



Pristine Paint Rock River



Diverse Ecosystems

The Paint Rock River is one of the most pristine rivers left in the southeastern United States. It flows unhindered from Franklin County, Tennessee, through a landscape of porous limestone. One part of this watershed is locally known as the Walls of Jericho. Eventually, the river empties into the Tennessee River upstream from Huntsville.

The Paint Rock River is home to an amazing diversity of freshwater creatures with over 100 species of fish and about 45 different species of mussels, several of which are found nowhere else in the world.

Landscape Scale Conservation

In order to preserve this great river, The Nature Conservancy and ADCNR are working together to manage a large part of the 318-square mile watershed. By working at a landscape level, these organizations hope to preserve the valley's impressive biodiversity.



As Nature Intended

The Paint Rock River flows today much as it has for centuries—with minimal development, damming or alteration. This has preserved its natural character and wild feel. Historically, much of this scenic valley was used for agriculture and cattle grazing on small family landholdings, including the farm of Roy B. Whitaker who sold this land to The Nature

Conservancy to be preserved for future generations. This serendipitous underdevelopment allowed the Paint Rock River to function as nature intended. Now the upper Paint Rock River watershed, including the Walls of Jericho area, is one of the few large, intact, and functional landscapes remaining in the southeastern United States.



Alabama Lampmussel/Jeff Garner

Endangered Mussels

Although not easily seen, the Paint Rock River supports some of America's rarest wildlife. Freshwater mussels have declined across America because of changes in water quality and flow. Many species are found only in a few rivers. The Paint Rock River still holds important mussel populations. Two species of mussels in this river, the Pale Lilliput and the Alabama Lampmussel, are found nowhere else in the world.



Snail Darter/USFWS

Endangered Fish

Just like freshwater mussels, several species of fish have also evolved in the Paint Rock River. The rarest of these is the Palezone Shiner, a very small fish known to exist today only in the Paint Rock River and one stream in Kentucky. The Paint Rock River is also one of the last refuges for three globally imperiled fish—Sawfin Shiner, Blotchside Logperch, and Snail Darter.