

# Freshwater Springs of Mississippi: A geographical analysis of their uses and conditions of general health

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## **Introduction**

Freshwater springs are one of the most widely appreciated sources of freshwater in the world. They form from underground aquifers overflowing and leaking onto the surface and rarely flow, unless after a period of intense precipitation. Freshwater springs are important to many cultures of the past and some that exist today. Native Americans believed that many freshwater springs contained an intense healing power, which would cure illness, hold off death, and lengthen life-span. European explorers sought the legend of the Fountain of Youth, which is thought to have been a freshwater spring in The New World. The water that resides in freshwater springs is also typically warmer than the human body, which makes it an attractive past-time. Aside from cultural importance, freshwater and ocean springs also hold serious ecological importance. Spring water is often full of minerals that make it valuable in a multitude of ways. The minerals that are present in spring water usually promote extremely vibrant and healthy ecosystems. Mineral-filled water is also often bottled and sold as drinking water, which makes it an economic resource. Freshwater springs have also historically been used as sources for crop irrigation. Indigenous communities in southwestern America were known to have used gravity-fed irrigation systems that revolved around freshwater springs. The majority of the

springs that reside in Mississippi emerge from fairly dense and impervious strata. The water yields, with the exception of some, are relatively small. However, in areas where the spring yields are adequate, the water is used for agricultural and domestic purposes. In this paper, I am going to analyze the status of freshwater springs in Mississippi from two positions. One of these positions will be cultural history based and the other will be based on a geographical analysis of ecological health.

## **Project Overview**

Freshwater springs often serve as the primary freshwater source for surrounding organisms, so the sustainability of them is crucial to the local environment. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the importance of Mississippi's freshwater springs culturally, historically, and ecologically. This paper will provide general information about the more well-known and kept-up-with freshwater springs in Mississippi. However, smaller and lesser-known springs will also be included within the research. The general hope is that I will be able to find a connection between the health of freshwater springs and an outside source, whether that outside source is human-interaction, geographical location, or climatological change.

## **Methods**

The methods of data collection are limited to the research of online historical records and climatological data. All of the streams were found using an online database called *GeoNames.org*. After all of the currently existing freshwater springs were found and accounted for, research into the individual springs was performed. Many of the springs don't have well-kept records, but they are still accounted for in the images. An individual assessment is used for the

available springs, as the goal of this paper is not to group the springs together based on preexisting similarities, such as size, accessibility, or geographical location. A preexisting grouping would limit the findings of similarities that I hope to find, which is the ecological condition. So, it is important for each of the freshwater springs analysis to be performed separately. If there is no available information about a spring, that will also be included. A map of all of the freshwater springs will be provided below for reference.

## **Analysis**

Tishomingo Park, located in the northeastern part of Mississippi, is home to many freshwater springs that are used for the Tishomingo Spring Water LLC. bottling company. The freshwater springs in this location are famous for their use throughout recent history (NatchezTraceTravel). The most known of the clutter of freshwater springs at Tishomingo is Jackson Spring. Jackson Spring sits just below the surface of the earth and overflows with its fifty-thousand gallon reservoir. It is named after the late President Andrew Jackson, who spent time traveling the Natchez Trace. It is said that Jackson praised the spring for its clean and tasteful water, which resulted in the spring being renamed in honor of him. The legend of Jackson Spring was well-known when it was given the gold medal for sparkling water in 1907. Little is known about the spring's history after that until the late 1990s, when it became the source of water for the Tishomingo Spring Water LLC. bottling company. The spring is supposedly healthy and has continued to provide a steady supply of water for the company (Elkins 2003). Cave Spring is also located in Tishomingo, MS and serves as one of the historic sites that resides along the Natchez Trace. It is likely that the spring was formed by the

underground water dissolving the rock, causing an eventual cave-in. It is believed that the Native Americans of the region used Cave Spring as a source of drinking water. Now, the spring is unsafe to traverse and the water is unsafe to drink (NatchezTraceTravel). Chalybeate Springs is the name given to two adjacent springs in Chalybeate, MS. The town was named after the cluster of springs. Little is known about the springs' history, but its name has Latin roots and means "iron-enriched" (Town and County History Walnut)

Archusa Springs is located south of Quitman, MS and served as the home for Texas Hospital during the Civil War. A doctor from the Houston area traveled to Quitman to help Confederate soldiers and chose Archusa Springs as the location for his medical service because he believed the water had healing properties. Archusa Springs also served as a source of recreation and drinking water for residents of The West Hotel in Quitman Mississippi in the mid-1800s (Historical Places in Clark County). Samuel Springs is a freshwater spring placed right next to the Ross Barnett Reservoir. There is no record of its history, but it now serves as a popular loudmouth bass fishing location. Another popular bass-fishing location is Sawed Horn Spring, which is located near Hattiesburg, MS (Fishbrain 2022). Brandywine Springs was a small health-resort town that existed between the early and mid-1800s. Guests would travel to Brandywine to benefit from the healing property-filled springwater. By 1840, the springs popularity as a healer dwindled (Torp 2022). Hamill Spring, located in Sturgis, MS, was used as a water source for early settlers. Hamill Spring also served as a water source for boilers at the Gus Boyd sawmill (Historical Marker Project 2014). Hollywood Spring is a freshwater spring in the northwestern part of Mississippi. Not much is known about the spring, but I am making an educated hypothesis that Holly Springs was first settled around the spring now known as Hollywood Spring. Swafford Springs is located in central Mississippi and it is hypothesized that

Clinton, MS was built around it (Department of Treasury 1822). However, there is not good evidence to support that. Waukomis Spring, which has linguistic roots in Native American history, served as a natural location near the first Mississippi residents that sold Coca-Cola (Miller and Miller).

Wildwood Springs, located in Franklin County, has an extensive history as a health resort. It was used as a hotel and get-away resort during the Civil War. For a while, it also served the locals as a meeting place and annual picnics would occur there (Geoghegan). Judge Hall of Meridian, MS utilized Arundel Spring as a source for drinking water for roughly ten years, beginning in 1895. He would sell the drinking water and advertised it as mineral drinking water (Mississippi Rails).

One of the most popular freshwater springs in Mississippi is Ramsey Springs, located in the southern portion of Mississippi. Ramsey Springs was a popular health resort that was used from its discovery until shortly after World War II. After the first hotel was built there, it encountered many changes of ownership and eventually shut down in the 1960s. In 2011, the Land Trust for the Mississippi Coastal Plain organization bought the Ramsey homestead and conveyed it to the state with the goal that the land would be dedicated to conservation due to the ecological and historical significance. The current condition of the freshwater spring at Ramsey Springs is not available. The springs that I have spoken on make up roughly half of the accounted-for freshwater springs in Mississippi. There are smaller, less popular springs that simply do not have a recorded history or ecological assessment (DiRienzo 2020) .

## **Results and Discussion**

It is quite clear that freshwater springs throughout the history of the state of Mississippi have an extensive cultural importance in the practice of medicine. We know very little about the detailed history of the majority of the freshwater springs in Mississippi, but the history that we do know of is usually related to the belief in springwater healing properties. The concept that freshwater springs hold healing properties exists in most countries across the world, so it is not peculiar that this remains true for the history of Mississippi. This is likely due to the fact that the mineral-filled springwater was a drastically cleaner source of water than most people had access to. Freshwater springs also served as sources for community for the early settlers in Mississippi. Many of the early settlers, when finding places to build their communities, would find that freshwater springs were an excellent source of life to build near. Access to clean drinking water was most likely instrumental to the building of many Mississippi towns that still exist today. There is no evidence that speaks on the Native American use of freshwater springs in Mississippi, but it seems that it is safe to assume that Native American communities relied on them as well, as many of the early foreign settlers encountered Native Americans in Mississippi when finding a location to build on. The only historical consistency that exists between the different freshwater springs in Mississippi is the reliance on them for healing properties, but the historical record does not go back very far. Through my research, I was able to find a significant problem that exists in our relationship with freshwater springs in Mississippi. To start, we have almost no ecological record of the condition of these springs. Most of the springs have been lost to time and have become local fishing or swimming holes, as opposed to heavily used sources of drinking water. Nowadays, the drinking water is still commonly retrieved from groundwater, but once it bubbles to the surface it becomes a roadside attraction. Freshwater springs support flourishing ecosystems that heavily depend on the health of the springs. However, the health of

springs across The United States are diminishing due to human interaction (Northwest Florida Water Management). There is no evidence that supports this when it comes to the freshwater springs of Mississippi, but it is safe to assume that this carries over to the state of Mississippi. Freshwater springs were once used as indicators of aquifer health. When we first started using aquifers as city-supplied water sources, freshwater springs could be monitored to show that the water was still safe. However, modern water-testing techniques make this practice obsolete. This means that it is no longer profitable to monitor the health of freshwater springs in Mississippi. The results of my research show that freshwater springs in Mississippi have historical significance and are still used as recreational resources by people that live close to them, but are not monitored or cared for in a way that they should be, as our amount of interaction with the local environment has grown, meaning that the effects on ecosystems, freshwater spring ecosystems included, has also grown.

## **Conclusion**

My goal for this paper was to find a connection of ecological existence between freshwater springs across Mississippi based on the historical interaction between people and the springs. I had hoped to find a pattern between human-use of the springs and the ecological progress that the springs encountered. However, my findings were purely of historical significance. I found that freshwater springs across Mississippi were very significant in the Civil War and served as the homes for small hospitals, as the waters were believed to have healing properties. The springs also have cultural significance in that many served as gathering places for travelers and local communities. However, my research fell short on the side of ecological development. Freshwater springs serve as the only source of life for many of the organisms that

surround them. So, the health of these springs is crucial to the survival of many ecosystems and the importance of these small ecosystems may play a bigger role in the survival of the large-scale ecosystem than we realize. There is no record of how many animals use each spring as the only source of freshwater, but it can be assumed that that is the case for multiple groups of animals. These freshwater springs also serve as recreation for many people, especially in the bass-fishing community. So, a more comprehensive study into the current ecological health of these freshwater springs needs to be performed. It is not profitable to monitor the health of a spring that is not directly connected to a groundwater aquifer that city drinking water is taken from. However, it could be a significant indicator of general ecosystem health.

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