



Natural Heritage in the MSNHA

The Highland Rim

The Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area is located within the [Highland Rim](#) section of Alabama. The Highland Rim is the southernmost section of a series of low plateaus that are part of the Appalachian Mountains. The Highland Rim is one of Alabama's five [physiographic regions](#), and is the smallest one, occupying about 7 percent of the state.

The Tennessee River

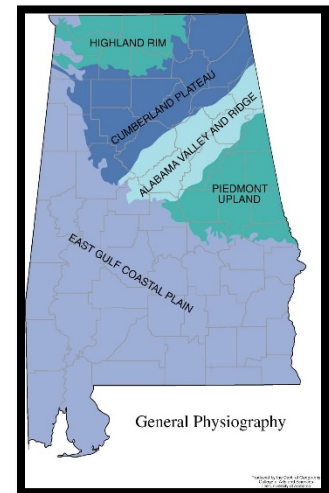
The Tennessee River is the largest tributary off the Ohio River. The river has been known by many names throughout its history. For example, it was known as the Cherokee River, because many Cherokee tribes had villages along the riverbank. The modern name of the river is derived from a Cherokee word *tanasi*, which means "river of the great bend."

The Tennessee River has many dams on it, most of them built in the 20th century by the Tennessee Valley Authority. Due to the creation of these dams, many lakes have formed off the river. One of these is Pickwick Lake, which stretches from Pickwick Landing Dam in Tennessee, to Wilson Dam in the Shoals area. Wilson Lake and Wheeler Lake are also located in the MSNHA. Additionally, Bear Creek Lakes were created by four TVA constructed dams on Bear Creek and helps manage flood conditions and provides water to residents in North Alabama. Though man-made, these reservoirs have become havens for fish, birds, and plant life and have become an integral part of the natural heritage of North Alabama.

The Muscle Shoals region began as a port area for riverboats travelling the Tennessee River. Navigation of the Tennessee River has benefitted the Tennessee Valley region because of the economic and industrial development it brought to the area.

National Forests

There are four national forests within Alabama and one in the MSNHA. The [William B. Bankhead National Forest](#) is located in the town of Double Springs, near Moulton. Bankhead National Forest is home to the only National Wild and Scenic River in Alabama, the Sipsey Fork, and the Sipsey Wilderness area, which is the largest wilderness area east of the Mississippi River. The Sipsey Wilderness area is home to an abundance of wildlife, many streams, and enough waterfalls to garner the name "land of one thousand waterfalls."



Wilson Dam

Native American artifacts have been found in the Bankhead forest, and it is one of the South's premier sites for prehistoric drawings and rock carvings.

National Natural Landmarks

The National Natural Landmarks Program works to conserve sites which contain outstanding biological and geological resources. One examples of these landmarks in the Muscle Shoals Heritage Area is the [Dismals Canyon](#).

Dismals Canyon was once a prehistoric swamp. Earthquakes caused parts of the area to rise,



creating a canyon and gorge system. The area was filled with dozens of sandstone grottos, waterfalls, and natural bridges. Dismals Canyon is extremely biologically diverse, containing

over 350 different species of flora identified by scientists. It is home to what to what are known as Dismalities which are unique, native larvae of small insects that emit a blue-green light.