

## It's The Environment The New River



The New River flows north; very few rivers flow in this direction. The New originates in North Carolina, flows north into southwestern Virginia, then into West Virginia before joining the Gauley River to form the Kanawha River and emptying into the Ohio River. Along more than 300 miles of river, waters of the New River support some of the finest fishing in the country, outstanding white water rafting or canoeing, and views in the New River Gorge (WV) that take your breath away. Some geologists believe that the New is one of the oldest rivers in North America. Claytor Lake is formed from the dammed New, upriver from Radford, VA. This picturesque river receives one of the largest discharges of nitrogen waste in the nation from the Radford Army Ammo Depot.

Sportsmen and women, outdoor enthusiasts, and people who enjoy a rural lifestyle on the river all enjoy the New River, and many relate closely to the river. My relationship with the New began almost forty-four years ago when I spent Thanksgiving break from college at my girlfriend's home in Giles County. Her parents never moved, and we married, still are married, providing numerous trips to her parents' home overlooking the New River. I've canoed the New, fished her waters, marveled at the geologic formations carved by water over eons in the New River gorge, and now take my grandsons fishing on the New.

On June 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012, my family stood on the front porch of my mother-in-law's house and watched as the now famous derecho made its way up the New River and tore through

Giles County, VA, leaving devastation in its wake. Some members of the watershed communities were without electricity for two weeks. Falling trees and limbs damaged homes and other buildings. Some residents of Giles and Franklin Counties have not yet recovered.



Pembroke  
Flooding  
8/8/2013

The New River in Virginia does not have a Superfund site and does not have a Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) in place for toxic chemicals. A TMDL is a calculation of the maximum amount of a pollutant that a water body can receive and still meet water quality standards; this calculation entails a thorough review of the various measurable and estimated sources of a pollutant for the specified water body. In fact, the only Superfund site in the watershed is Ore Knob in North Carolina, located on a small tributary. Still, most fish in the New are not safe to eat because they are contaminated with polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), heavy metals, or pesticides. PCBs seem to be everywhere, in part, because PCBs were used so widely and in equipment that was - - and still is - - common in modern society. Electrical transformers, heavy industrial equipment like pumps, as well as paints and caulking all had PCBs in them. Older equipment and materials that once had PCBs may still be releasing PCBs into the environment, including leaching into rivers like the New.

The New River watershed in western North Carolina runs through the mountains that were once mined for iron and other metals. At least one of these old mining sites, Ore Knob, is a Superfund site and is leaching mine waste, such as acid and heavy metals into the New. The old mining sites can explain the metal contamination that seems to crop up throughout the entire watershed. Agricultural and urban/suburban runoffs add excess nutrients and bacteria, sediment, and other contaminants. It surprises us that PCBs contaminate seemingly pristine stretches of the New that have little or no industry. The New River - - for all its glory and vistas - - carries more than the usual load of problems, and many of the problems do not get the attention of rivers that flow through our big cities and government centers.

This past week I introduced my three young grandsons to the wonders of the New River. It saddens me that so many problems lurk beneath the surface. We all need to put forth some energy to restore the New.

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Writing from Giles Co., overlooking the New River