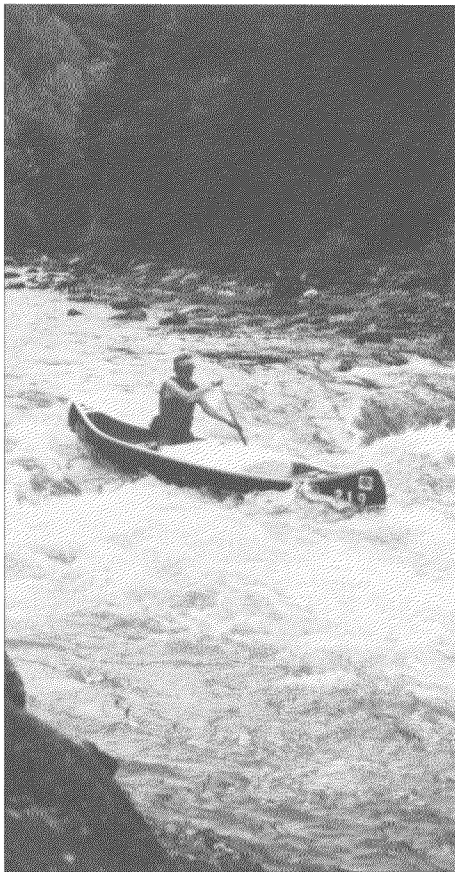




Rivers and floodplains provide numerous recreational opportunities—including hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, boating, swimming, bird-watching, picnicking, jogging, photography, ice skating, and simply observing nature

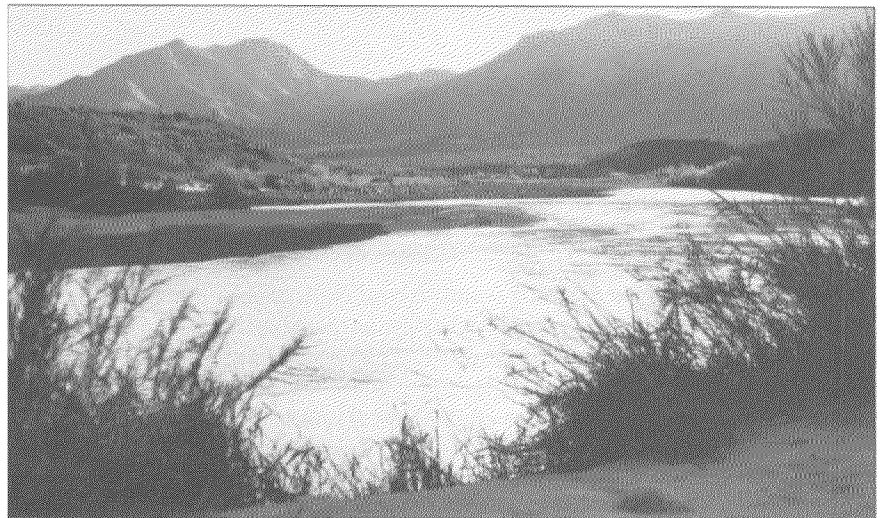
Above: Bicyclist, Boulder Creek Pathway, Boulder, Colorado

Below: Canoeer, Nantahala River, North Carolina



generally more biologically diverse than the surrounding uplands and encompass a broader range of moisture and soil conditions and a greater diversity of flora and fauna than wetlands do. The Soil Conservation Service estimates that there are 16 million acres of riparian land along streams, canals, lakes, reservoirs, and tidal shorelines of rural, nonfederal portions of the United States. Bottomland hardwood forests also are a major riparian ecosystem, and they account for about 52 million acres, mostly in the South.

Healthy riparian ecosystems provide community structure for raptors, safe passage corridors to water for mammals, habitat for amphibians, and cover and nutrients for fish. At elevations below 3,500 feet, they take the form of lush strips of streamside vegetation that interrupt the desert landscape. These linear communities provide habitat for up to 80% of the West's wildlife species, and are essential for maintaining its healthy fish and wildlife populations. Cottonwood groves provide a high canopy and open understory essential to certain birds of prey for hunting, while mesquite bosques provide lower, denser vegetation ideal for colonial nesting by whitewing doves. Also dependent on riparian habitats are grey squirrels, river otters, muskrats, summer tanagers, canyon frogs, tree frogs, and dove-tailed hawks.



Arid region floodplains, although apparently desolate, actually provide habitat for most desert wildlife species
Channel, floodplain, and riparian habitat, Verde River, Tonto National Forest, Arizona.

Cultural Resources

As used in this report, the cultural resources of floodplains include their historic and archaeological sites, their scientific, recreational, and aesthetic uses, as well as the harvest of the floodplains' natural and cultivated products. Because water has always been basic to human survival, transportation, and commerce, many sites of historic and archaeological significance lie in floodplains. Floodplains provide opportunities for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, boating, swimming, bird-watching, picnicking, jogging, photography, ice skating, nature observing, as well as for scientific study and research, educational activities, and less tangible aesthetic benefits. Floodplains can provide urban communities with a tremendous open-space and greenbelt resource.

Inland floodplains are great sources of commercial timber. Much of the 82 million acres of commercial forested wetlands in the 49 continental states lies within floodplains. The standing value of southern wetland forests alone is \$8 billion. The floodplains along larger rivers are prime agricultural lands because of their flat terrain, abundant water supplies, and rich alluvial soils periodically replenished by flooding. From 1956 to 1975 about 60% of the U.S. commercial fish and shellfish harvest was made up of wetland-dependent species. Several billion dollars are generated annually from this harvest and from wetlands-dependent sport fishing.