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Rock Creek



**Natural Resources and  
Environmental Protection Cabinet**

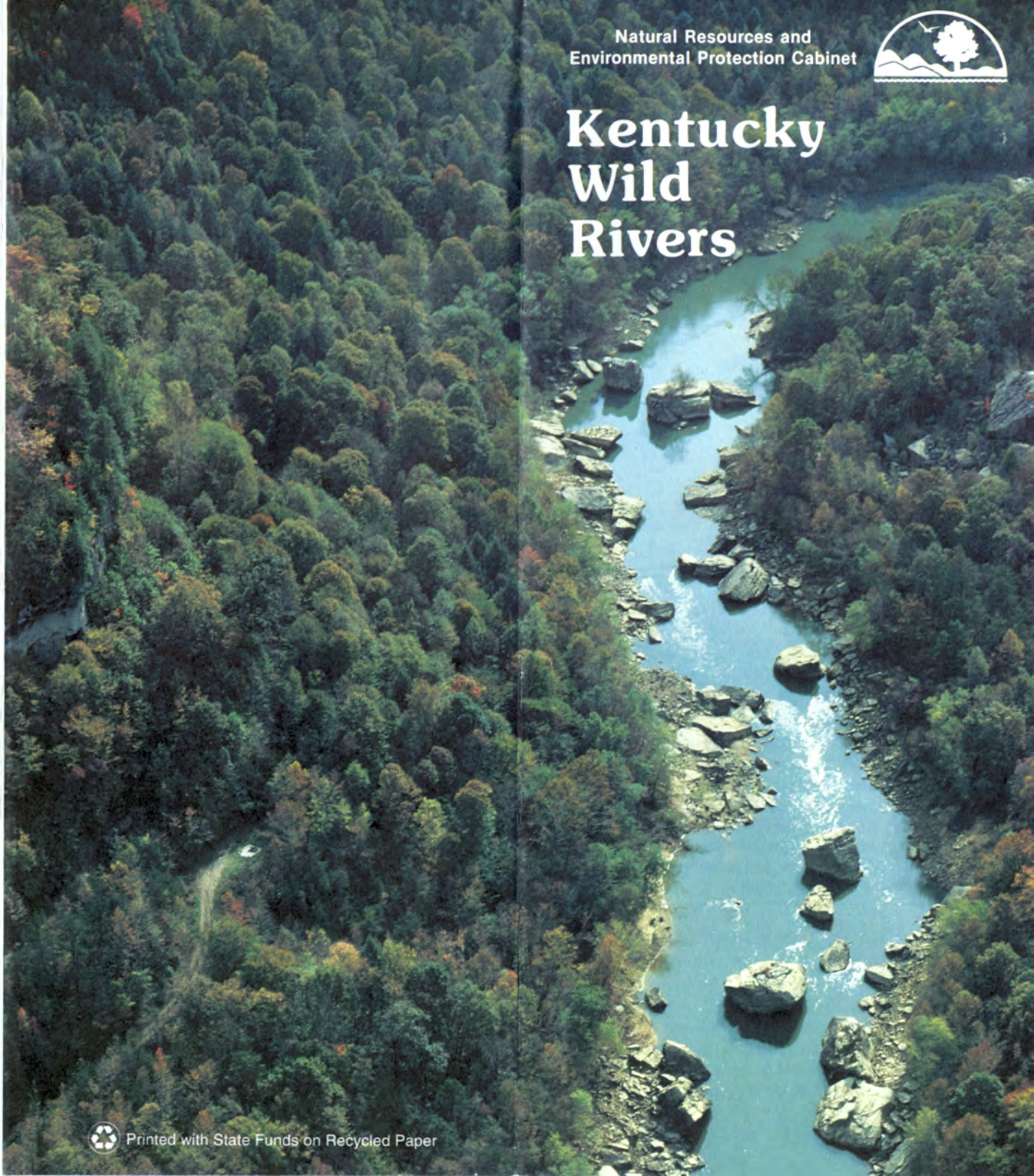
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*Front panel photo — Rockcastle River — Donald F. Harker  
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Natural Resources and  
Environmental Protection Cabinet



# Kentucky Wild Rivers



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*A trip down one of Kentucky's Wild Rivers is a visual adventure into the state's primitive past. The mystique of the unexplored wilderness of several hundred years ago remains in the unspoiled natural beauty of these remote streams. Choruses of songbirds greet the dawn, deer and raccoon feed fearlessly along the banks, white water rapids cascade into peaceful shoals and weathered cliffs loom like ancient castles above the winding river channel.*



James Archambeault

Red River

## THE WILD RIVERS SYSTEM

Kentucky is preserving the unique scenic, fish and wildlife, botanical, geological, cultural and recreational values of its most pristine rivers through a program established by the **Wild Rivers Act** of 1972. The Division of Water, within the Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Cabinet, is responsible for administering the Wild Rivers Program.

**Portions of nine rivers of exceptional quality and aesthetic character have been designated as Kentucky Wild Rivers.** Each Wild River is actually a linear corridor encompassing all visible land on each side of the river up to a distance of two thousand feet. The nine Wild River corridors comprise a total of 114 river miles and 26,382 acres.

**The Wild Rivers System recognizes those rivers which retain many of their natural attributes and protects them from unwise use and development.** Some activities are strictly prohibited within a Wild River corridor, such as surface mining, clear-cutting of timber, construction of dams or other in-stream disturbances. Existing residential and agricultural land uses continue, but developments which might impair the river's water quality or natural condition are regulated through a permit system.

**Wild Rivers are far more than just clean, free-flowing waters in a scenic setting.** They serve as refuges for wild plants and animals, as well as havens for those people seeking solitude and tranquility in nature's realm. Their waters provide healthy sport fisheries, cool pools for swimming and white water rapids for adventurous paddlers.

Wild Rivers provide living examples of natural ecological processes for nature study and scientific research. Their living components may hold the chemical keys to future cures for human ailments, or contain genetic codes for developing superior food and timber crops to sustain our expanding population.

Wild Rivers are natural museums harboring the relicts of prehistoric inhabitants in rock shelters and caves, and preserving the ancient impressions of primitive life in rock strata. Historic structures from pioneer days are preserved to remind us of what life was like before technology so changed the face of the land.

These priceless treasures are held in public trust by the Commonwealth for our use and enjoyment, and thanks to the Wild Rivers Act, they will be here for many generations to come.



Rockcastle River



Rafting

Kentucky Dept. of Travel Development

## THE USES OF OUR RIVERS

**The natural qualities and attributes of our rivers and streams have nearly disappeared during the past two centuries.** Originally, native Americans and the early pioneers depended on the rivers primarily for food and as avenues of transportation. As settlement of the land progressed, settlers built towns along the riverbanks, constructed dams to harness energy and store water, re-directed stream courses to irrigate farms, and deepened and straightened river channels to transport lumber, coal and other products to market.

**As society has increased in complexity, so have its uses and effects on the rivers.** Many have become receptacles for municipal and industrial sewage and solid wastes, as well as convenient places to discard trash. Discharges from surface mining and oil and gas extraction, and wastes from livestock operations also degrade water quality. Uncontrolled riverbank and floodplain development, which removes stabilizing vegetation and destroys productive wetlands, contributes to the soaring costs of flood damage.

**We are just beginning to fully comprehend the effects of long-term abuse of our rivers and to appreciate the importance of this threatened natural resource.** A river is far more than just a current of water. Its use and enjoyment are integral parts of our lives. Wise conservation measures are needed to sustain our river resources for future generations, but land use and resource protection *can* be compatible and complementary when the needs of both are taken into consideration.

## RECREATION

River-oriented recreation is increasing in popularity and demand, and Kentucky's Wild Rivers are suitable for a wide array of recreational activities. Most of them offer non-motorized boating — from the peaceful flat water cruise to the challenging white water run.

Activities on land within the Wild River corridors are limited, however, because *public use of a Wild River is restricted to the river itself and any adjacent publicly-owned land.*

Many of the Wild Rivers are located in or near public parks or forests which provide additional opportunities for river-oriented recreation. In most parts of Daniel Boone National Forest, for instance, camping, hunting, fishing and other activities are available. These areas provide many scenic hiking trails and some offer trails for horseback riding. The state and national parks offer developed campgrounds, recreational facilities and interesting interpretive programs.

Development within the Wild River corridors is limited to improvements in river access and safety which are consistent with the natural primitive character of the areas. Plans call for the establishment of small parking areas and boat launch facilities at the upstream and downstream ends of each Wild River, and for the posting of signs to promote safety and provide information about the special features of each Wild River area.



River Cooter

John R. MacGregor



John R. MacGregor

Cumberland Rosemary

Ky. Lady's-slipper Orchid

## THE MANAGEMENT PLAN

Land and resource use within a Wild River corridor are governed by a management plan developed for each river. The plan delineates the site characteristics and needs and recommends specific strategies for protection and recreational development.

Management plans are developed cooperatively by the Division of Water, state and federal agencies and interested citizens. Anyone interested in the management of a Wild River has the opportunity to comment on the plan during public hearings and a written comment period before the plan is adopted. This assures local involvement and understanding of the management goals for each site during the planning process.

Once a plan is adopted, the continued cooperation and involvement of representatives from all levels of government, as well as local citizens, is essential to its successful implementation. This is an on-going process requiring periodic re-assessment of stated goals and strategies to accommodate changing patterns of resource use.

## WILD RIVER DESIGNATION

Rivers, or river segments, are designated into the Wild Rivers System by the Kentucky General Assembly. **A proposed river must meet certain established criteria, including the possession of waters which are free-flowing and not polluted beyond feasible correction, scenic vistas and shorelines essentially primitive and unchanged, and opportunities for wilderness type recreation which would not disturb the primitive character.**

Agencies or citizen groups wishing to nominate a river into the System must submit a proposal to the Division of Water. The proposal should include a map of the proposed stream or stream section and a description of the factors qualifying the stream as a Wild River.

The inclusion of additional rivers into the Wild Rivers System will help alleviate crowding at some of the more popular rivers and provide for a wider distribution of Wild River areas across the state. The total mileage presently within the System represents a very small fraction of the more than 50,000 miles of rivers and streams which flow through Kentucky.



Big South Fork

# Kentucky Wild Rivers System

15.9 miles of the **Rockcastle River** between KY 1956 at Billows and the Lake Cumberland backwaters offer one of the most popular canoe runs in the eastern U.S. Swift currents twist between huge boulders and tumble over rock ledges. The hazardous "narrows" is a precipitous gorge bounded by 100-foot cliffs. The segment also offers opportunities for hiking, swimming, camping and shore fishing.

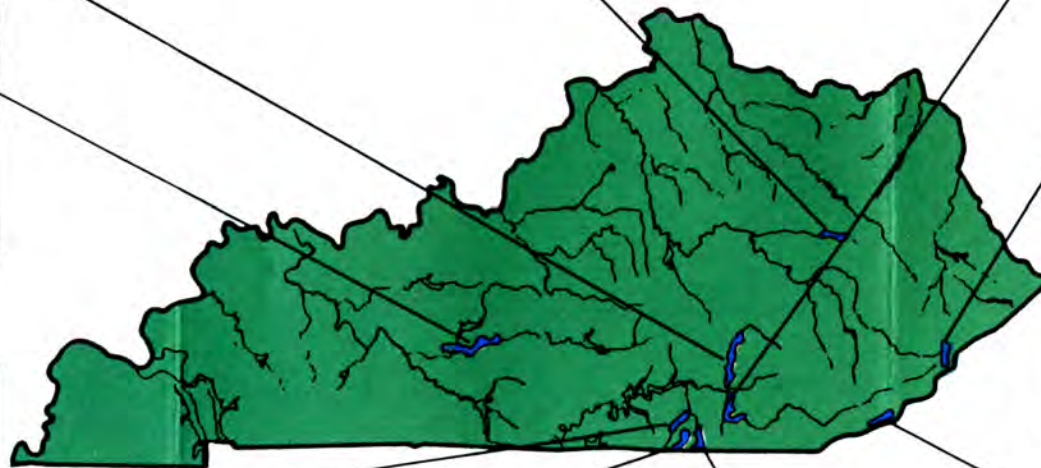
9.1 miles of the **Red River** between KY 746 and KY 715 tumble among huge boulders in a narrow, twisting and largely inaccessible hemlock gorge. Features and activities include natural arches, challenging white water, bass and muskellunge fishing, camping and exploring. An unusual array of wildflowers may be observed in season. In recognition of the river's exceptional qualities, the U.S. Congress recently designated 19.4 miles of the river, including the state-designated portion, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

16.1 miles of the **Cumberland River** between Summer Shoals and the backwaters of Lake Cumberland wind along rugged mountain slopes rising over 400 feet above the stream. This stretch includes spectacular Cumberland Falls in Cumberland Falls State Resort Park. Special features include sheer cliff walls and large boulders in and about the river channel. Recreational opportunities include white water canoeing, rafting, camping, hiking and fishing.

26 miles of the **Green River** wind serenely through the spectacular Mammoth Cave National Park and extensive forested hillsides and limestone cliffs. River corridor features include riverside caves, cool springs harboring unusual cave fish and opportunities for island camping. Family canoeing is very popular on this placid river.

4 miles of **Bad Branch** from its headwaters on Pine Mountain to KY 932 is within a very scenic gorge, rimmed by 100-foot cliffs and containing magnificent Bad Branch Falls. The stream area harbors a unique assemblage of rare plants and animals and myriad wildflowers. A portion of the gorge is a State Nature Preserve and offers excellent opportunities for nature study, hiking and wildlife observation.

10.4 miles of the **Little South Fork** between KY 92 and the backwaters of Lake Cumberland offer beautiful scenery and mild white water canoeing in winter and spring. The corridor includes an impressive and remote cliff-lined gorge near the downstream terminus. Recreation is limited because land on both banks is entirely in private ownership.



3.9 miles of **Martins Fork** between Cumberland Gap National Historic Park and KY 987 exemplify the clean, clear mountain streams of southeastern Kentucky. Swift, shallow waters descend amidst a dense hemlock and magnolia forest with striking mountain vistas on either side. Recreation is limited because the corridor lands are entirely in private ownership.

18 miles of **Rock Creek** between the KY/TN state line and White Oak Junction flow through narrow valleys with steep wooded hillsides. The stream corridor features natural arches, rock shelters and exceptional trout fishing. An improved road paralleling the entire length provides opportunities for sightseeing, picnicking and camping. U.S. Forest Service developed recreation areas are located at Bell Farm, Hemlock Grove and Great Meadows, at the upstream end of the corridor.

10.2 miles of the **Big South Fork** between the KY/TN state line and Blue Heron offer one of the most popular canoe-camping runs in the eastern U.S. Located entirely within the Big South Fork National River and Recreational Area, administered by the National Park Service, river recreation is enhanced by spectacular vistas along the boulder-choked white water stream.