

Tennessee – Cumberland River Sub-basin

Tennessee River

The Tennessee River is the largest tributary of the Ohio River and is approximately 652 miles (1049 km) long and has a watershed of approximately 40,000 square miles. The watershed drainage area of the Tennessee River Basin includes parts of Alabama, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, Tennessee, West Virginia, and Virginia. The river was once popularly known as the Cherokee River, among other names, and is derived from the Cherokee village name Tanasi. There are over 70 tributaries and sub-tributaries that make up the Tennessee River system as well as nine mainstem reservoirs and 23 tributary reservoirs.

The Tennessee River and its tributaries host some 102 species of mussels and over 200 species of fish. Initially, populations of aquatic organisms declined drastically due to dam construction and water pollution, but have made a comeback in recent times as a result of improvements made to water quality by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Invasive species such as Asian Carp and zebra mussels have made their way into the Tennessee Valley and are a serious cause for concern.

Cumberland River

The Cumberland River is 688 miles (1,107 km) long with a watershed of over 18,000 square miles. The 688-mile long Cumberland River starts in eastern Kentucky on the Cumberland Plateau, flows through southeastern Kentucky and crosses into Tennessee at Clay County, and then curves back up into western Kentucky before draining into the Ohio River, a tributary to the Mississippi River. During the early colonial period, the river was known as "Warioto" to the local Native Americans and as "Shauvanon" by French traders. It was also known as the "Shawnee" or "Shawonoe" before being known by its current name. There are five mainstem reservoirs and six tributary reservoirs as well as seven major tributaries within the system.

The Cumberland River and its tributaries host some 100 species of mussels and over 160 species of fish. As in the Tennessee River, populations of aquatic organisms declined drastically due to dam construction and water pollution, but have made a comeback in recent times as a result of improvements made to water quality by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Invasive species such as Asian Carp and zebra mussels have also made their way into the Cumberland River Valley and are a serious cause for concern.