsville  
www.ci.reidsville.nc.us/lakereidsville.htm  
750 acres

23 Lake Rim*  
www.fcp.us/outdoor_programs/lake_rim_park.aspx  
50 acres

24 Lake Townsend  
www.greensboro-nc.gov/departments/Parks/  
1,542 acres

25 Oak Hollow Lake*  
www.high-point.net/pr/oakhollowcem.htm  
(336) 883-3494  
800 acres

26 Ramsey 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.lee-county-nc.gov/Departments/SanLeePark.aspx  
Two 10-acre lakes

29 Stoney Creek/Old City Lake*  
140 acres

30 Sutton Lake*  
http://suttonlakenc.net/  
1,100 acres

31 Horseshoe Lake/Suggs Mill Pond  
www.nature.org/wherework/northamerica/states/northcarolina/preserves/art5607.html  
600 acres

32 University Lake*  
www.owasa.org/Facilities/UniversityLake.aspx  
213 acres

33 Zeke’s Island National Estuarine Research Reserve  
www.nccoastalreserve.org/

*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.
WHERE SHOULD I GO?

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, call the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs at (919) 733-0711, or check out the website at http://www.eenorthcarolina.org.

HOW CAN I HELP?

You can gain a sense of community pride by learning more and helping to protect streams, rivers and lakes in the Cape Fear River Basin. The contacts listed below can help you do just that.

- Bald Head Island Conservancy
  www.bhic.org
  (910) 457-0089

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

- Cape Fear River Watch
  http://cfwrus/ (910) 762-5606

- Carolina Estuarine Reserve Foundation
  www.cerf.org/ 

- Deep River Park Association
  (919) 898-4814

- Morgan Creek Valley Alliance
  www.morgancreek.org/ (919) 962-0522

- N.C. Soil and Water Conservation Districts
  www.et.state.nc.us/DSWC (919) 733-2302

- North Carolina Coastal Federation
  www.nccof.org (252) 393-8185

- North Carolina Stream Watch
  www.ncwater.org/Education_and_Technical_Assistance/Stream_Watch (919) 715-5433

- Triangle Rails-to-Trails Conservancy
  www.triangletrails.org/

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*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, call the N.C. Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs at (919) 733-0711, or order online at http://www.eenorthcarolina.org.