

# Interstate 81 Construction and it's Devastating Effects on the New River

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All over the New River Valley construction is being done to accommodate the widely growing population of people. This can be seen through the construction of new stores, new subdivisions, as well as expanding roadways to better handle heavy traffic that flows in and out of the area. One such area of concern that has been under construction for nearly two years is the bridge on Interstate 81 directly over the New River. The roadway will have expanded ramps for increased safety as the traffic volume on this stretch of the interstate has increased dramatically over the last decade. The section of the river under the construction site is popular for fishermen and other recreational activities such as boating. Those who participate in recreational activities near the bridge often use it as a source of shade during hot summer months.



Due to being located near a somewhat highly populated area the New River has faced criticism for decades about cleanliness and water quality. Construction near streams and rivers tend to have increased sediment and the pattern of the stream changes.

According to the American Society of Agronomy, the construction of new highways has a wide range of negative effects on the environment from sedimentation, habitat degradation, changing of leaf processing and introduction of toxic materials to the environment from construction. Studies have continued to truly understand the long-term effects of highway construction on habitats both in the stream and out.

As the population continues to grow so do the demands on the environment as well. The interstate system built during President Dwight D. Eisenhower's era over 60 years ago is facing much needed repairs to meet the incredible demands of traffic now traveled yearly on the interstate. The increased demand for construction materials to fix and add to the interstate system has placed strains on the environment not yet seen before as well as construction at the sites which are having a negative impact on the environment by increasing sediment in the streams and rivers. This increased sediment reduces habitat for organisms such as macroinvertebrates and will eventually reach up the food web to larger species.



Credit: William Paine

Reference:

Chen Y., Viadero R., Wei X., Fortney R., Hedrick L. (2008) Effects of Highway Construction on Stream Quality and Macroinvertebrate Condition in a Mid-Atlantic Highlands Watershed, USA, *Journal of Environmental Quality*. (38) 1672-1682.

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