

NJ Rivers

NJ's rivers and streams provide water for drinking, irrigation, industry, recreation, wildlife, transportation and energy production.

Background

Over the centuries, New Jersey has both cherished and abused its rivers, polluting them with wastes and toxics, letting excessive stormwater cause them to overflow and erode their banks. Since the 1970s, we have made great progress in restoring our surface waters, but there is still a long way to go to reach the 1972 Clean Water Act goals of having "fishable, swimmable" rivers across the state.

In most rivers, the major threats to water quality are no longer industrial. Environmental regulation and cleanups, and the demise of many older industries have reduced or controlled many direct ("point") hazardous discharges into rivers from facilities, though the toxics left by those industries still seep from sediments and riverfront sites.

Stream Protection

New Jersey contains 18,126 miles of rivers and streams which are a critical natural resource. Our waterways are the source of our drinking water, support agriculture and industrial uses, and provide scenic beauty, recreational opportunities and wildlife habitat. In New Jersey water quality, quantity and stream habitat all continue to decline as we build and rebuild in floodplains and increase our water use. Environmental commissions play a critical role in protecting waterways by gathering information, educating the public, and working within the municipality to support good planning.

Contact [ANJEC](#) for materials on stream protection for environmental commissions such as:

- Riparian Buffer Fact Sheets
- Plants for Riparian Buffers
- Landscaping Tips
- Stream Protection Brochure
- Environmental and Land Use Ordinances
- NJDEP Model Ordinances

Stormwater

Today, the greatest contributors to poor water quality in New Jersey's rivers are from "non-point" sources, transported by rainwater as it washes across

the land and drains into rivers. Fertilizers, oil, pesticides, pet wastes, trash, sediment and other contaminants harm fish and birds, and make the rivers unsafe for fishing, swimming and drinking. Also, as development covers the land with impervious surfaces, the increased volume and speed of stormwater causes flooding, erosion and sedimentation along waterways.

Non-point pollution problems are difficult to solve. Nonstructural, "green" techniques for reducing and filtering stormwater are effective, but require a shift in cultural attitudes and systems for land use.

ANJEC's [stormwater section](#) gives more detail on controlling runoff.

Access

Another problem confronting New Jersey's rivers is that of public access. In the 1900s, industrial facilities, dumps and transportation infrastructure were often built along riverfronts. This trend made it harder and less pleasant to access river banks, and gradually served to "disconnect" residents from rivers. Today, we see the value of reconnecting communities to riparian resources, and are dedicating public and private funds to clean up industrial sites and establish riverside parks and linear trails along rivers and streams.

Advocacy Groups

Many of New Jersey's Rivers have regional advocacy groups -- watershed associations and Riverkeepers -- who watch over them and promote better land use, cleanups and access. [See below](#) for a list of some of New Jersey's major rivers and the organizations that advocate for them.

- [Passaic](#)
- [Lower Raritan](#)
- [Rahway](#)
- [Delaware River](#)
- [Delaware River Watershed Restoration Initiative](#)
- [Maurice River](#)