The Mississippi River is a natural wonder that stretches nearly 2,500 miles from its origin at Lake Itasca in Minnesota, through ten states, and into the Gulf of Mexico. Called the “Father of Waters” or the “Mighty Miss,” the river offers more than just a convenient mode of transportation. The river also provides fertile soil along its banks and recreation areas for tourists, and has inspired a wealth of literature, music, and films.

The Mississippi River has also caused great destruction. At 7:45 a.m. on April 21, 1927, a levee broke at Mound Landing, near Scott north of Greenville. The river rushed through the breach, flooding not only the Delta, but also over 2.7 million acres of land, much of which was used for farming. The lives of 246 people were lost as were crops, farm animals, and homes.

This disaster caused the U.S. Congress to take action to ensure that something similar did not happen again. The following May Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1928. This charged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers with repairing, building, and managing protective dams and levees along the Mississippi River. Today the USACE continues civil works programs including flood risk management, environmental protection, recreation, and emergency response.

The Pascagoula River is part of Mississippi’s second largest river basin. It is also the last unregulated river system in the lower United States. This means that nothing stops the natural flow of the river, such as a dam. In total, the Pascagoula River Basin drains about 9,600 square miles. That area stretches from Simpson and Jefferson Davis counties in the west to Kemper and Neshoba counties in the north and Alabama in the east all the way to the Gulf of Mexico. The river basin is heavily forested with lower-lying flatlands near the Gulf Coast and 50,000 acres of protected lands along the river. These areas provide sanctuary for 17 endangered or threatened species and over 300 types of birds.
In the late 1700s a French explorer first suggested connecting the Tennessee and Tombigbee Rivers. The result would have been a shortened distance to New Orleans and other Gulf of Mexico ports of trade. Not until 1972 did construction begin on what would become the largest earth moving project in history, removing as much soil as the Suez and Panama Canal projects combined. When completed in 1985, the Tenn-Tom stretched 234 miles and connected not only the Tennessee and Tombigbee rivers but also additional waterways, highways, airports, and railways throughout northeast Mississippi and western Alabama. The Tenn-Tom has proven important for the local economy by providing jobs on and alongside the waterway. It allows for the easier, faster, and safer transport of trade goods en-route to other countries, boosting our national economy.

The Tenn-Tom was also the first large water resource project built after the institution of the National Environmental Policy Act, meaning the natural beauty and wildlife along the route were safeguarded during and after construction. Today the Tennessee-Tombigbee Waterway attracts tourists and vacationers to its campgrounds, picnic sites, and environmental centers.

Rollin’ Down the River

A variety of river craft has been used over the years to transport people and goods up and down the Mississippi River. Flatboats were large raft-like boats with flat bottoms and square ends that were steered with long oars. Because flatboats traveled with the current they could only be used when going downstream (south). When a boatman had reached his destination he sold his freight, dismantled his boat to sell the lumber, and returned north on foot or horseback. Steamboats came into popularity in the early 1800s. They were a faster means of transportation prior to the development of the railroad. Author Mark Twain worked as a steamboat pilot in the 1850s. He wrote about his experience in *Life on the Mississippi*, published in 1883. Both of these river craft are still in use today. Flatboats or barges, used to transport trade items, and steamboats (also known as riverboats or paddle steamers) are used in the tourism industry.
Visit sites and museums across the state to learn more about Mississippi’s rivers!

**Tunica Riverpark and Museum**

Located on the banks of the Mississippi River, the Tunica Riverpark offers a museum with exhibits on Mississippi history, a giant animated map showing the geology of the state, and four aquariums filled with lowland and aquatic life. A 1.9 mile nature trail winds through a wetlands forest. Plus, explore the upper Mississippi River on the Tunica Queen, a riverboat offering cruises highlighting local points of interest. Plan your visit at [http://temp.tunicariverpark.com/](http://temp.tunicariverpark.com/)

**Audubon Centers**

The mission of the National Audubon Society is to conserve and restore natural ecosystems with a focus on birds, other wildlife, and their habitats. Two Audubon sanctuaries and education centers are located in the state of Mississippi.

**Lower Mississippi River Museum, Vicksburg**

Visit and discover the benefits and risks of living on the banks of the Mississippi River and how communities have used or been affected by it. Understand how the river has been used as a highway, decide how to protect the Mississippi River Valley from flooding, and interact with an outdoor scale model of the river. Then, board the Mississippi IV and explore the state rooms to the engine room. Take a pilot’s test, practice your navigation skills through locks and at docks, send messages using Morse Code, and develop a menu for the ship’s guests. See what else you can investigate at [http://www.lmrm.org/](http://www.lmrm.org/)

At the Strawberry Plains Center in Holly Springs, you can visit observation rooms overlooking the Center’s hummingbird and butterfly garden and explore forests and grasslands within 15 miles of trails. Or catch a program on topics ranging from grass and tree identification to deer management and bird behavior.

The Pascagoula River Audubon Center in Moss Point offers swamp and marsh tours to learn about wetland conservation and storm water management. Volunteer to be a Citizen Scientist and help monitor coastal birds and their habitats.

Show What You Know!

Vocabulary

**Breach:** break or rupture.
**Conservation:** to preserve and protect natural resources and wildlife.
**Dam:** a barrier built across a stream or river to obstruct the flow of water.
**Ecosystem:** a system formed when organisms interact with each other and their environment.
**Endangered:** in danger of becoming extinct or, of dying out.
**Flatboat:** a large, flat-bottomed boat used in shallow water.
**Habitat:** the natural environment of an organism.
**Levee:** an embankment designed to prevent the flooding of a river.
**River basin:** an area of land drained by a river and its branches.

**The Singing River:**
Nickname for the Pascagoula River. According to legend, the Pascagoula Indian tribe joined hands and walked into the river singing rather than go to war with a neighboring tribe. Today people still claim to hear mysterious music coming from the waters on quiet evenings.

**Steamboat:** a steam-driven vessel.

**Trade goods:** supplies or services willingly exchanged.

**Unregulated:** not controlled by method or rule.

**Watershed:** a region or area drained by a river or stream.

**Wetland:** land with wet, spongy soil such as a marsh, swamp, or bog.

Create a Catfish Competition

How would you like to see a catfish of your own creation on the cover of the Mudcat? If you’re an artist – or even if you’re not! – craft a cool catfish graphic, send it in to the Mudcat, and YOUR catfish could win a coveted spot on the cover of the next issue! Send all entries via mail or email to:

Outreach Programs Coordinator
Museum Division, MDAH
P.O. Box 571
Jackson, MS 39205-0571
outreachprograms@mdah.ms.gov

Congratulations to Matthew G. of Southaven for creating this issue’s winning Mudcat!

Mix and Match

Match the words that have similar meanings.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dam</th>
<th>Marsh</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Steamboat</td>
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<td>Wetland</td>
<td>Barge</td>
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<td>Flatboat</td>
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<td>Habitat</td>
<td>River basin</td>
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<td>Watershed</td>
<td>Paddle steamer</td>
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