



Saint Marys River Basin

The Indians' name for this river was THLATHLOTHLAGUPHKA or PHLAPHLAGAPHGAW, which means "Rotten Fish" but the white men couldn't pronounce it. Jean Ribault (1520-65) upon finding it May 1, 1562, called it the SEINE. The present name originated from that of the early mission.

Quick Facts



- The St. Marys River basin is located in the southeast Georgia and is bordered by the Satilla River basin to the north and the Suwannee River basin to the west.
- As of 1995, about 9,000 people lived in the St. Marys watershed.
- The population is centered mostly in Kingsland and Folkston.
- Currently, there is not much industry present in the St. Marys River Basin, and there has not been much economic dependence on the river area since the early 1900's when the last lumber mills closed due to the inability to effectively access timber.

Basin Description

- The headwaters are located in Charlton County and the river flows north and east to the Atlantic Ocean.
- The St. Marys River watershed is located in Georgia and Florida. The Georgia portion of the basin drains approximately 765 square miles (of the 1,300 total square mileage) of water drainage.
- The 1988-90 land cover interpretation showed 41 percent of the basin in wetlands.

Landuse

- The 1988-90 land cover interpretation showed 41 percent of the basin in forest cover, 41 percent in wetlands, 2 percent in urban land cover, and 2 percent in agriculture.
- Both the agriculture and animal industry in the St. Marys River Basin are limited.
- There are about 10,600 acres devoted to agricultural production and an estimated 3,380 Animal Units in the Basin
- In 1997, agriculture contributed \$137 million to the local economy.

Surface and Ground Water Resources:

- Surface water resources in the basin are limited by its small size. The only significant tributaries are the North Prong St. Marys River (with 540 square miles of tributaries) and Spanish Creek (with 109 square miles of tributaries).

- Ground water resources in the St. Marys River basin are supplied by the Floridan aquifer system, one of the most productive ground water reservoirs in the United States.

Biological Resources

- There are 52 species of fish that together represent 17 families in the St. Marys River basin.
- The fish populations in the St. Marys basin are limited in productivity by acidic waters, low alkalinity, and extreme variation in flow
- The blackbanded sunfish and the banded topminnow are two fish species found in the basin that are currently listed by the state as rare species.

Health of the River

- In the St. Marys River Basin, there are about 4 rivers and streams listed on the 303(d) list as waters not meeting their designated use of fishing according to the standards set by the Clean Water Act. These impaired waters include roughly 20 miles of rivers and streams in the St Marys River Basin.
- There are now about seven facilities, including industries and municipalities that are legally authorized to discharge wastewater into the St. Marys River Basin

Tourist Sites / Significant Parks Pertaining to River

- In the American Revolution, Georgia's colonial volunteers fought the British soldiers on the banks of the St. Marys River.
- Parks: Crooked River State Park, Black Rock Mountain, Obediah's Okefenok, Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge, Okefenoke Swamp Park, Ralph E. Simmons Memorial State Forest, Traders Hill Park, Camp Prickney Landing, Temple Landing
- Tourist sites and activities: McIntosh Sugar Works Mill; seakayaking to explore the river and coastal marshes; canoeing; boating; fishing (the sportfish include redbreast sunfish, bluegill, largemouth bass, and various catfish); and water skiing

Cultural Information

The Gullah (or the Geechee as they are called in Georgia) are a group of African-Americans indigenous to the St. Marys River Basin area. Their geographic isolation allowed them to maintain many of their old African customs such as crafts, books, and music.

Get Involved

The St. Marys River Management Committee was formed in 1991, and includes citizen volunteers interested in preserving the St. Marys River. To help in this effort, write to:
PO Box 251
Folkston, GA 31537
Email: riverhse@eagnet.com
Call: (912) 729-4644.