

Monongahela River Watershed

West Fork, Tygart River Valley, Cheat River,

Monongahela River Mainstem

The Monongahela River, also known as “the Mon”, is formed in Fairmont at the confluence of the West Fork and the Tygart Valley Rivers. The Monongahela joins with the Allegheny River to form the Ohio River at Pittsburgh.

Fast facts:

Drainage area in West Virginia: 4,180 square miles

Length in West Virginia: 37.5. (Total river miles 128.7)

Name origin: The Native American word “Monongahela,” means “falling banks,” in reference to the instability of the river’s banks.

Landmarks to show on the map:

Blackwater Falls. The falls of the Blackwater River drop about 62 feet at the head of the Blackwater Canyon. The River is named for the dark, reddish-brown water colored by tannic acids that originate from the hemlock and spruce forests that grow in the area.

Inset graphics or text:

Navigation and Transportation: A system of nine locks and dams from Fairmont to Pittsburgh make the Monongahela River navigable to accommodate barges transporting steel, coal, and other bulk materials to and from markets on the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers.

West Fork River Watershed

The West Fork River flows north from its headwaters in Upshur and Lewis Counties to its confluence with the Tygart Valley River in the City of Fairmont to form the Monongahela River.

Fast facts:

Drainage area: 881 square miles

Length: 103 miles

The water quality of the West Fork River and some of its tributaries is affected by acid mine drainage from active and abandoned underground and surface mines.



Tygart Valley River Watershed

The Tygart Valley River rises near Mingo in Randolph County and flows north, to join the West Fork River in Fairmont to form the Monongahela River.

Fast facts:

Drainage area: 1,376 square miles

Length: 130 miles

Inset graphics or text:

- ☐ A 12-mile-long stretch of the river below Buckhannon River is a class III-V whitewater rafting destination.
- ☐ The river is impounded by a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers dam upstream of Grafton to form the Tygart Lake.

The Tygart Valley River watershed is characterized by a combination of coal mining, timber harvesting, agriculture, and recreational development.

Cheat River Watershed

The Cheat River begins at the confluence of the Black Fork and Shavers Fork at Parsons in Tucker County and flows north to join the Monongahela at Point Marion, Pennsylvania.

The river winds through scenic, steep valleys and mountainous, forested lands.

Fast facts:

Drainage area: square 1,420 miles

Length: 156 miles

Inset graphics or text:

- ❑ The Cheat River's path through Chestnut Ridge forms the deep, rugged Cheat Canyon, which is unparalleled for grandeur within the watershed. This section of the Cheat River, from Albright to Jenkinsburg, features Class IV and Class V rapids. The Canyon is a favorite destination for whitewater kayaking and rafting.
- ❑ The Cheat River supplies water to the coal-fired power plant at Albright and the hydropower plant on the Cheat Lake Dam.
- ❑ The Cheat River is dammed a short distance upstream from its mouth to form Cheat Lake.

Water Quality Concerns

Many streams in the Cheat River watershed are impaired by acid mine drainage discharge from abandoned mines. A total of 239 Abandoned Mine Land designated sites are known to exist in the lower Cheat watershed.