

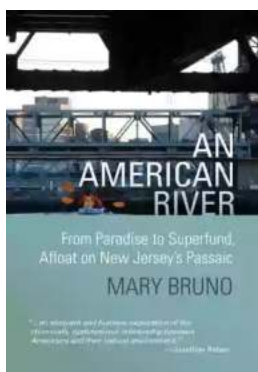
From Paradise To Superfund Afloat On New Jersey Passaic

The Passaic River is not what it used to be. Once a pristine and picturesque waterway, it has now become one of the most contaminated rivers in the United States. From paradise to a Superfund site, the Passaic River in New Jersey has undergone a drastic transformation due to decades of industrial pollution and neglect.

The Passaic River stretches approximately 80 miles long in northeastern New Jersey, flowing through numerous towns and cities. It was once a vital source of drinking water, a thriving habitat for fish and wildlife, and a popular recreational spot. However, since the early 20th century, this once idyllic river has endured a series of unfortunate events that have left it severely polluted.

The Beginnings of Industrial Pollution

In the 1800s, the industrial revolution took hold of America, and the Passaic River became an attractive location for various industries. Textile mills, chemical plants, and dye factories started appearing along its banks, releasing untreated waste directly into the river. At the time, there were no regulations or environmental awareness to prevent this pollution.



An American River: From paradise to superfund, afloat on New Jersey's Passaic

by Mary Bruno (Kindle Edition)

★★★★☆ 4.7 out of 5

Language : English

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Text-to-Speech : Enabled

Screen Reader : Supported

Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 320 pages
Lending : Enabled



Throughout the decades, the river absorbed massive amounts of toxic chemicals such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), dioxins, heavy metals, and other hazardous substances. These pollutants seeped into the riverbed, creating a dangerous cocktail that threatens both human health and the environment.

The Superfund Designation

In 1984, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) declared the lower eight miles of the Passaic River a Superfund site. Superfund is a federal program aimed at cleaning up the most contaminated areas in the country. The pollution levels in the Passaic River were so high that the EPA determined it required immediate remediation.

This Superfund designation brought attention to the dire state of the Passaic River and initiated long-term efforts to restore its ecological balance. The cleanup process has been complex, involving the removal of contaminated sediment, containment of the pollutants, and the implementation of stricter regulations to prevent further pollution.

The Ongoing Cleanup Efforts

The Passaic River cleanup is a multi-phase process that has faced numerous challenges along the way. The initial phase, known as the "Lower Eight Miles Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study," aimed to evaluate the extent of pollution and determine the best course of action for remediation.

Since then, several cleanup plans have been proposed, each outlining strategies for removing contaminated sediment and preventing further pollution. The plans involve dredging the riverbed, capping the contaminated areas, and constructing combined sewer overflow retention systems to reduce stormwater pollution.

A Long Road Ahead

The cleanup efforts on the Passaic River have made progress, but the road to full recovery is long. As pollutants continue to leach into the river, the restoration process becomes more challenging. The EPA estimated that the cleanup project will cost several hundred million dollars and may take decades to complete.

Nevertheless, there is hope for the Passaic River's future. Improved regulations have minimized the amount of pollution entering the river, and there are ongoing efforts to educate the public about the importance of preserving this precious resource. Organizations and local communities are working together to restore the river's natural beauty and revive its once vibrant ecosystem.

The transformation of the Passaic River from a paradise to a Superfund site is a cautionary tale of the environmental consequences of unchecked industrial pollution. However, it is also a story of resilience and the determination to restore what was lost. Through ongoing cleanup efforts and increased awareness, the Passaic River has the potential to once again become a thriving ecosystem, proving that even in the face of adversity, nature can rebound.

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<1>We were afraid of its impenetrable darkness. Afraid of its industrial smell. We were afraid of the things that lived beneath its surface and the things that had died there. We were afraid of spotting a hand or a head bobbing in the rafts of garbage that floated by. We were afraid of submerged intake valves that sucked water into the factories along the banks. We were afraid of the river's filth. It wasn't the kind of filth that came from playing with your friends. It was grownup filth. The kind that scared the blue out of water and coated the riverbank with oily black goo. It was the kind of filth you could taste, the kind that could make you sick, maybe even kill you. We were afraid of getting splashed with river water or of touching river rocks. We were afraid of falling in or—God forbid—going under. We were afraid of the river's anger at being so befouled, and afraid, most of all, of the revenge we felt certain the river would exact.

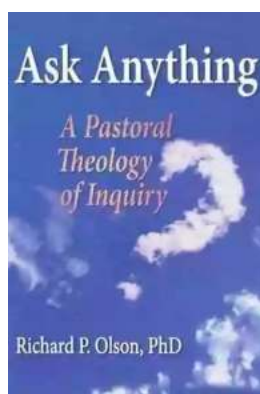
New Jersey's Passaic River rises in a pristine wetland and ends in a federal Superfund site. In *An American River*, author and New Jersey native Mary Bruno kayaks its length in an effort to discover what happened to her hometown river. The Passaic's wildly convoluted course invites detours into the river's flood-prone natural history, New Jersey's unique geology, the corrupt practices of the Newark chemical plant that produced Agent Orange and poisoned the river with dioxin,

and into the lives of an unforgettable cast of characters who have lived and worked along the Passaic and who are trying, even now, to save it. Part natural history, part personal history, part rollicking adventure, the book is a narrative meditation on the wonder of nature, the enduring ties of family, and the power of water and loss. “My great grandmother liked to say, ‘Don’t shit in the nest,’” writes Bruno. “The Passaic River is an object lesson in what can happen when we ignore that simple, salty advice.”

"An American River is an intricate and satisfying braid of memoir, history, science, nature writing, and acute social observation. This is an invigorating and hopeful book, and its sense of wonder is infectious. It's not, I think, too great a stretch to say that it holds its own on the shelf alongside Walden, Silent Spring and A Sand County Almanac."

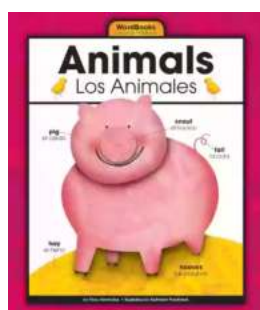
Jonathan Raban

Author of *Driving Home: An American Journey*



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