The Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin is the cradle of civilization in the Carolinas. Here, evidence of 12,000 years of activity documents the history of Native Americans in the Southeast. The basin’s gently contoured Uwharrie Mountains, the oldest mountain range in North America, played as much a role in human settlement as the fertile rivers that slice through them.

In the early 19th century, the basin was the scene of the nation’s first documented gold discovery. All of this cultural bounty is set in a landscape ripe with aquatic resources—cold-water and coolwater trout streams, slower-moving Piedmont streams, and even streams with Coastal Plain characteristics. Much of the Yadkin River is bound by a series of man-made lakes.

From its headwaters near Blowing Rock, the Yadkin River flows east and then south across North Carolina’s densely populated midsection. It travels 203 miles—passing farmland; draining the urban landscapes of Winston-Salem, Statesville, Lexington and Salisbury; and fanning through seven man-made reservoirs before its name changes to the Pee Dee River below Lake Tillery. The Pee Dee courses another 230 miles to the Atlantic, leaving North Carolina near the community of McFarlan and ending its journey at South Carolina’s Winyah Bay. The Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin bisects North Carolina, running north to south, neatly separating counties on its journey.

Bald eagle (above); Blewett Falls Lake, Pee Dee River (left)

Profile:
- Total miles of streams and rivers: 5,862
- Total acres of lakes: 22,988
- Municipalities within basin: 93
- Counties within basin: 21
- Size: 7,221 square miles
- Population: 1,675,937 (2010 U.S. Census)
Major tributaries of the Yadkin-Pee Dee River include the Mitchell, Ararat, Uwharrie and Rocky rivers and Dutchmans, Long and Abbots creeks. The uppermost reservoir in the basin is W. Kerr Scott Reservoir. Six reservoirs farther downstream are known as the Yadkin chain lakes: High Rock, Tuckertown, Badin (Narrows), Falls, Tillery and Blewett Falls. They were all built in the first half of the 20th century to power aluminum smelters and electric utilities.

High Rock is the first and largest of the Yadkin chain lakes. Badin, the oldest in the chain, was built in 1917 just below the gorge called “the Narrows” to power the aluminum plant in Badin. Badin Lake has been described as a bassmaster’s paradise, where largemouths lurk around the forested shoreline’s rocky points. Bald eagles visit Badin and other reservoirs, making ample meals of fish below the dams’ turbines.

Forested land covers half of the basin, including the federal lands of the Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the 50,000-acre Uwharrie National Forest, which lies completely within the basin.

Since it originates in the Blue Ridge and drains portions of the Piedmont, Sandhills and Coastal Plain, the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin contains a wide variety of habitat types, as well as many rare plants and animals. There are more than 30 species of rare aquatic animals in the basin, two of which are federally listed as endangered. The shortnose sturgeon is a migratory marine fish that once spawned in the river but has not been spotted in the basin since 1985, and the Carolina heelsplitter is a mussel now known from only 10 populations in the world, including the lower basin’s Goose Creek. The upper portion of the Yadkin River watershed contains habitat for several rare mussel species, in addition to the lower Pee Dee River watershed, particularly below Blewett Falls Lake and in the Uwharries.

**Back from the Grave**

The robust redhorse is a large species of sucker-fish discovered on the Yadkin River in 1869. Biologists considered it extinct in North Carolina until they rediscovered one in 1985. Since then, researchers have collected more than 60 individual fish in the Pee Dee River. A bottom-dweller with a crimson tail fin, the fish can grow to 30 inches long and weigh up to 17 pounds. This lunker usually prefers mollusks in the streambed to an angler’s bait. The redhorse is the largest sucker species in North America. The Robust Redhorse Conservation Committee (RRCC) was created in 1995 to improve the status of the species throughout its former range. The RRCC is a cooperative, voluntary partnership formed under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between state and federal resource agencies, private industry, and the conservation community. The RRCC is facilitating the recovery efforts and conservation measures by conducting research to answer scientific questions and address management needs.

**ARTIFACTS PAVE A ROAD TO THE PAST**

The Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin contains some of the most significant remnants of early American civilization and the oldest cultural remains in North Carolina. A succession of Native American cultures began settling in the region as long ago as 12,000 years. The renowned Hardaway archaeological site is situated on a ridgeline near the Narrows of the Yadkin River. First revealed to state archaeologists in 1937, the site has since yielded more than 7 metric tons of cultural material, including more than 3,000 projectile points, 5,000 scrapers and other stone tools and stone-chipping debris dating back more than 12,000 years. To fashion their tools, Native Americans quarried the Uwharries for rhyolite, a strong but malleable volcanic rock they found in abundance on mountaintops.
The Uwharries were created from an ancient chain of volcanic islands that were caught between the colliding continents of Africa and North America and thrust upward. This tectonic event happened before the uplift of the Appalachians. Today’s 1,000-foot hills were once 20,000-foot peaks. Geologists more precisely refer to the Uwharrie peaks as monadnocks, rounded caps of erosion-resistant rock that have survived millions of years of erosion. In the northern part of the basin, a remnant of the ancient Sauratown Mountains offers up another classic example of a monadnock—Pilot Mountain. Once thought to be part of an extinct volcano, the pinnacle of Pilot Mountain State Park is actually an outcrop of the hard, metamorphic rock quartzite. The Saura Indians called the prominent landmark Jomeokee, meaning “the great guide” or “pilot.”

Town Creek Indian Mound, which sits on a low bluff overlooking the Little River in Montgomery County, is another significant archaeological excavation. A reconstructed site from around the 1200s includes a large earthen mound—a place for religious ceremonies, political meetings and feasts; the burial hut; and the surrounding stockade. It is a national historic landmark and the only North Carolina historic site dedicated to interpreting the state’s Native American heritage. The people who lived at the site have been called Pee Dee Indians, and their lifestyle the Pee Dee culture, but the term “Pee Dee” is an archaeological designation. Researchers believe the Native Americans who lived in the region were culturally unaffiliated.

The Yadkin-Pee Dee earth has revealed more than the secrets of early civilization. In 1799, a 12-year-old boy found a 17-pound yellow stone in Meadow Creek. It was worthy only to be the family doorstep until it was identified as gold three years later. This part of the North Carolina Piedmont soon ushered in a spirited period of gold prospecting well before the California Gold Rush of 1848. Hobbyists can still pan for gold on most streams in the Uwharrie National Forest using manual panning techniques. Suction dredging and metal detecting are not allowed in the forest. Rock hounds are allowed to take a small amount
of surface collections from the variety of igneous, sedimentary and metamorphic rocks found in the forest. Collectors are encouraged to contact the Uwharrie National Forest (910-576-6391) for a complete list of rules and regulations.

Agriculture was once thought to be the primary source of one of the basin’s most serious pollutants—eroded soil. This sediment smothers mussels and aquatic insect larvae and buries the gravel streambeds essential to fish reproduction. It also clouds the water in reservoirs (High Rock Lake is heavily polluted by sediment, among other contaminants). Starting in the mid-1990s, farmers in the basin took part in intensive soil-conservation programs designed to control eroded soil washing from farm fields and pastures. It turns out that huge reductions in farm run-off didn’t significantly decrease the amount of sediment flowing into rivers. The lay of the land was changing—from rural to more urban uses—and it became clear that leveling of land for housing, businesses and roads was doing its share to send muddy sediment pouring into the streams and lakes.

Population growth is accompanied by removal or alteration of natural areas, which damages or destroys wildlife habitat and harms surrounding waters when pollutants wash into them. Rain and melted snow (stormwater) carry eroded soil, fertilizer, pesticides, metallic chemicals and other pollutants from construction sites, residential areas and paved surfaces that don’t allow water to soak into the soil. Proper land-use design and management will be necessary to help control stormwater runoff in both urban and rural areas.

Rapid growth in urban areas has prompted a need for wiser, more efficient land-use planning in counties and cities. The upper basin includes part of the Triad metropolitan area (Winston-Salem, Greensboro and High Point), and the lower basin touches the Charlotte/Mecklenburg metropolitan area. This growth could eventually create a solid band of urban counties from Raleigh to Charlotte. Every person, business, industry, landowner, town and county share responsibility for the health of waters in the basin.
The Upper Mitchell River flows through dense forest and runs clean and clear. It is designated as one of the state’s Outstanding Resource Waters.

A model for conservation in the basin is the Greater Uwharrie Conservation Partnership. The mission of this partnership is to work for the long-term conservation and enhancement of biological diversity and ecosystem sustainability throughout the Greater Uwharries landscape. The partnership includes a network of organizations, landowners and local, state and federal agencies working together to protect and enhance the region.

Meanwhile, Yadkin Inc., the Alcoa subsidiary that controls land development around High Rock, Tuckertown, Badin and Falls lakes, has implemented some progressive shoreline management strategies to protect water quality. These include forested buffers and minimum setback requirements for new homes. Duke Energy Progress Carolinas has a shoreline management plan for Tillery and Blewett Falls lakes, which the company manages.

A variety of skills, knowledge and talents is necessary to solve water quality problems—which is why it’s so important for many different people, organizations and agencies to pool their resources to protect a community’s natural resources. Many of these cooperative strategies are at work in the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin.

State of North Carolina: Governor Pat McCrory • North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources: Secretary John E. Skvarla, III • Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs: Program Manager Lisa Tolley; Project Manager Ian Brown • Editor Carla Burgess • Designer Kimberly KC Schott, Red Gate Design • Special Thanks North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission, North Carolina Division of Water Quality and North Carolina Natural Heritage Program • Date: 2013 • 5,500 copies of this public document were printed at a cost of $1,324.12 or 0.241 per copy. • This publication was funded through a Walmart Stormwater Compliance Grant.
The Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin offers many opportunities to enjoy and explore nature through walking, hiking and biking. This list includes places at some mountain sites, the steepness of terrain may limit easy activity, other than at an overlook or short path. Many sites include views of streams, rivers, creeks, lakes and/or waterfalls. Remember that some trails are multi-use, serving pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians and other recreational users. For information about urban and regional bikeways, visit www.ncdot.gov/bikeped.

1 Dolphin Cove Park
www.visitdavidsncounty.com/recreation.html
110 acres 1-mile trail skirts this 80-foot long crevice at the base of a bluff on the Yadkin River.

2 Catawba College Ecological Preserve
www.centerfortheenvironment.org/gardens-preserve.html
489 acres 2 miles of trails through forests and seasonal wetlands.

3 Dan Nicholas Park
www.dannicholas.net 450 acres 2-mile nature trail.

4 Doughton Park/Blue Ridge Parkway
www.blueridgeparkway.org 7,000 acres Access to 15-20 miles of trails.

5 Eagle Point Nature Preserve/High Rock Lake Preserve
www.rowancountync.gov 200 acres 4.5 miles of nature trails with overlooks and isolated caves.

6 E.B. Jeffress Park/Blue Ridge Parkway
www.byways.org/browse/byways/2280/places/28425 600 acres .5 to 1-mile trail to Cascades waterfall.

7 Fort Dobbs State Historic Site
www.fortdobbs.org 31 acres .5-mile interpretive nature trail.

8 Morrow Mountain State Park

9 Pilot Mountain State Park

10 Horne Creek Living Historical Farm
www.nchistoricsites.org/horne/facilities.htm 104 acres .25-mile trail skirts Horne Creek.

11 Stone Mountain State Park
www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/stmo/main.php 13,747 acres 11.5 miles of trails with views of scenic waterfalls and cool, mountain streams.

12 Town Creek Indian Mound
www.nchistoricsites.org/town/facilities.html 56 acres .75-mile interpretive trail along the Little River.

13 North Carolina Zoological Park
www.nczoo.org/ 500 acres 6 miles of trails; access with zoo admission.

14 Rendezvous Mountain Educational State Forest
www.ncesf.org/RMESF/home.html 3,316 acres 5 miles of trails through hardwood forests of the Blue Ridge.

15 Uwharrie National Forest
www.ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Uwharrie/trails.html
- Birkhead Mountains Wilderness Trails (5,160 acres/10 miles of trails)
- Badin Lake Hiking Trail (8 miles of trails)
- Denson’s Creek Trail (3 miles of trails)
- Uwharrie National Recreation Trail/ Dutchman’s Creek (30 miles of trails)

16 Wood Run Mountain Bike Trails
www.ncnatural.com/NCUSFS/Uwharrie/trails.html
17 miles of trails in the Uwharrie National Forest.

17 Horizons Park
2.5-mile nature trail; 4.5-mile biking trail.

18 Kermersville Lake Park/Triad Park
Kermersville Lake Park, less than 1 mile of hiking/biking trail, and Triad Park, 2.6 miles of hiking and biking trails; 1.4 mile hiking loop.

19 Old U.S. 421 River Park
.17-mile walking path.

20 Pee Dee National Wildlife Refuge
www.fws.gov/peedee/ 8,500 acres 1.7 miles of hiking trails, including .25-mile wheelchair-accessible nature trail; biking allowed on refuge roads.

21 Tangletwood Park
www.forsyth.cc/Parks/Tanglewood/Default.aspx 1,100 acres 8 miles of hiking and mountain biking trails.

22 W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir

23 Winston-Salem Trails and Greenways
www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks 16 miles hiking/biking trails, including:
- Bethabara Greenway 2.7 miles along Mill Creek
- Bowen Branch Greenway 0.3 miles along Brushy Creek
- Silas Creek Greenway .8 miles along Silas Creek
- Salem Lake Park/Salem Creek Trails 11 miles along Salem Lake

24 Yadkin County Park
www.yadkincounty.gov 140 acres 4-mile nature/bike trail.

25 Yadkin River Greenway
www.yadkinrivergreenway.com/ 2-mile hiking and biking trail, including a 1.56-foot bridge over the Reddies River.
The Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin offers many opportunities for paddling creeks, ponds, streams, rivers and lakes. 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. This list does not include locations for whitewater adventure. These trails and lakes are suitable for easy to moderate paddling.

1. **Albemarle City Lake**  
   [www.ci.albemarle.nc.us](http://www.ci.albemarle.nc.us) • 100 acres

2. **Badin Lake/Narrows Reservoir**  
   • Alcoa-Yadkin: 3 access areas  
   • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 2 access areas*
   • Uwharrie National Forest: 1 access area

3. **Blewett Falls Lake**  
   [www.ncvisitorcenter.com/Blewett_Falls_Lake.html](http://www.ncvisitorcenter.com/Blewett_Falls_Lake.html) • 2,560 acres  
   • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 2 access areas*

4. **Falls Lake**  
   • Alcoa-Yadkin: 1 access area  
   • Uwharrie National Forest Deep Water Trail

5. **High Rock Lake**  
   [www.forsyth.cc/Parks/KernersvilleLake](http://www.forsyth.cc/Parks/KernersvilleLake) • 15,180 acres  
   • Alcoa-Yadkin: 5 access areas  
   • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 1 access area*  
   • N.C. 601 access area (near Salisbury)  
   • Salisbury Pump Station

6. **Kernersville Lake**  
   [www.forsyth.cc/Parks/KernersvilleLake](http://www.forsyth.cc/Parks/KernersvilleLake) • 60 acres • Rental boats only.

7. **Lake Tillery**  
   • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 4 access areas*

8. **Little River**  
   [www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/WhereToBoat.aspx](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/WhereToBoat.aspx)  
   • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 1 access area

9. **Mallard Lake**  
   [www.co.forsyth.nc.us/Parks/Tanglewood_fishing.aspx](http://www.co.forsyth.nc.us/Parks/Tanglewood_fishing.aspx) • ~10 acres • Rental boats only.

10. **Pee Dee River**  
    [www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/WhereToBoat.aspx](http://www.ncwildlife.org/Boating/WhereToBoat.aspx)  
    • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 3 access areas*

11. **Pilot Mountain State Park**  
    • Access to 2-mile stretch of the Yadkin River.

12. **Salem Lake**  
    [www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks/SalemLake/Articles/SalemLake](http://www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks/SalemLake/Articles/SalemLake) • 365 acres • Rentals boats available

13. **Tuckertown Lake**  
    • Alcoa-Yadkin: 3 access areas  
    • N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission: 2 access areas*

14. **W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir**  
    [http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/visitors/projects.cfm?id=k719220](http://corpslakes.usace.army.mil/visitors/projects.cfm?id=k719220) • 1,475 acres  
    • Seven boat ramps and a canoe launch.

15. **Winston Lake**  
    [www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks/ParksAndGreenways/Articles/ParksAndGreenways](http://www.cityofws.org/Home/Departments/RecreationAndParks/ParksAndGreenways/Articles/ParksAndGreenways) • 20 acres

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### 16 YADKIN RIVER CANOE TRAIL

*(highlighted in yellow)* The 125-mile Yadkin River Trail starts below the W. Kerr Scott Reservoir near Wilkesboro and ends at High Rock Lake in Davison County. There are 14 public access points and two portages along this lazy stretch of the Yadkin, suitable for paddlers with beginner-to-moderate skills. Maps are available from the Yadkin Riverkeeper, [www.yadkinriverkeeper.org/content/maps](http://www.yadkinriverkeeper.org/content/maps).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Area</th>
<th>Miles to Next Access Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tailwater</td>
<td>7.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoot Park (North Wilkesboro)</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronda Park (Ronda)</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elkin Crater Park (Elkin)</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadkin Shore Access (Crutchfield)</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoals/Pilot Mountain State Park</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yadkin Islands Rest Stop</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donannah Park (N.C. 67)</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winston-Salem Water Intake Dam</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old U.S. 421 River Park</td>
<td>5.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Huntsville (undeveloped)</td>
<td>10.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tanglewood Park (Clemmons)</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idols Dam Portage</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. 64 access</td>
<td>8.9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*For detailed directions of N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission boating access areas, visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on “Boating” then “Where to Boat.”

### 17 SOUTH YADKIN RIVER CANOE TRAIL

The following sites comprise a short canoe trail on the South Fork Yadkin River, which spills into the Yadkin River just north of Salisbury.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Area</th>
<th>Miles to Next Access Area</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N.C. 801</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boone’s Cave Rest Stop</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Salisbury Pump Station</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York Hill, S.C.</td>
<td>end</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*For detailed directions of N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission boating access areas, visit [www.ncwildlife.org](http://www.ncwildlife.org) and click on “Boating” then “Where to Boat.”

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What makes the Yadkin-Pee Dee River Basin special? See for yourself. Visit these Environmental Education Centers to discover more about your ecological address:

- Allison Woods Foundation
- Arboretum at Tanglewood
- Blue Ridge Parkway
- Boone’s Cave Park
- Camp Caraway
- Catawba College Center for the Environment
- Horizons Unlimited
- Iredell Museums
- The Joseph Andres Gutierrez Geology and Earth Science Education Center
- Morrow Mountain State Park
- North Carolina Zoological Park
- Pilot Mountain State Park
- Reedy Creek Nature Center
- Rendezvous Mountain Educational State Forest
- Reynolda Gardens of Wake Forest University
- Rowan Wildlife Adventures
- SciWorks, The Science Center and Environmental Park of Forsyth County
- Stone Mountain State Park
- Tanglewood Park Nature Education Center
- W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir
- YMCA Camp Hanes
- YMCA at Herring Ridge

For more information about Environmental Education Centers in North Carolina, check out the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs’ website at www.eenorthcarolina.org.

You can gain a sense of community pride by learning more and helping to protect streams, rivers and lakes in the Catawba River Basin. The contacts listed below can help you do just that. To find out about local river organizations and conservation groups, contact your local soil and water conservation district. To find out about how you can get involved in local waterway and other litter cleanups, contact North Carolina Big Sweep.

Clean Water Management Trust Fund
www.cwmntf.net/

Division of Water Quality, Stormwater and Runoff Pollution
www.ncstormwater.org/

North Carolina Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts
www.ncaswcd.org

North Carolina Big Sweep
www.ncbigsweep.org/

North Carolina Stream Watch
www.ncwater.org/Education_and_Technical_Assistance/Stream_Watch/

North Carolina Water Science Center
http://nc.water.usgs.gov/

Weymouth Woods Sandhills Nature Preserve
www.ncparks.gov/Visit/parks/wewo/main.php

Yadkin-Pee Dee Basinwide Plan*
http://portal.ncdenr.org/web/wq/ps/bpu/basin/yadkinpeedee

*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, fill out the online order form at www.eenorthcarolina.org.