



# Coosa River Basin



The Coosa River!

The Coosa River has also been spelled Koosa River in the past. The name may be derived from the Abikha or Coosa (Kusa) Indian tribe of the Creek Confederation or from the town by this name on the river. It has also been asserted that coosa is a Muskogean word meaning cane or canebrake.

## Hydrologic Unit Codes (HUCs) of the Coosa River Basin

- 03150101 Conasauga River Basin
- 03150102 Coosawattee River Basin
- 03150103 Oostanaula River Basin
- 03150104 Etowah River Basin
- 03150105 Mainstem Coosa below Rome and Chattooga River Basin



### Quick Facts

The Coosa River and its tributary streams occupy most of the northwest corner of Georgia and extend through northeast Alabama.

The Coosa River basin or watershed, comprising all land areas draining into the river above the confluence with the Tallapoosa River near Wetumpka, Alabama, occupies a total area of about

10,059 square miles, of which 4,579 square miles (46 percent) lie in Georgia, 5,353 square miles (53 percent) lie in Alabama, and 127 square miles (1 percent) lie in Tennessee.

The Coosa River itself is formed by the confluence of the Oostanuaula and Etowah Rivers in Rome, Georgia. The Oostanuala River in turn is formed by the confluence of the Conasauga and Coosawattee Rivers. The basin also contains the Chattooga River, which joins the Coosa River in Alabama.

- **Conasauga River:** The Conasauga River flows in a northerly direction for about 13 miles from its beginning near Blue Ridge, Georgia. It then flows west 13 miles where it bends, after emerging from the mountains, and flows south for 62 miles. There it joins the Coosawattee River near Resaca, and forms the Oostanuala River.
- **Coosawattee River:** The Cartecay and Ellijay Rivers form the Coosawattee River at Ellijay, Georgia. It drains an area of 865 square miles. It flows 48 miles from its source, in a generally westward direction, to its juncture with the Conasauga River...Salacoa Creek, with a drainage of 241 square miles, is

## Georgia River Network

the largest stream contributing to the Coosawattee River. The headwater streams, Cartecay and Ellijay Rivers, drain areas of 136 and 92 square miles, respectively.

- **Oostanaula River:** The Oostanaula River flows south from its source at the juncture of the Conasauga and Coosawattee Rivers for 47 miles to join the Etowah River at Rome. The Oostanaula basin has an area of 2,150 square miles all of which, except for 140 square miles of the Conasauga River area, are in Georgia.
- **Etowah River:** The Etowah River begins in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Dahlonega and flows about 150 miles south to its confluence with the Oostanaula River at Rome. The basin drains an area of 1,860 square miles in Georgia. The principal streams contributing to the Etowah River are the Little River of Georgia which drains a 210-square-mile area, and Euharlee, Pumpkinvine and Allatoona Creeks.
- **Coosa River:** The Coosa River, from its beginning at the juncture of the Oostanaula and Etowah Rivers at Rome, flows in a westward direction for 30 miles into Alabama before flowing south past Gadsden and Childersburg, joining the Tallapoosa River just south of Wetumpka to form the Alabama River. The total drainage area for the Coosa basin is 10,161 square miles. Approximately 4,400 square miles are in Georgia and Tennessee with the remaining area in Alabama.
- **Chattooga River:** The Chattooga River, with a total drainage area of the 675 square miles, drains portions of Walker and Chattooga counties in Georgia before entering Lake Weiss in Alabama.”

### Wetlands

Total wetland acreage based on landsat TM imagery is 8,572 acres or 0.3 percent of land are in the Coosa River basin.

## Biological Resources

### Aquatic Fauna

- The Conasauga River ranks first in imperiled species in the Coosa River Basin. No threatened and endangered mussels remain in the Etowah.
- There are 87 fish species, representing 17 families.
- There are many freshwater fisheries, including Rocky Mountain Public Fishing Area, Carters Lake, Lake Allatoona, and a land locked striped bass population on the Coosa River that is one of the few in the U.S. that is naturally reproducing.
- There are several amphibians and reptiles that inhabit the basin.
- Aquatic gastropods (snails): 82 species in the entire Coosa River Basin (TN,AL,GA). There are 30 species in the Upper Coosa (GA and TN) with one being extinct and 2 extirpated. Thirty five species have gone extinct from the Coosa River Basin in Georgia and Alabama.
- Amphibian Species: 37 species of amphibians exist in the Coosa River Basin. (9 of the 37 species are considered of "Special Concern" by the Georgia Natural Heritage Program)

- Mussels: Freshwater Mussels serve as natural filtration systems that help keep the water clean and clear. Georgia has 98 species of mussels, and is the 4<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states in mussel diversity. Eleven species of these mussels native to the Coosa basin are currently listed as endangered or threatened. 7 species are now extinct.

## Health of the River

Major threats and current stressor to the river and its tributaries include dams, sprawling development, poor agricultural practices, toxins left by several industries, and non-native species.

There are elevated levels of Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in the tissue of bass, catfish, and crappie caught by state scientists in a 200 mile stretch of the Coosa River from Rome to Lay dam. Much of this contamination in the upper portion of the Coosa River basin is traced to General Electric's medium transformer assembly plant in Rome.

### 305b/303d

Pursuant to section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, states are required to develop a list of impaired waters (i.e. those waters that do not meet water quality standards required to protect designated uses such as, recreation, fishing, public water supply, etc.). In the Coosa River Basin, there are approximately 43 rivers and streams listed on the 303(d) list as waters not meeting designated uses. These impaired waters include roughly 325 miles of rivers and streams in the Coosa River Basin.

### Fishing Advisories

The Coosa River from the confluence of the Oostanaula and Etowah Rivers to the Georgia-Alabama boundary line, and all streams flowing into the Coosa River between those two points, have been closed to commercial fishing since 1976 due to contamination of fish tissue by PCBs. Fish tissue quality has improved in the Coosa River with declining PCB residues, but 2 out of the 6 tested species still carry recommendations to not eat, and only one species has no restricted consumption recommended. Current advisories can be found on the web at <http://georgiawildlife.dnr.state.ga.us>.

### NPDES Discharges

The Clean Water Act (CWA), the basic federal law designed to control water pollution in the United States, prohibits the discharge of any pollutant into waters of the United States except in compliance with a National Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) Permit issued pursuant to the CWA. Currently, there are approximately 153 facilities, including industries and municipalities, authorized to discharge wastewater into the Coosa River Basin pursuant to a NPDES Permit.

### Impoundments

Three dams are located within the Georgia portion of the Coosa River basin, while a fourth, the Weiss Dam in Alabama, has an impoundment which extends into Georgia.

## How to Get Involved

**Watershed Groups in the Basin**

**The Conasauga River Alliance**

109 King Street, Suite I  
Dalton, Georgia 30720  
Phone: 706-279-9001  
Fax: 706-259-2480  
E-mail: [sclose@tnc.org](mailto:sclose@tnc.org)

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<sup>1</sup> Photos by Coosa River Basin Initiative

**Coosa River Basin Initiative**

408 Broad Street  
Rome, Georgia 30161  
Phone: (706) 232-2724  
E-mail: [info@coosa.org](mailto:info@coosa.org)  
[www.coosa.org](http://www.coosa.org)

**Coosawattee River Alliance**

c/o North Georgia RDC  
503 W. Waugh Street  
Dalton, GA 30720  
Phone: 706-272-2300  
Fax: 706-272-2253  
Email: [wer@ngrdc.org](mailto:wer@ngrdc.org)

**Lake Allatoona Preservation Authority**

4809 South Main Street  
Acworth, Georgia 30101  
Phone: 678-801-4010  
Fax: 678-801-4015  
Website: [www.allatoona.org](http://www.allatoona.org)

**Little River Valley Association**

270 Hickory Flat Rd.  
Alpharetta, Georgia 30004  
Phone: 770-475-9214  
Fax: 770-475-0049  
E-mail: [statham@mindspring.com](mailto:statham@mindspring.com)

**Rome/Floyd County Adopt-A-Stream**

P.O. Box 1433  
Rome, Georgia 30162  
E-mail: [envhist@roman.net](mailto:envhist@roman.net)

**The Upper Etowah River Alliance**

E-mail: [info@etowahriver.org](mailto:info@etowahriver.org)  
Website: [www.etowahriver.org](http://www.etowahriver.org)