

# What you should know about the New River

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## Geographic Location

The New River, nearly 30 miles long, flows throughout urban Broward County, Florida. The North Fork is a shallow, meandering tributary of the River, extending through the northwest section of the City of Fort Lauderdale, while the Las Olas Isles area is a series of man-made islands located along Las Olas Boulevard in east-central Fort Lauderdale. The South Fork is composed of two drainage tributaries that join and converge with the North Fork.

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## Himmarshee

The River's name can be traced back to its first Native American residents. Legend has it A-la-pa-taw, meaning "The Alligator Man," sensed a strong earthquake was on the verge of erupting. People ran to their homes fearing the terror that might come. During the night, there were electrical storms, wind, violent and frightening rain— and ultimately— the giant earthquake. The next morning they noticed the world had changed. The dry land had been replaced with a crystal-clear river flowing to the sea. A-la-pa-taw named the river, Himmarshee, which some say means "New River."

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## Birth of a Community

The New River played a critical role in the community's history. Records of the New River date back to the 16th century when it was one of the first of two rivers to be charted in the New World by Spanish explorers. During the early 1800's Bahamians populated a tiny but thriving community along the New River, sustaining themselves by fishing and ship salvage. Fort Lauderdale's population was small at the end of the 19th century, comprised of farmers and trappers. Many farms were located along navigable streams which provided access to the railroad docks on the New River. This became the core of a thriving community.

William Cooley, a native of Maryland, arrived at the New River in 1824 starting the area's first manufacturing, processing and shipping business. In 1893, Frank Stranahan started the first store and trading post on the North Bank where Indians traded their furs. By 1912, the New River was one of the largest vegetable shipping ports in the States.

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## Venice of America

Fort Lauderdale has often been described as the "Venice of America." There are some three hundred miles of inland waterways, lined with 42,000 resident boats and served by a hundred marinas and boat yards. The New River is part of Fort Lauderdale's center of commerce: Port Everglades, which is the world's second largest cruise port. More than a million and a half passengers stream through the New River Inlet to visit annually.

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## **The River's Decline**

Today the New River is in desperate need of repair. This once crystalline waterway has deteriorated under the strains of immense growth. Water quality has been adversely affected from debris, sedimentation, storm water runoff, and other pollutants. Inappropriate land uses near the water have also contributed to the decline of the River and its tributaries. This degradation of water quality and habitat represent a negative impact on the environment, health, and economy of the Broward County metropolitan area.

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## **River Rescue**

In 1991, the Broward County Department of Natural Resource Protection (DNRP) initiated a water quality assessment study of the New River. The project was intended to evaluate the nature and extent of water quality issues associated with the New River. The study focused on the water quality of the North Fork, elevated levels of bacteria in the Las Olas Isles area, and surface flow in the basin of the South Fork. The New River Study Final Report concluded the New River faces a variety of environmental and ecological problems. Results of the Study prompted the DNRP to design a plan to help restore the River to a more pristine condition. Activities in the plan include:

- Calling on 1000 Friends of Florida to organize and help support a 'Greenway' program focused on linking conservation, recreational, historic, and educational points of interest through canoe trails, bike and hiking paths, and water taxis.
- Partnering with area marinas and boat yards to create a best management practice (BMP) for the industry which has significantly decreased levels of copper, lead, and other heavy metals entering the waterway.
- Passage of an anti-pollution ordinance by the City of Fort Lauderdale will help to control discharge of raw sewage from vessels into the waters of the city. The city is also making significant improvements to adjacent sewer systems.
- Expansion of Marine Industries Association of South Florida's annual waterway cleanup to include additional sites along the North Fork of the New River to help remove litter and debris from the water.
- Continued assessment of contaminated sediments which will eventually be removed.
- The end result of these efforts will be a New River system that is more ecologically functional, aesthetically pleasing, and a valued asset to the community.

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## **You Can Help**

The River has been an artery for transportation, a source of recreation, and the center of Broward County's history for well over 100 years. The New River embraces part of our lives and it is essential that we, as a community, protect this precious resource. We must recognize the value this river has to our history, our communities, and most of all, our future. There are many ways you can help restore and preserve the New River. Please call the DNRP at 519-1253 for information.

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