

Upper Wapsipinicon Watershed at a Glance

This story was made with [Esri's Story Map Journal](#).
Read the interactive version on the web at <https://arcg.is/1u9mqP>.



Upper Wapsi-Major River

- WAPSIPINICON R
- LITTLE WAPSIPINICON R
- Other

Mississippi Basin Rivers

- Mississippi
- Columbia
- Colorado
- St. Lawrence
- Yukon
- Nelson/Saskatchewan
- Rio Grande

Miss_RiverBasin

- Upper Wapsi Watershed - Areas
- PolyStyle00

The Mississippi River Basin is the largest watershed in North America and the 4th largest watershed in the world at over 1,245,000 square miles. It includes major tributaries such as the Missouri, Ohio, and Arkansas Rivers and thousands of smaller tributaries along its 2,300 mile course.

Upper Wapsipinicon River



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Mississippi Basin Rivers

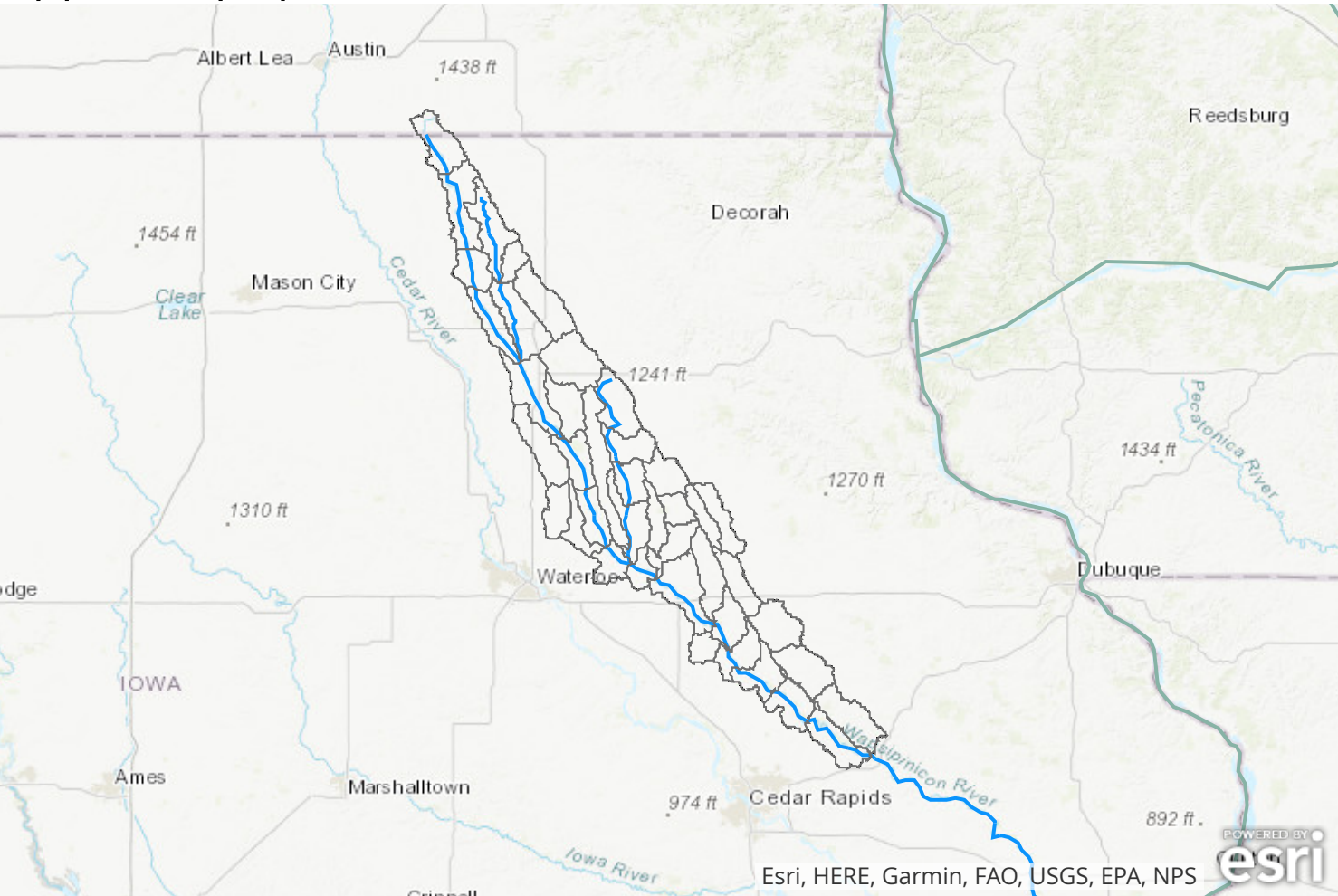
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Upper Wapsi Watershed - Areas

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The Upper Wapsipinicon River is part of the larger Wapsipinicon River, which stretches over 290 miles from the Iowa - Minnesota border all the way to the Mississippi River near Clinton, Iowa. The smaller section of the Wapsipinicon River known as the Upper Wapsipinicon River includes 270 miles of river above Anamosa, Iowa. The majority of the residents living in the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed have some connection to the land and its waters through agricultural production. Many also utilize the streams and rivers for natural resource based recreation. The Wapsipinicon River boasts one of the longest continuous stretches of natural and scenic river corridor in the Iowan Surface Region of Iowa. (Iowa Protected Water Areas, general Plan, 1981) According to a survey by ISU's Center for Agriculture and Rural Development, visitors made approximately 226,801 trips to the Upper Wapsipinicon River in 2009 and spent \$6M on outdoor recreation activities. The Upper Wapsipinicon River and its tributaries are high quality water resources that serve as an important recreational resource for residents and visitors.

Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed



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The Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed has a drainage area of 1569.43 square miles or 1,003,356 acres. Ninety nine percent of the watershed is located in Iowa, and .8% or 8,345 acres is located in Mower County in Minnesota. (Rapid Watershed Assessment, NRCS) Water quality and quantity in the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed are impacted by the management decisions and policies of many different private and public entities, including two states, 11 counties and 27 communities. The watershed contains eight major rivers and streams and a total of 2,177.1 river miles. There are also 120 lakes covering 1632.7 acres. (Chickasaw County Hazard Mitigation Plan, 2013). The unique

wooded wetlands on the river corridor are dominated by dozens of tree species, silver maple being the most dominant. The river corridor provides habitat for many bird, fish, amphibian, reptile and mammal species.

History



Although the origin of the name of the Wapsipinicon River can not be verified, there are several stories about how it was named. One notes that a young Indian maiden named Wapsi and the son of an Indian chief named Pinicon were canoeing the river on the eve of their wedding day. A jealous suitor named Fleat Foot approached the couple from along the shoreline and shot Pinicon through the heart. The story notes that as Wapsi jumped to the aid of Pinicon the canoe overturned and the two lovers drown in the swift river current. In remembrance of the sad event , the Native American tribes combined the names of the young lovers and called the river Wapsipinicon. In some stories, Wapsi is the man and Pinicon is the woman. Other origin of the name theories note that the literal translation of the Indian name is White Potato River or Swan Apple River, which would refer to the Jerusalem Artichoke Plants that grow along the river bank.

However the name of this river originated, the original European settlers found a landscape with unending prairie interrupted only by marshy potholes and wooded areas along the river valleys. The watershed was rich with game and indigenous peoples living in the wooded valleys and surrounding tallgrass prairie. Wetlands were distributed across the watershed and wooded wetlands bordered the river valleys. European settlement altered landuse and vegetation dramatically.

Photo Courtesy of the Nature Conservancy

Early Settlement



European settlement transformed the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed. The existing vegetation was growing in some of the richest soil in the world. The relatively flat terrain of the lowan surface and favorable climate provided settlers with an ideal location for growing crops and raising livestock. The land transitioned from prairie and woodland to agricultural fields and pasture. Almost all of the pothole wetlands in this watershed were drained to increase tillable acres and pasture lands.

Photo courtesy of Harry S. Truman Library and Museum

Transformation



Soil erosion Richardson County, Nebraska, 1936. Arthur Rothstein for the FSA.

By the early 1900s, as more and more land was turned over to the plow, watershed dynamics changed too. Deeply plowed fields on steep slopes caused horrific erosion and deep gullies to form. Rivers and streams muddied with sediment and became devoid of trout. Increases in runoff caused severe flooding and damage to public and private infrastructure and farms. It was clear to those living in the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed that a change was necessary to carry on their way of life.

Photo courtesy of Wessels Living History Farms

A New Era



The formation of the Soil Conservation Service (now the Natural Resources Conservation Service or NRCS) in 1935 began a new chapter in land use methods in Eastern Iowa and the surrounding regions. With the help of NRCS, farmers in the Upper Wapsipinicon River Watershed implemented methods of soil conservation like contour farming, terraces, grassed waterways, and diverse crop rotations. Although the land transitioned to new generations of farmers through time, the land ethic of Northeast Iowa farmers was deeply instilled and continues with many today.

Photo Courtesy of Larry Reis