

Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project

Fact Sheet #1

THE REPORT ON THE SETTING OF THE RARITAN RIVER BASIN

What Is This Report?

The "Settings" Report is the first in a series of technical reports produced by the Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project. This report provides an overview of the physical and ecological characteristics of the Basin. It provides a general understanding of the land use development patterns and trends that have occurred over the years.

What Is The Raritan Basin?

The Raritan Basin is a collection of many watersheds. A watershed is an area of land that collects runoff from precipitation and drains to streams, rivers, lakes and reservoirs. This project is working within watershed boundaries, as these are nature's boundaries that share common water sources.

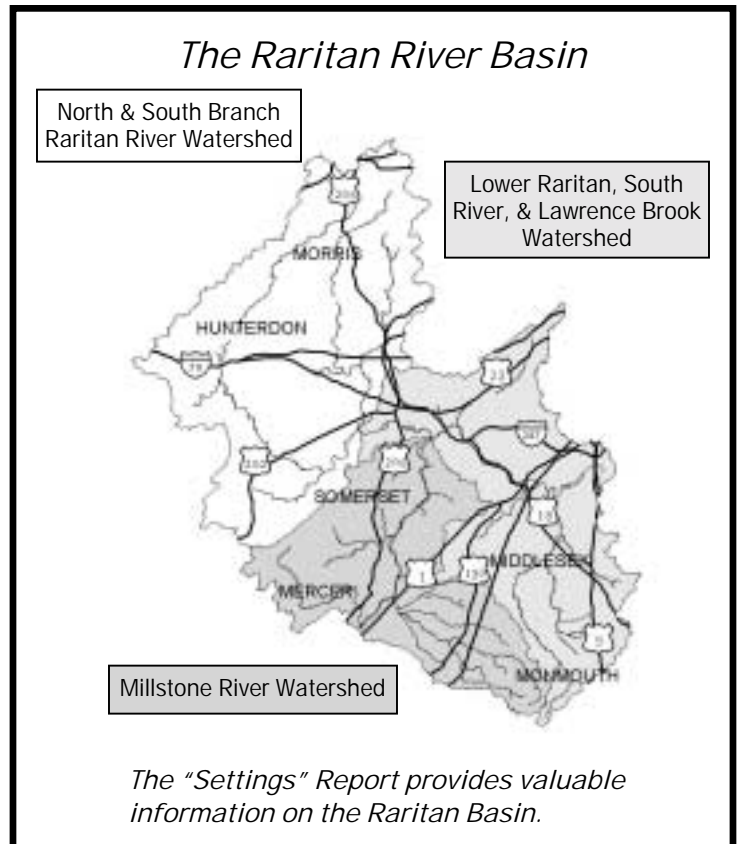
The Raritan Basin is located in north-central New Jersey, approximately midway between New York City and Philadelphia and is the largest river basin located entirely within the State of New Jersey. The Basin encompasses approximately 1,100 square miles and is located within seven counties including parts of Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Somerset and Union counties.

Major waterways in the Basin include the North Branch and South Branch of the Raritan River (known collectively as the Upper Raritan River), the Lower Raritan River, South River, Green Brook, Lawrence Brook and the Millstone River, along with their many feeder streams. Some of these watersheds are among the healthiest in New Jersey, while others are considerably degraded.

Why Is The Raritan Basin Important?

The Raritan Basin provides water to approximately 1.2 million people in central New Jersey, including drinking water, irrigation water for farms, nurseries and golf courses, and processing water for industries. In addition, the Basin is also used for many recreational activities including canoeing,

fishing and hiking and it provides habitat for many aquatic and terrestrial organisms.



Quick Facts About The Raritan Basin

- Land elevations in the Raritan Basin range from near sea level at the Raritan Bay to greater than 1,000 feet near Budd Lake in Morris County.
- The Basin contains approximately 2,000 mapped miles of flowing streams.
- On average, the Basin receives approximately 47 inches of rain per year. However, this area has experienced severe droughts and flooding in recent years.

- The amount of farmland in the seven counties has decreased by 11.8% between 1987 and 1997. This is greater than the 6.9% loss for the entire State.
- Wetland losses between the 1940's and 1970's were more than 25% in Middlesex, Morris, Somerset and Union counties, while Hunterdon, Mercer and Monmouth lost more than 50%.
- Population trends over the past several decades have resulted not only in a moderate increase in the total population, but also a major shift in population from urban to rural areas of the Basin.
- The Raritan Basin has 19,763 acres of State Parkland and 5,098 acres of Natural Land Areas.

This information can be a valuable starting point in our understanding of how land formation and development patterns affect water quality, quantity and ecosystem health. In addition, this information will be helpful in guiding future land use practices and development through the Raritan Basin.

How Can You Use This Report?

The information in the "Settings" Report provides a starting point for assessing the health of the environment in the Basin. Other technical reports build on this information.

This report can:

- Help local governing bodies and planning boards better understand the link between land use and development and their impacts on water quality and quantity.
- Aid state and local leaders in their understanding of development trends within the Basin.
- Provide local residents with facts about open space preservation, and the loss of wetlands farmland.
- Assist in documenting historical data on the state of our environment.
- Provide teachers with information on local watersheds that can be incorporated into school curricula.

For More Information.....

The Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project is a partnership of government, non-profit and private organizations working together to improve the water resources of the Raritan River. To learn more about the Raritan Basin Watershed Management Project or for additional information on the "setting" of the Raritan Basin, contact the New Jersey Water Supply Authority, Watershed Protection Programs Unit, at (732) 356-9344 or visit our website at www.raritanbasin.org. Also, you may contact the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) Raritan Region staff at (609) 633-7020 or visit the NJDEP Division of Watershed Management website at www.state.nj.us/dep/watershedmgt/.