



Discovering *Alabama*

Teacher's Guide

Locust Fork River

Suggested Curriculum Areas

Science
Social Studies
Literature
Music

Suggested Grade Levels

5–12

Key Concepts

Native Landscape
Rural Life
Aesthetic Values

Key Skills

Forecasting
Research

Synopsis

This video features a personal journey by *Discovering Alabama* host, Dr. Doug Phillips, who grew up along the Locust Fork River. Phillips canoes part of the river in a nostalgic return to the site of his childhood home. But as the novelist Thomas Wolfe observed, you can't go home again—all things change for better or worse. On this journey, viewers learn about the river's past and explore crucial questions concerning its future.

In earlier times, daily life in Alabama was often closely tied to the local river or creek. For many families, these waterways were a primary source of work and play—fishing, washing, swimming, and learning about nature. The Locust Fork River is such a waterway. The Locust Fork is one of three main tributaries of the Black Warrior River. It is a strikingly beautiful stream, flowing through rural Blount County in a mountain and valley region that once held special allure, both for Indians and settlers, as a land of abundant natural resources and wild wonders.

For much of this century, the Locust Fork was familiar only to the residents of its immediate watershed. In recent times, however, the river has gained attention as Alabamians recognize its uncommon recreational appeal. We are also becoming more concerned about changing land practices that pose environmental threats to the Locust Fork. Today, Alabama's growing population, particularly that which is spreading northward from Birmingham and Jefferson County, signals one of the accelerating changes in the watershed.



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Before Viewing

1. This video provides an opportunity for students to identify with a personal journey of their own along a favorite stream. Ask students to recall occasions such as fishing, boating, or wading in a river, creek, stream, or brook near home. (Near home is the preferable location, although some city youngsters may have such experiences only at their grandparents, on vacation, or at some other distant site.) Ask each student to write a brief account of a memorable experience they had involving their water adventure. Have them exchange written accounts and share their experiences in small groups.

1. A good strategy to help stimulate personal reflection is an activity called “My Concern.” After students have shared their experiences, ask them to think of a related matter that concerns them very personally—something that might stir feelings of fear, sadness, or frustration. All genuine concerns are allowed in this activity. These concerns can vary greatly from such as, “I’m afraid of the river sometimes” to “I’m sad because my best friend moved away, and we don’t go swimming together anymore.” Have each student write the concern on a piece of paper, exchange this with someone else, and take a few minutes to talk about each other’s concern.

3. Introduce the video by explaining that it features a river that has long been special to those who know it and that, today, many people are concerned about its future.

While Viewing

Have students note the thoughts and feelings expressed about the Locust Fork River by the program host and others featured in the video.

Video Mystery Question: The video reveals that the original childhood home of the program host was in a remote rural area, with no indoor plumbing, and only a fireplace for heat. Does this mean that the host was raised among the early settlers? (Answer: No, he’s not quite that old. Like other parts of Alabama, much of Blount County remained very rural well into the 1960s, with many families dependent on subsistence farming. However, in the brief span of only a decade or so, accelerated social and economic change has greatly affected this rural way of life.)

After Viewing

1. Place students in pairs and have them discuss how the Locust Fork River is like or unlike their favorite waterways. Are any of the concerns identified in the video similar to their concerns for the streams or rivers they know?

2. Remind the class that the Locust Fork River is close to Birmingham, Alabama. As such urban areas grow and expand, this often brings change to surrounding natural features. Ask the class to imagine the long term changes that could occur to the Locust Fork River. List these on the blackboard. Conduct a brainstorm session to elicit ideas for controlling change to achieve a future that, as expressed in the video, incorporates “the best of the old ways together with the best of the new ways.”

Extensions

1. Have students research and write individual or group reports about how rivers and their surrounding cultures are closely related, and how cultures can be affected when the river is altered.

2. As Birmingham expands, the Locust Fork River and its watershed are expected to experience significant change. Invite speakers with different views to present their thoughts about this anticipated change. Possibilities include the Alabama Rivers Coalition at 205-322-5326 and the Birmingham Water Works Board at 205-254-0500.

Philosophical Reflections

For years, rural Blount County has absorbed various kinds of spillover from the expanding city of Birmingham, causing some of its inhabitants to question the desirability of suburban sprawl, diminished rural areas, increasing traffic, rising crime, and the other effects of growth. Meanwhile, the City of Birmingham has proposed plans to dam the Locust Fork, thereby flooding a portion of the free-flowing river to create a reservoir. Opponents of this plan have expressed concerns that native river features would be lost and that the resulting lake would stimulate even more growth thus negating the very qualities of rural community and environment that make Blount County appealing in the first place.

Disagreement over impending growth is a sign of changing values, a clash between rural and urban values, similar to conflicts seen in many rapid growth regions of America. But which came first, the chicken or the egg? Is the urbanization of land and life-styles a result of changing values, or are changing values the result of the urbanization of land and life-styles?

Nature in Art

Toward the middle of the video, the host has canoed several miles downstream—ever closer to the backcountry site of his original family home and deep into the wild reaches of the Locust Fork. Alone, he is drawn by the beauty and the spell of the river of his childhood.

The scene is accompanied by an aria from an Italian opera. Some might say that this part of the video is ruined by the operatic music; that, for example, soft, strumming guitar music would have been more appropriate. But such sanitized music, although perhaps more acceptable to some popular tastes, is also more in tune with current trends that take us further away from understanding and appreciating the timeless beauty of great musical works—many of which were directly inspired by the wonders of nature. This video incorporates several musical treasures. For example, it closes, appropriately, with “Going Home,” adapted from Dvorak’s New World Symphony. Have students select and share a piece of music they feel is expressive of their favorite stream.

Community Connections

1. Have each student research, prepare, and present a brief description of his or her favorite stream, from its headwaters to its end point, including information about the stream’s history, plants, animals, and other environmental features. Have them note any problems or changes that may be affecting the stream today.
2. Assign a class project to research and produce an educational slideshow or video about a local river. Invite community leaders to meet with the class to explore together ways to maintain the natural qualities of this river for the future.

Complementary Aids and Activities

Project Learning Tree, Grades 7-12, Activity 77, “You’ve Come a Long Way, Maybe.” Available from Alabama Forestry Association, 555 Alabama St., Montgomery AL 36104.

Project Wild, Elementary Activity, “Learning to Look, Looking to See,” p. 181 and **Aquatic Project Wild**, Grades 7-12, “The Glass Menagerie,” p. 121. Both available from Alabama Department of Conservation & Natural Resources, 64 N. Union St., Montgomery AL 36130, 334-242-3623.

Agriculture in the Classroom. A series of classroom activities available from the Alabama Department of Agriculture & Industries, P.O. Box 336, Montgomery AL 36193.

Additional References and Resources

Alabama Water Watch, c/o Water Division, Alabama Department of Environmental Management, 1751 Cong. W.L. Dickinson Dr., Montgomery AL 36130.

Center for Environmental Education, 1725 DeSales St., NW, Suite 500, Washington DC 20036.

Zero Population Growth, Inc., 1400 16th St., NW, Washington DC 20036.

Biophilia by Edward O. Wilson (1984).

NatureSouth, 3, no. 1. Alabama Museum of Natural History, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa AL 35487, 205-348-2040.

Words from the Land: Encounters with Natural History Writing, Stephen Trimble, ed. (1988).

Parting Thoughts

As youngsters, my friends and I often stole away to the Locust Fork River to explore the tantalizing realm of nature. We roamed the surrounding hills and hollows and stalked the river’s crooks and bends. We marveled at its rapids, waded in its shoals, and investigated the mysterious pools and quiet, hidden places. The river was a world full of wild wonders to captivate a child’s mind and spirit. The adventure of discovering the natural diversity of the Locust Fork was powerful in our lives. But more than simply satisfying our youthful curiosity, these experiences gave us a deep bond with nature, and with that bond, there grew a sense of inspiration and personal fulfillment that I fear today’s “shopping mall kids” may miss.

Lord knows, each new generation brings another batch of mouths to feed, and we must have a viable economy to do so. However, each new generation also is another batch of minds and spirits to nurture. With apologies to such cities as Los Angeles, Miami, and Detroit, my guess is that these crowded, sprawling places are not ideal for nurturing. Alabama must find better ways of economic improvement that allow us to retain our rural landscape and our native, natural wonders.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. Rivers as rugged as the Locust Fork, despite their wild appeal, are not always suitable for the typical school or family float trip. Low water conditions can mean a tiresome (and bruising) ordeal of boat dragging, and high water can be very dangerous. Besides, you probably have a river near home, that would welcome your friendly visit.

Happy outings,

Dr. Doug





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Activity/Information Sheet

Locust Fork River

Wild and Scenic Rivers of America

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, which serves to protect free-flowing rivers with “outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values.” At this point, 154 rivers have been designated wild and scenic, covering approximately 10,764 miles. Within this system, 5,219 miles are designated wild, 2,310 miles are scenic, and 3,235 miles are recreational.

Did you know...

- of the country's 3.5 million river miles, only 10,763.75 are designated as National Wild and Scenic rivers?
- only 2% of America's rivers are free-flowing and pristine enough to qualify for wild and scenic designation?
- fewer than 30% of our total river miles maintain healthy fisheries?
- over 40% of our rivers are not considered swimmable or fishable?
- about 50% of our drinking water comes from rivers?
- worldwide, a billion people lack reliable access to clean water?

Background

In 1968, Congress enacted the National Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and, for the first time, established a system for preserving outstanding free-flowing rivers. By that year, so many rivers in the nation had been dammed, channelized, and over-developed that Congress thought it wise to protect some outstanding examples of what remained. Such rivers are an important part of our natural cultural heritage and their protection offers the American public diverse recreation opportunities, enhanced tourism economies, the preservation of plant and animal species, and even more dependable supplies of clean water. Moreover, most communities that have designated Wild and Scenic Rivers are proud of the recognition their areas have received and have benefitted from the increases in land values that protected river designations bring.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act is the strongest statutory tool for protecting natural rivers. Dams are forbidden, inappropriate streamside development can be limited and growth better managed, and essential non-utilitarian values are maintained. According to the National Park Service's Nationwide Rivers Inventory, more than 60,000 miles of rivers qualify for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. But by late 1988, fewer than 9,300 miles enjoyed such protection. That's about one quarter of one percent of all US river miles.

By contrast, 600,000—17 percent of what used to be free-running rivers—now lie stilled behind an estimated 60,000 dams. That is, for every mile of river preserved, our nation has extinguished 65 miles, a profound rate of extinction.

American Rivers is working to stem the extinction of our most outstanding natural rivers. With the help of conservation colleagues from all over the United States, we intend to bring the national rivers system to full comple-

ment. To do so will require the continued hard work of volunteers, professional conservationists, legislators, and agency officials.

Because the rate of river extinctions is proceeding apace, rivers need your help if our nation is to live in reasonable equilibrium with its environment.

Mileposts

1957: The Craighead brothers propose a national rivers system in Montana Wildlife

1965: Wisconsin becomes the first state to pass a law protecting wild rivers

1968: The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act enacted

1973: The American Rivers Conservation Council (now American Rivers) is founded to expand the number of waterways protected by the Act

1980: The Alaska Lands Act adds 25 river segments to the system

1988-90: Wildcat Brook (NH) and Farmington River (CT) become the first rivers in the system to be managed by local entities

1992: The Michigan and Arkansas Omnibus Rivers Acts add a total of seventeen new segments to the river system

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For more information, see the American Rivers web site: <http://www.amrivers.org> or write them at:

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