

Upper Mississippi River

The Mississippi River is the second longest river in North America, flowing 2,350 miles from its source at Lake Itasca through the center of the continental United States to the Gulf of Mexico. The Missouri River, a tributary of the Mississippi River, is about 100 miles longer. Some describe the Mississippi River as being the third longest river system in the world, if the length of Missouri and Ohio Rivers are added to the Mississippi's main stem.

When compared to other world rivers, the Mississippi-Missouri River combination ranks fourth in length (3,710 miles/5,970km) following the Nile (4,160 miles/6,693km), the Amazon (4,000 miles/6,436km), and the Yangtze Rivers (3,964 miles/6,378km). The reported length of a river may increase or decrease as deposition or erosion occurs at its delta, or as meanders are created or cutoff.

As a result, different lengths may be reported depending upon the year or measurement method. The staff of Itasca State Park at the Mississippi's headwaters suggest the main stem of the river is 2,552 miles long. The US Geologic Survey has published a number of 2,300 miles, the EPA says it is 2,320 miles long, and the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area suggests the river's length is 2,350 miles.

Some like to measure the size of a river is by the size of its watershed, which is the area drained by a river and its tributaries. The Mississippi River drains an area of about 3.2 million square kilometers (1.2 million square miles) including all or parts of 32 states and two Canadian provinces, about 40% of the continental United States. The Mississippi River watershed is the fourth largest in the world, extending from the Allegheny Mountains in the east to the Rocky Mountains in the west. The Amazon for comparison drains about 7.1 million square kilometers (2.7 million square miles).

Wildlife

The Mississippi River and its floodplain are home to a diverse population of living things:

- At least 260 species of fish, 25% of all fish species in North America, live in the Mississippi River.
- Forty percent of the nation's migratory waterfowl use the river corridor during their spring and fall migration.
- Sixty percent of all North American birds (326 species) use the Mississippi River Basin as their migratory flyway.
- From Cairo, IL upstream to Lake Itasca there are 38 documented species of mussel. On the Lower Mississippi, there may be as many as 60 separate species of mussel.
- The Upper Mississippi is host to more than 50 mammal species;
- At least 145 species of amphibians and reptiles inhabit the Upper Mississippi River environs.

The source for the above information can be found at [National River and Recreation Area Minnesota](#)