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# 2013

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# America's Most Endangered Rivers® 2013

The *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® report is one of the best-known and longest-lived annual reports in the environmental movement. Each year since 1986, grassroots river conservationists have teamed up with American Rivers to use the report to save their local rivers, consistently scoring policy successes that benefit these rivers and the communities through which they flow.

American Rivers reviews nominations for the *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® report from river groups and concerned citizens across the country. Rivers are selected based upon the following criteria:

- A major decision (that the public can help influence) in the coming year on the proposed action
- The significance of the river to human and natural communities
- The magnitude of the threat to the river and associated communities, especially in light of a changing climate

The report highlights ten rivers whose fate will be decided in the coming year, and encourages decision-makers to do the right thing for the rivers and the communities they support.

The report is not a list of the nation's "worst" or most polluted rivers, but rather it highlights rivers confronted by critical decisions that will determine their future.

The report presents alternatives to proposals that would damage rivers, identifies those who make the crucial decisions, and points out opportunities for the public to take action on behalf of each listed river.

## About American Rivers

American Rivers is the leading organization working to protect and restore the nation's rivers and streams. Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Since 1973, American Rivers has fought to preserve these connections, helping protect and restore more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and the annual release of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*®.

Headquartered in Washington, D.C., American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 100,000 supporters, members, and volunteers nationwide. Visit [www.AmericanRivers.org](http://www.AmericanRivers.org), [www.facebook.com/americanrivers](http://www.facebook.com/americanrivers), and [www.twitter.com/americanrivers](http://www.twitter.com/americanrivers).

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Photo: Bhanu Tadinada

# Colorado River

# #1

Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, Wyoming

Threat: Outdated water management

At Risk: Recreation economy, water supply, agriculture, and wildlife habitat

## Summary

The Colorado River is a lifeline in the desert— its water sustaining tens of millions of people and endangered fish and wildlife in seven states. However, demand on the river's water now exceeds its supply, leaving the river so over-tapped that it no longer flows to the sea. A century of water management policies and practices that have promoted wasteful water use have put the river at a critical crossroads. To address ongoing drought and increasing demand for water due to climate change, and to put the Colorado River on a path to recovery, the U.S. Congress must support robust funding of critical programs like WaterSmart that address water supply sustainability in the Colorado River Basin and across the West.

## The River

Thirty-six million people from Denver to Los Angeles drink Colorado River water. The river irrigates nearly 4 million acres of land, which grows 15% of the nation's crops. Millions of tourists flock to the banks of the river and its tributaries each year for boating, fishing, birding, hunting, and hiking, which adds up to a \$26 billion dollar recreation economy. Its water and wetlands provide habitat for migrating birds and four federally-listed endangered species of fish. Bighorn sheep, elk, mule deer, bear, and mountain lion prowl its banks.

More than one hundred dams have been built on the Colorado River and its tributaries for flood control, hydropower, and agricultural and municipal water supply. Despite the benefits of dam building and irrigation, over-allocation and drought have placed significant stress on reservoirs and water storage. Dams have fundamentally changed the river ecosystem, impacting fish, wildlife, and recreation, as well as natural and cultural resources in places like Dinosaur National Monument, Canyonlands National Park, and Grand Canyon National Park.

## The Threat

According to the Bureau of Reclamation's *Colorado River Basin Water Supply and Demand Study* (December 2012), there is not enough water in the Colorado River to meet the Basin's current water demands, let alone to support future demand increases from growing populations in an era of climate change. The Colorado River is often called one of the most controlled and plumbed rivers on the planet. More dams and diversions are planned, especially in the upper basin in Colorado. Currently multiple projects are being proposed along the Front Range of Colorado that would remove more than 300,000 acre feet of new water from the Colorado River and its tributaries— all of this would be removed even before the river reaches Lake Powell and Lake Mead.



Photo: Peter McBride



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Climate change is expected to reduce Colorado River's flow by 10 to 30 percent by 2050. Warmer weather, less snow, a reduction in stream runoff, and changed timing of spring runoff are all likely impacts. Currently scheduled water deliveries from the Colorado system are not sustainable in the future if climate change reduces runoff even by as little as 10 percent. With snowpack once again below average, extreme drought conditions will likely persist when water is needed most.

### What Must Be Done

The Colorado River is the lifeline of the Southwest, and is truly the economic foundation of a significant portion of the western United States. Managing the severely drained Colorado River in ways that are compatible with growing needs in the Basin is a formidable but inescapable task. The Bureau of Reclamation's recent study examines a wide range of proposals to ensure the region has the water it needs for the economy, environment, and quality of life. The Federal government must immediately follow this study with bold action to build a future that includes healthy rivers, state-of-the-art water conservation for cities and agriculture, and water sharing mechanisms that allow communities to adapt to warmer temperatures and more erratic precipitation.



Photo: National Park Service, Mark Lellouch

In 2013, the United States Congress must fund programs that encourage sustainable water supply management in the Colorado Basin while protecting rivers and the water supply, businesses, and wildlife they support. Specifically, the U.S. Congress must prioritize funding in the Colorado River Basin to:



Photo: Matt Inden-Miles, Colorado Tourism

- 1) Support robust and effective funding levels for the Bureau of Reclamation's WaterSmart and Title XVI Water Reclamation and Reuse programs. These programs help stakeholders to optimize existing water infrastructure, maximize available water supplies, and provide healthy river flows for communities and ecosystems.
- 2) Support cost-effective investments in existing water supply infrastructure, and ensure that operations of existing storage can efficiently maximize water delivery in reliable quantities.
- 3) Prioritize funding for water efficiency and conservation programs.

- 4) Ensure that funding promotes the protection of rivers by directing management decisions that maintain and restore flows needed for river health in critical areas of the Basin.

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Photo: Christopher Drummond

# Flint River

# #2

Georgia

Threat: Outdated water management

At Risk: Water supply for communities, farms, recreation, and wildlife

## Summary

The Flint River provides water for over one million people, 10,000 farms, unique wildlife, and 300 miles of exceptional fishing and paddling. Despite being in a historically wet area of the country, in recent years many Flint River tributaries are drying up completely and the river's low flows have dropped dramatically. American Rivers and Flint Riverkeeper are working in collaboration with diverse partners to restore the flows and health of the Flint. The State of Georgia also has a role to play and must act to protect the Flint in droughts and at all times to safeguard the river's health for today and future generations.

## The River

The Flint River is a major portion of the Apalachicola-Chattahoochee-Flint basin shared by Florida, Alabama, and Georgia. It provides water to approximately one million people in southern metropolitan Atlanta and communities throughout west and southwest Georgia. The river supports many billions of dollars' worth of urban, agricultural, and recreational economic activity.

The Flint is home to the highest diversity of fish in any Gulf Coast drainage east of the Mississippi, including a world-class fishery for the endemic shoal bass and many other rare species such as the Halloween darter and five federally protected mussel species. It offers superb paddling, including Class I-III whitewater in the scenic Pine Mountain area.



Photo: Keith Larson

## The Threat

The Flint is a river running dry. The reasons are many, and include urbanization at the river's headwaters, water demand from communities in the upper Flint basin, intensive agricultural water use in the lower basin, and frequent and prolonged drought. The Flint's low-flow problems are a reminder that water scarcity is increasingly a serious issue in all regions of the country.

In the lower Flint basin, the over-permitting and over-pumping of the Floridan Aquifer—and the drying-up of major streams in the Flint watershed as a consequence—presents a difficult water management balancing act that rivals challenges on the Great Plains and in California. The upper Flint presents challenges that more and more communities will face wherever urbanization, drought, and water demand strain limited surface water resources. Throughout the Flint basin, proactive and collaborative work to address these water quantity challenges is critical to ensuring the sustainability of communities and the river ecosystem.



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Since 1975, low flow rates in the lower river have decreased 40 percent, and in tributaries and the upper river over 70 percent. Severe low flows have impacted property values and traditional uses, such as fishing and recreation, and critically threaten endangered fish and mussel populations. The river's southernmost major tributary, Spring Creek, home to three federally protected species, has gone dry in nine of the last 11 years, including non-drought years.



Photo: Stephen Golladay

Recreational paddling opportunities in the scenic upper river have declined over the last decade because the river runs low so often, especially in the warm months of the year. Climate models predict more frequent and intense droughts in the future, promising to make the low-flow issues increasingly dire for recreation, wildlife, and communities.

### What Must Be Done

The complex water quantity challenges throughout the Flint River basin have developed over decades and will not be solved quickly.

Collaboration among all water users and all stakeholders in a healthy Flint River is the key to meeting these challenges.

American Rivers and Flint Riverkeeper have just completed a new assessment of the upper portion of the basin, pointing toward solutions for that part of the river system. The organizations are working on a multi-year project to restore healthy flows in the upper Flint basin— working with municipal water providers, water users, residents, businesses, landowners, congregations, non-profits, state officials, and all who depend on a vibrant, flowing Flint River. Similar collaborative efforts in the lower Flint basin, focused on agricultural water use, hold great potential for finding solutions for restoring the Flint. There are many factors contributing to the Flint's low-flow problems, and just as many opportunities for those who depend on the river system to help restore it.

Meanwhile, the state of Georgia also must address flows throughout the Flint basin. The Georgia Environmental Protection Division must work to develop ecologically-based, enforceable healthy flow requirements for drought and non-drought conditions to protect the economic and ecological vitality of the river system. The State of Georgia must help find solutions that will allow for the reasonable use of water in the Flint basin in a way that improves flows in the river for the benefit of all river functions, users, and future generations.

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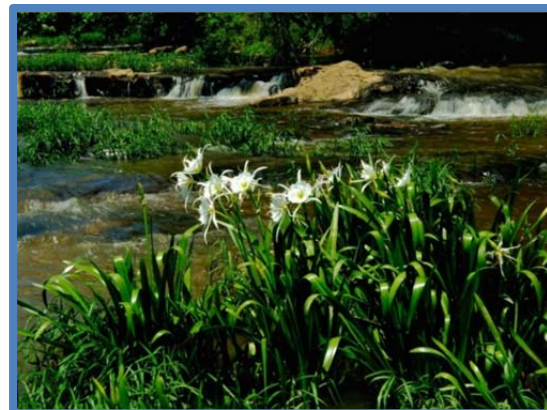


Photo: Christopher Drummond

### How You Can Help

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Photo: Loren Granstaff, Friends of the San Saba

# San Saba River

# #3

Texas

Threat: Outdated water management

At Risk: River flow for ranchers, citizens, and lakes

## Summary

The San Saba River is a scenic waterway located on the northern boundary of the Edwards Plateau in Texas. Flows of sparkling, clear water course through limestone bluffs and hills, supporting fish, wildlife, and recreation. Through wasteful water use and unregulated pumping, irrigators are transforming a vibrant, pristine river into a dried-up riverbed. The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality must enforce the law to ensure adequate flows are maintained. Further, the Texas Legislature should appoint a watermaster on the upper stretch of the San Saba River to better manage flows and protect the river long-term.

## The River

The Hill Country and its rivers are often regarded as the most scenic landscape in Texas. The San Saba River, a tributary of the Colorado River (of Texas), is regarded by many as the most pristine of these rivers. The river serves municipalities, waters livestock and crops, provides recreation for citizens, and supplies water to the Austin chain of lakes that ultimately flow to the Gulf of Mexico. Huge burr oak and pecan trees line the banks of the San Saba. The river is home to rare mussels that scientists believe exist nowhere else on earth, numerous types of amphibians, and many species of fish, including Guadalupe bass found only in the Hill Country rivers.

A river steeped in history, the Spanish established the first mission north of San Antonio on the banks of the San Saba in 1764, only to see it destroyed two years later by fierce Comanche warriors. Later, Jim Bowie searched for his fabled mine, and eventually the Texas Rangers established a camp on the San Saba from which they guarded the Pegleg stagecoach crossing.



Photo: Robb Kendrick/National Geographic Stock

## The Threat

Texas law provides that all natural surface water found in rivers is owned by the state and is held in trust for its citizens. There are no sealed meters and no accurate methods for the state to know whether irrigators around Menard, Texas, are exceeding their allowed limits. The irrigators have been diverting the river's flow into a gravel-bottomed canal (where 30 percent or more is lost due to leakage). Moreover, some irrigators place extremely shallow wells next to the river to pull water from the river under the guise of groundwater wells. This unregulated pumping in the last twelve years has almost dried up over 50 miles of the river for an average of five months of the



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Photo: Loren Granstaff, Friends of the San Saba

year. This hurts downstream ranchers who need water, damages the river ecosystem, and negatively impacts the Austin chain of lakes.

While pumping is certainly legal by permitted landowners, such permit holders are required to leave a flow in the river sufficient to service the domestic and livestock users downstream. In 2011, after priority calls were made by ranchers, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) did the right thing and suspended pumping. The river filled up and flowed again despite irrigators' claims that it was drought— not excessive pumping— that had dried up the river. When irrigators pumped the river dry again in 2012, the TCEQ inexplicably denied the priority calls from downstream

ranchers, refusing to enforce the law because they claimed they did not feel the suspension would result in restored river flows. This position was puzzling since the flow returned to the river after the suspension in 2011— the year of the worst drought in more than 60 years.

## What Must Be Done

Enhanced enforcement of the existing law is needed to ensure the river continues to flow. Ultimately, the appointment of a watermaster on the upper stretch of the San Saba River is necessary to monitor stream flows and water use, enhance Highland Lake levels, and prevent the wasting of water and its use in quantities beyond a user's right. In the past, Texas has successfully implemented such a system on other rivers whereby the watermaster regulates the pumping so that the river maintains a stable flow. The legislature should appoint a watermaster for the river's upper stretch to maintain the health of the river for its many users, the Highland Lakes, and the coastal Bays.

The TCEQ is the state agency responsible for protecting the state's rivers. However, with no meters to regulate how much water is actually being pumped, and given the State's ineffective and underfunded enforcement program, the San Saba River has no protection. Based on TCEQ records obtained through the Public Information Act, there has been illegal pumping and management irregularities in this basin. The agency must act to enforce the law and stop waste and abuse. To do this, TCEQ should require sealed meters to monitor pumping activity, eliminate shallow water wells, and suspend pumping when flow is threatened.

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Photo: Loren Granstaff, Friends of the San Saba

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Photo: Amy Thorstenson, Friends of the Little Plover (1997)

# Little Plover River

# #4

Wisconsin

Threat: Outdated water management

At Risk: Fish habitat and water supply

## Summary

The Little Plover River flows six miles from clear, cold headwater springs before joining the Wisconsin River. However, dramatic increases in groundwater withdrawals have reduced river flows. Once prized for native brook trout and popular with anglers, the river's flow has decreased to levels that threaten the persistence of fish populations. In the past decade, portions of the Little Plover River were repeatedly sucked dry, making the river the unfortunate poster child for Wisconsin's inadequate groundwater management. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources must adequately manage High Capacity Water Wells to safeguard the Little Plover and other rivers and lakes across the state.

## The River

The Little Plover River has always been a magnet for anglers. In the early 1900's, local newspaper archives report trout catches in excess of 100 fish in one day. Today, the Little Plover remains a destination for anglers as a Class I trout stream, retaining a smaller population of its native brook trout. Designated a Wisconsin Legacy Place, the Little Plover River's historical importance to indigenous people is evident by the density of arrow heads that have been found along its banks.



Photo: USFWS

Demands on the groundwater that feeds the Little Plover River include the drinking water for a population of 14,000, as well as 5500 acres of irrigated crops, a vegetable processing plant, and a paper mill— all water-intensive uses. Located in the central sands of Wisconsin, immortalized by Aldo Leopold's Sand County Almanac, the soil requires heavy irrigation. The value of agricultural products grown in the county tops \$145 million, but at the cost of area rivers and lakes.

## The Threat

Today the Little Plover River is under great stress and its story has become a sad cautionary tale. Since shallow groundwater sources often provide water to rivers, High Capacity Wells (with a pump capacity of 100,000 or more gallons per day) can have as much or more impact on river flow than surface pipes directly drawing water from the river. Taking water from all directions can cause rivers to run dry if enough water is withdrawn. Models based on 60 years of data show reductions in flow in the Little Plover River beginning in the mid-1970's, with more than half the historic flow missing by 2006. This reduction mirrors the more than doubling of the number of irrigation wells, which now account for about 85% of water withdrawals in the Little Plover Basin since 1980; it is compounded by municipal and industrial wells pulling from the same source.



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Photo: Barb Feltz, Friends of the Little Plover River (2005)

The Little Plover River, along with several lakes in the Central Sands region, has been the most visible victim of poor groundwater management, but the problem is statewide. Wisconsin is a water-rich state, but groundwater, the water source for 70% of the population and over 90% of water used for farming and industry, is limited. Wisconsin law leaves streams, lakes, and wetlands unprotected from excessive groundwater pumping, and does not require consideration of the impacts of High Capacity Wells and their cumulative effects on groundwater supply or groundwater-dependent surface waters except in limited circumstances. Nearly all water resources are left high and dry by current law, and there is no mechanism to restore water to clearly impacted resources such as the Little Plover River.

## What Must Be Done

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) must enforce public flow orders for the Little Plover River. In 2006, a task force of stakeholders facilitated by the DNR was formed to address excessive groundwater pumping that was causing low stream flows and ultimately drying up the river and impacting the ability to sustain healthy fish populations. The establishment of public rights flows (PRF) for the Little Plover was a direct byproduct of the deliberations of the task force. The PRF, or water level necessary to protect public rights and interests, may not be lowered. This means that lower flows, where they can be attributed to excessive groundwater pumping, must be restored by better managing that pumping. Without enforcement, however, the PRF is ignored, pumping is not regulated and managed, and the river is in danger of running dry, while High Capacity Well permitting continues unabated with little, if any, oversight.

Wisconsin DNR needs to develop and implement management plans for maintaining adequate water flows and regulate High Capacity Wells throughout the state in order to protect other water users and the environment from overuse. The state has ignored the impact of High Capacity Wells for long enough. It is time to take the interests of local residents, fish, and wildlife into account and find a balance between development of High Capacity Wells and healthy river flows, before Wisconsin loses its waters and its natural heritage.

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Photo: Jim Gifford, Friends of the Little Plover River (2011)

## How You Can Help

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Photo: Catawba Riverkeeper

# Catawba River

# #5

North Carolina and South Carolina

Threat: Coal ash pollution

At Risk: Drinking water and recreational enjoyment

## Summary

Millions of people in the Southeast depend on the Catawba River for drinking water and recreation. However, storage ponds for coal ash, a byproduct of power generation, are threatening the river and local water supply with pollution. North Carolina's Department of Environment and Natural Resources must require Duke Energy's Riverbend power plant to ensure the coal ash ponds are sufficiently maintained in perpetuity to safeguard the river and water supply for future generations.

## The River

The Catawba River begins as hundreds of feet of beautiful waterfalls in the North Carolina mountains. It flows for 300 miles through 11 dammed lakes before reaching the coastal wetlands of South Carolina. Every spring, thousands of people flock to kayak and canoe the free-flowing section of the river in South Carolina, where the world's largest population of rocky shoal spider lilies bloom. In addition, thousands of people use the 11 major lakes on the Catawba River for swimming, fishing, and boating.



Photo: Jeff Cravotta, flight by Southwings

Catawba means 'people of the river,' and for hundreds of years, the river's clean, plentiful water has supported Native Americans and settlers. Today, the basin continues to experience some of the nation's most rapid growth. More than 1.5 million people in Charlotte, Gastonia, Hickory, Rock Hill, and elsewhere depend on the Catawba for drinking water and power generation.

## The Threat

Coal ash is formed at coal-fired power plants when coal is burned in boilers that generate steam for power generation. In the Catawba watershed, coal ash and scrubber residue has been dumped into 551 acres of ponds—all lacking liners to prevent groundwater contamination. These ponds are permitted to discharge—even into drinking water reservoirs—arsenic, selenium, and other carcinogens at concentrations that far exceed the EPA Maximum Contaminant Levels for drinking water. Decades of unlimited coal ash pond discharges have caused extreme soil and water contamination in Catawba drinking water reservoirs.

The impact of the discharge of these contaminants will multiply as more water is withdrawn from the river and flows decrease over time, with increasing demand and more frequent drought. Potential new reservoirs and water transfers within the Catawba system will only exacerbate the problem caused by this coal ash pollution.



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Four coal ash ponds that sit almost 80 feet above the banks of the Catawba River are listed on the EPA list of 44 High Hazard Coal Ash Impoundments. These aging ponds pose a catastrophic security threat as drinking water

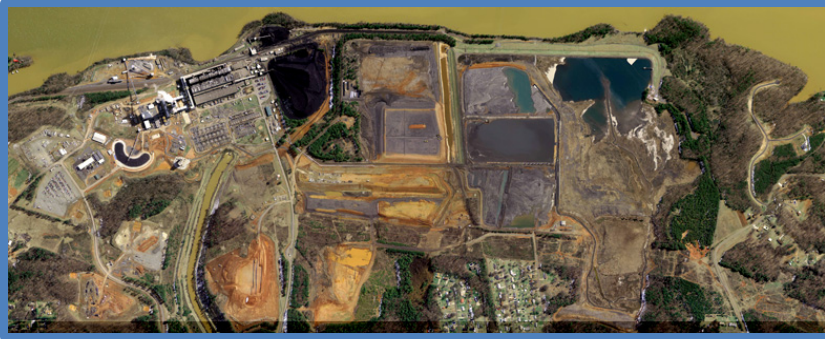


Photo: Catawba Riverkeeper

reservoirs and billions of dollars of property could be destroyed should one of the coal ash pond dams fail, as happened in 2008 at the Tennessee Valley Authority's Kingston Fossil Plant. The clean-up for the Kingston coal ash spill has already cost more than \$1.5 billion—and that bill will continue to climb for years to come, with some damage that no amount of money can fix. The Kingston facility was newer than Riverbend, and impacted an area much more rural and less of a critical drinking water source than Mountain Island Lake. For a massive spill to happen amidst the most populated area in North Carolina would be absolutely catastrophic.

At Riverbend Steam Station, a coal-fired power plant that sits on the drinking water source for 860,000 people, problems have appeared at the dam holding back the coal ash pond. Seeps are now coming out of the dam on all sides and into the reservoir. These discharges are neither monitored nor permitted. Duke Energy and the North Carolina Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) have known about the seeps and have even channelized them into French drains— sending the polluted water through the soil into the surrounding land (for which there are no plans to remediate). This is a major issue given that there are hundreds of acres of coal ash ponds within a 28-mile span above and below this site — all of which could end up leaking in the future.

### What Must Be Done

The Riverbend Steam Station, one of Duke Energy's oldest coal-fired power plants, is scheduled to close in April 2013. However, no plans or precedent exist to clean up the 3.2 million cubic yards of toxic waste from its 71 acres of coal ash ponds. These dams have questionable long-term stability. Without cleanup, the ponds will gradually seep into and contaminate Mountain Island Lake, a drinking water reservoir for 860,000 people. Plus, the possibility of dam failure will forever pose a catastrophic threat to the community. The stakes are high to ensure that a good precedent is set for the nation's largest utility. DENR must require Duke Energy to remove contaminated material from the site and dispose of it at a lined, monitored storage site.

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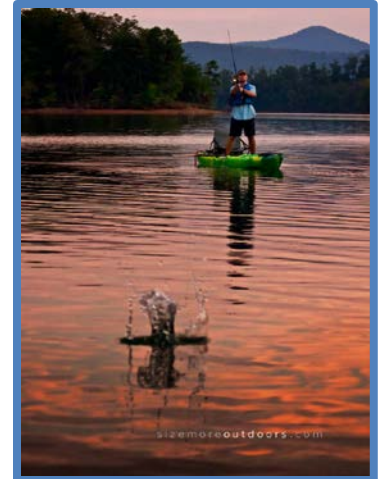


Photo: Trent Sizemore

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Photo: River Point Resort & Canoe Outfitting Co.

# Boundary Waters

# #6

Minnesota

Threat: Copper and nickel mining

At Risk: Recreation economy, drinking water, and wilderness

## Summary

The 1.1 million-acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is the most popular wilderness area in the country. The South Kawishiwi River, which flows into the Boundary Waters, is threatened by copper-nickel mining proposals by Twin Metals Minnesota and others on adjacent unprotected public lands. If mining is permitted, the Boundary Waters and its clean water will be irreparably harmed by acid mine drainage containing sulfates and heavy metals. President Obama, Congress, and Minnesota's Governor Dayton must block proposals to mine and efforts to weaken water quality standards in this sensitive and well-loved area.

## The River

The Boundary Waters has high recreational, ecological, cultural, and economic value. The beautiful landscape of forests, lakes, and rivers of the Boundary Waters has historically attracted as many as 250,000 visitors annually. The Boundary Waters is a popular fishing destination for walleye, northern pike, and smallmouth bass. Wolves, lynx, moose, bear, loons, bald eagles, and osprey inhabit this area. The Boundary Waters is protected for Native American cultural values and use (e.g., hunting, fishing, and gathering wild rice). The U.S. Forest Service has estimated that the Superior National Forest contributes \$500 million to the regional economy each year, of which \$100 million is attributed to the Boundary Waters. The South Kawishiwi River is a critical waterway into this great wilderness and an important canoe route and Boundary Waters entry point. The significance of the river is underscored by the four protected research sites in the area, including two natural areas and an experimental forest.



Photo: © 2013 Jim Brandenburg

## The Threat

The Boundary Waters is endangered by a proposal to create a massive copper-nickel mine adjacent to the South Kawishiwi River and within two miles of the Boundary Waters. The Boundary Waters watershed is also negatively impacted by extensive exploration for additional mine sites. If copper-nickel mines are developed, polluted waters from the South Kawishiwi will flow through some of the most popular Boundary Waters lakes, including the iconic Basswood.

According to the EPA (*Toxic Release Inventory: 2010 National Analysis*), hardrock mining produces more releases of toxic materials than any other industry. Approximately 99% of the rock extracted in the proposed mine



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will be waste. When this waste rock interacts with water and air, sulfuric acid and toxic metals will be released. Similar mines throughout America generate hundreds of millions of gallons of acid mine drainage and will require active water treatment for thousands of years to avoid complete destruction of streams and groundwater.



Photo: © 2013 Jim Brandenburg

With the Boundary Waters and Superior National Forest as a magnet, vibrant local economies have developed in Ely, Grand Marais, and other communities around the Wilderness. Large numbers of vacation home owners, retirees, and quality-of-life residents provide an economic and tax base for the area. Scores of diverse businesses thrive because of the economic activity generated by tourism and residents attracted to the region. Poisoning of the Boundary Waters would drastically, if not fatally, undermine these thriving local economies.

### What Must Be Done

This year, Congress may consider an exchange of Superior National Forest lands with state lands for the purpose of promoting copper-nickel mining. The State of Minnesota will auction mineral leases on lands within the watershed of the Boundary Waters, and efforts to challenge state and federal water quality regulations will intensify. These actions will advance the development of sulfide mines and lead to more mineral exploration and mining pollution within the Boundary Waters watershed. Recent polls in Minnesota have revealed a growing concern among the public. The Boundary Waters ecosystem with its network of lakes, streams, and forests is a high-risk location for a copper-nickel mine. This is an area where sulfide mining pollution is unacceptable.

President Obama, Congress, and Minnesota's Governor Dayton must oppose the development of the massive Twin Metals Minnesota mine, all land exchanges intended to turn over public lands to mining companies, and state mineral leasing within the Boundary Waters watershed. Further, they must defend a healthy Boundary Waters region by strengthening and enforcing Minnesota and federal water quality regulations and expanding mining protection zones around the Boundary Waters.

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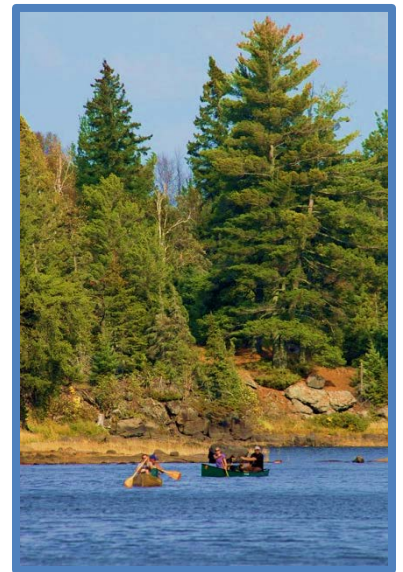


Photo: Carlyn Iverson

### How You Can Help

- Go to [www.americanrivers.org/BoundaryWaters](http://www.americanrivers.org/BoundaryWaters) and TAKE ACTION!
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Photo: Nelson Brooke

# Black Warrior River

# #7

Alabama

Threat: Coal mining

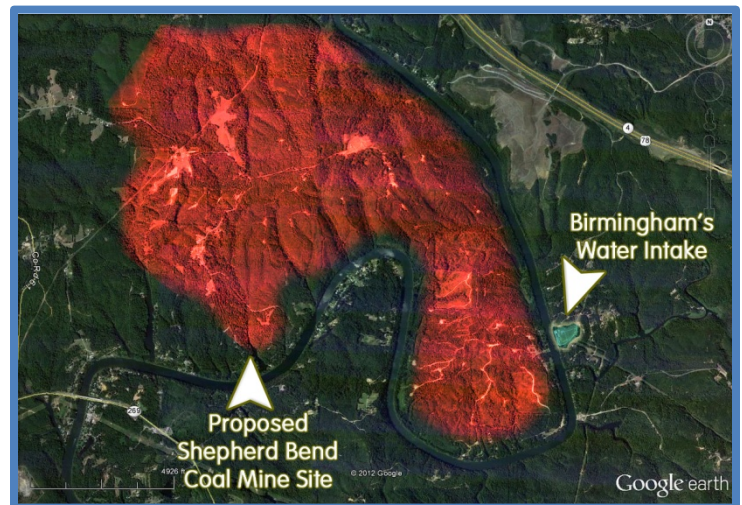
At Risk: Drinking water quality and fish and wildlife habitat

## Summary

The Black Warrior River is a valuable resource for drinking water, recreation, fishing, and rare fish and wildlife. However, the river's Mulberry Fork is threatened by the Shepherd Bend Mine, a 1,773 acre coal mine which would discharge polluted wastewater only 800 feet from a major drinking water intake. To mine the proposed area, Drummond Company must obtain leases from property owners, particularly the University of Alabama. The University must stand up for the health of area residents, students, and drinking water customers by permanently refusing to sell or lease its land and mineral rights at Shepherd Bend for coal mining.

## The River

Flowing for roughly 300 miles, the Black Warrior watershed covers 6,276 square miles and is home to over one million residents. Its headwaters consist of the Wild and Scenic Sipsey Fork, which, along with the Mulberry and Locust forks, is rated in the top 2% of United States streams by the National Park Service for outstanding recreational values. The Black Warrior River watershed is home to 127 freshwater fish species (4 federally endangered), 36 species of mussels (5 federally endangered), 15 turtle species (1 federally threatened), and numerous other aquatic species.



Once widely inhabited by Native Americans, the watershed now provides drinking water to many of Alabama's population centers, including Tuscaloosa (home of the University of Alabama) and Birmingham (Alabama's largest city, which obtains approximately half its drinking water from the watershed). The river and its tributaries are national destinations for fishing, boating, paddling, swimming, and other recreation.

## The Threat

Drinking water for the greater Birmingham area is threatened by a proposed coal mine on property primarily owned by the University of Alabama. Drummond Company's Shepherd Bend Mine would discharge wastewater into the Black Warrior River's Mulberry Fork only 800 feet from the Birmingham Water Works Board's intake, which provides drinking water for 200,000 citizens.



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Photo: Nelson Brooke

The Birmingham Water Works Board has offered detailed information about how wastewater discharges from this mine would introduce sediment and toxic pollutants, such as heavy metals, into the drinking water supply. This water contamination could potentially lead to increased treatment costs for customers and decreased water quality. Coal mining communities are also at increased risk of developing cardiopulmonary disease, hypertension, lung disease, and kidney disease.

Permits already approved by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) and the Alabama Surface Mining Commission (ASMC) allow wastewater discharges containing 10 times the level of iron and 40 times the level of manganese recommended by the Safe Drinking Water Act. Health and engineering experts have encouraged UA not to rely on ADEM's and ASMC's judgment, stating that the issued permits are not sufficiently protective of water quality. The permits are inadequate for protection of the river and the drinking water supply for 200,000 people daily.

Drummond has a poor track record; many permit violations at their mines have been documented in recent years. Should contamination issues arise at this mine, it is unlikely state environmental agencies will initiate timely and effective enforcement action to address problems, hold them accountable, and deter future violations.

### What Must Be Done

As owner of large portions of land and mineral rights at Shepherd Bend, UA has been asked by countless citizens, businesses, and organizations to take a stand against the mine. However, the coal industry maintains powerful influence throughout Alabama, including sway over UA System's Board of Trustees, where Drummond Company's CEO, Garry Neil Drummond, is a Trustee Emeritus. While the University and Trustees claim they have no plans to sell or lease their land and mineral rights at this time, students, the local community, and drinking water customers deserve permanent reassurance. The UA System Trustees must publicly guarantee they will never sell or lease UA's land and mineral rights at Shepherd Bend for mining, in order to ensure a healthy future for the Black Warrior River and the communities that depend upon it.

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Photo: Nelson Brooke

### How You Can Help

- Go to [www.americanrivers.org/BlackWarrior](http://www.americanrivers.org/BlackWarrior) and TAKE ACTION!
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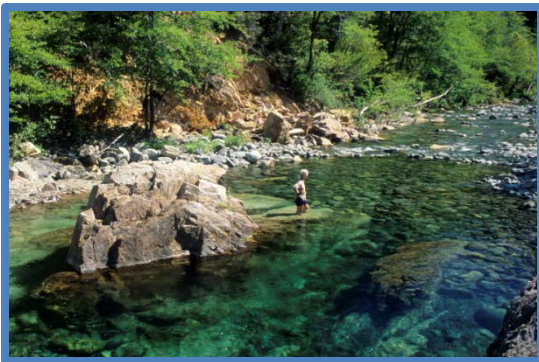


Photo: Barbara Ullian

# Rough & Ready and Baldface Creeks

# #8

Oregon

Threat: Nickel strip mines

At Risk: Pristine rivers, wilderness, botanical diversity, and recreation

## Summary

Rough & Ready and Baldface Creeks, tributaries of the Wild and Scenic Illinois and North Fork Smith rivers, flow clean and clear through some of the wildest country in the West. These eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers are celebrated by wildflower enthusiasts and hikers. Unfortunately, nickel mines threaten to destroy these unique, wild streams. Members of the Oregon Congressional delegation previously asked the Obama Administration to withdraw the area from mining, but the Administration did not act. Congress and the Interior and Agriculture Secretaries must now permanently protect the natural treasures of Rough & Ready and Baldface Creeks from mining before their clean water, fish and wildlife, and wild character are irreparably harmed.

## The River

The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) has found Rough & Ready Creek and Baldface Creek nationally outstanding and eligible to be federally designated as National Wild and Scenic Rivers. Rough & Ready Creek is a tributary of Oregon's Wild and Scenic Illinois River and its watershed has the highest concentration of rare plants in Oregon. Baldface Creek is a phenomenally productive tributary of the Wild and Scenic North Fork Smith River, which flows into California's famous Smith River. The water quality in the creeks was found so exceptional and outstanding by the USFS that this attribute is one of reasons the agency found them worthy of Wild and Scenic designation.



Photo: Barbara Ullian

The creeks also provide pristine habitat for fish and other aquatic life. Rough & Ready Creek's watershed includes an Oregon State Botanical Wayside, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Area of Critical Environmental Concern, a USFS Botanical Area, and a Nature Conservancy Preserve. Baldface Creek is a remote untouched refuge for coho and Chinook salmon, steelhead, and cutthroat trout.

## The Threat

At Rough & Ready Creek, a recently formed mining company has located new claims and submitted a new mining plan to USFS. It includes mining lands recommended as Wilderness, miles of road construction in the Rough & Ready Creek Botanical Area and South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area, and a smelter facility on the Rough & Ready Creek Area of Critical Environmental Concern.



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At Baldface Creek, a foreign-owned mining company has submitted a plan to conduct exploratory drilling at 59 sites in the Baldface Creek/North Fork Smith watershed, across approximately 2,000 acres of the South Kalmiopsis Roadless Area. The information gathered will be used to advance mine development. Baldface Creek's watershed was recommended as Wilderness by the Bush Administration.



Photo: Zachary Collier

The Environmental Protection Agency identified metal mining as the largest toxic polluter in the U.S. Strip mining, road construction, and metal processing would devastate this fragile, precious wild area. If one mine starts operating, thousands of acres of other nickel claims could be developed on nearby federal public lands— impacting designated and eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers and turning one of North America's most important rare plant centers and clean water supplies into an industrial wasteland. The Forest Service already concluded that this type of mining would have drastic and irreversible impacts at Rough & Ready Creek. Dangers include high chromium content smelter waste, naturally occurring asbestos, air and water pollution, and impacts to a world-class salmon and steelhead river.

Members of Oregon's Congressional delegation have repeatedly asked the Obama Administration to help them protect these Oregon treasures by withdrawing the federal lands in the Rough & Ready and Baldface Creek area from the 1872 Mining Law. Despite the extremely high scientific, social, and ecological values at risk, the area remains open to destructive mining and acquisition by mining companies under this unjust antiquated law.

### What Must Be Done

The only way to prevent these priceless lands and waters from being polluted and destroyed by mining is for the Obama Administration to provide interim protection by immediately withdrawing their watersheds from application of the 1872 Mining Law, and for Congress to pass legislation to permanently protect Rough & Ready Creek, Baldface Creek, and the surrounding area from mining. Immediate action is needed to preserve this cherished botanical and recreation wonderland, and the rivers that flow through it, for present and future generations.

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Photo: Barbara Ullian

### How You Can Help

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- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use hashtags #MER2013 and #cleanwater
- Share Rough & Ready Creek posts on our Facebook page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about Rough & Ready and Baldface Creeks to decision-makers and with your friends!

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Photo: [Seattle.roamer](#)

# Kootenai River

# #9

British Columbia, Montana, and Idaho

Threat: Open-pit coal mining

At Risk: Water quality and survival of rare fish and wildlife

## Summary

One of our country's last wild rivers, the Kootenai River provides critical habitat for several rare and threatened native fish species, as well as wildlife like grizzly bear and woodland caribou. However, the river is threatened by runoff and waste from current mining and proposed expansions of five open-pit coal mines along the Elk River in British Columbia, a tributary to the Kootenai. The U.S. State Department must involve the International Joint Commission in order to halt the mine expansions until an independent study of the impact of current and future mines on water quality, fish, and wildlife is completed.

## The River

The Kootenai River is an international watershed encompassing approximately 18,000 square miles of British Columbia, Montana, and Idaho. Its large land area coupled with high levels of precipitation make the Kootenai the second largest tributary of the Columbia River (the largest river in the Pacific Northwest). The Kootenai River and its tributaries attract anglers, paddlers, and other outdoor enthusiasts from across the United States and Canada.

Not only does the Kootenai River provide critical habitat for rare and threatened native fish like white sturgeon, bull trout, and westslope cutthroat trout, it also plays a vital role in maintaining adequate flows for several endangered salmon and steelhead runs in the Columbia River. The steep forested mountains through which the Kootenai River flows are home to bountiful wildlife, including woodland caribou (one of the most endangered mammals in North America), and most of the large carnivores found in the continent's temperate zones, including wolf and grizzly bear.

## The Threat

Large scale open-pit coal mining is currently degrading water quality and impacting fisheries and other aquatic life in the Elk River in British Columbia, which flows into the headwaters of the Kootenai River. Teck Coal operates five open-pit coal mines in the Elk River Valley. Multiple new mines that are being proposed, along with expansions at existing mining operations, are posing unprecedented risks to the clean water, fish and wildlife, and recreation values of the Kootenai River system.



Photo: Garth Lenz



Photo: Gord McKenna [flickr]

Selenium, a naturally-occurring element, is released as a result of the mining, and becomes toxic at very low levels in the aquatic environment. Despite documented violation of provincial and federal water quality guidelines for selenium, four of the five mines are expanding. Each mine expansion is being considered individually, with no legal requirement to evaluate the cumulative water quality and aquatic life impacts from all five mines. In addition to the expansions, one new mine has also been proposed and three large scale exploration projects are currently underway that could lead to even more mine proposals.

Teck Coal's own data show that they have exceeded British Columbia's selenium standard since 2006, with levels steadily increasing and detectable in Montana and Idaho. Selenium is a pollutant that bioaccumulates in the environment. That means its impact multiplies as it moves through the food chain. Elevated levels of selenium have already been detected in Kootenai River fish. Due to selenium contamination, the State of Montana has listed Lake Koocanusa (a dammed section of the Kootenai River on the U.S./Canadian border) as an impaired water body under Section 303(d) of the U.S. Clean Water Act.

### What Must Be Done

British Columbia is expected to issue permits for expansions of two of the five open-pit coal mines in the near future. Both of Montana's Senators have requested that the U.S. State Department investigate the existing and potential downstream impacts from the open-pit coal mines. In addition, a coalition of tribes has requested that the governments of the U.S. and Canada refer this matter to the International Joint Commission (IJC). International scrutiny of the proposed mines expansion, through the objective auspices of IJC, is the best way to ensure protection of water quality and native fisheries in the Kootenai River system.

Specifically, the U.S. State Department should direct the IJC to investigate and report on the current discharges from the five open-pit coal mines, and the current cumulative adverse impacts on water quality, fisheries, wildlife, and the environment. Given the B.C. government's accelerated timeline for approving the mine expansions, the U.S. State Department should also request an immediate moratorium on current mine expansions based on a lack of analysis of the cumulative and downstream impacts to water quality and fish habitat.

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Photo: Garth Lenz

### How You Can Help

- Go to [www.americanrivers.org/KootenaiRiver](http://www.americanrivers.org/KootenaiRiver) and TAKE ACTION!
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Photo: Malmoea

# Niobrara River

# #10

Nebraska, South Dakota, Wyoming

**Threat:** Sediment build-up and flooding  
**At Risk:** Property, crops, and public safety

## Summary

The Niobrara River is an oasis for paddlers, anglers, and wildlife. A major tributary of the Missouri River, the lower portion of the Niobrara is protected as a federal Wild and Scenic River. The Lower Niobrara is increasingly threatened by too much sediment backing up in the upper reaches of Lewis and Clark Lake behind the Missouri River's Gavins Point Dam. The sediment is raising the level of the Niobrara and threatening local communities with flooding. To safeguard the Wild and Scenic Niobrara and its communities, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must improve sediment management within the Missouri River system and must prioritize funding for this critical issue in their Fiscal Year 2015 budget.

## The River

Spectacular bluffs and rolling hills characterize the landscape that surrounds the Niobrara River near its confluence with the Missouri River. This 18-mile stretch of the Lower Niobrara, along with the 39-mile reach of the Missouri River between Ft. Randall Dam and Lewis and Clark Lake and eight miles of Verdigre Creek, were federally protected as Recreational reaches under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1991. Endangered interior least tern and threatened piping plover frequently nest on sandbars along the Lower Niobrara. Bald eagles, river otters, pallid sturgeon, and many other recreational sport fish species inhabit the Lower Niobrara and Missouri National Recreational River, including paddlefish.

Historically, the Niobrara River has been home to both the Ponca Sioux and Santee Sioux Tribes. Recently, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) had to dredge to restore tribal river access due to excess sedimentation near Santee, Nebraska.

## The Threat

Dams and other flood control structures built in the mid-1900's on the Missouri River have caused sediment to accumulate in the reservoir system. When sediment builds up on the riverbed it raises river levels, creating flooding issues for tributaries like the Niobrara River. At one time, most of that sediment was flushed out of the system to the Mississippi River where it helped build coastal wetlands along the Louisiana Delta—keeping saltwater intrusion at bay. Now, reservoirs behind dams act as sediment traps, slowing the flow of the river and allowing sediment to settle, accumulate, and consequently deplete reservoir flood storage capacity. At the same time, water management for navigation using water released from dams has caused lowering of the riverbed below Gavins Point Dam. Without sediment replenishment, it takes more water to serve downstream authorized purposes.



Photo: USFWS



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The sediment build-up is so extreme at the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri Rivers that the overall level of the local water table has increased substantially. This leads to flooded cropland and basements, and greatly impacts boating and other recreation. Flooding due to sedimentation forced relocation of the Village of Niobrara in 1973. Downstream from the confluence, Lewis and Clark Lake is expected to lose 50 percent of its water storage capacity by 2045 due to sediment accumulation in the reservoir— to date, it has already lost 30 percent of capacity.

As the sediment builds within the system, the Lower Niobrara is slowly losing the seeps, springs, riparian forests, prairies, and canyons that characterize this Wild and Scenic River. Only a few of the great cottonwood trees in the confluence area have survived the recent sustained high waters. The USACE has purchased thousands of acres of riverside land to limit future liability, but this is not the long-term answer. The underlying sediment problem must be addressed now to secure a future for this Midwestern treasure.

## What Must Be Done

Conflicts among authorized uses of the Missouri River have made reaching a solution to this problem a challenge. The USACE has released several studies outlining various alternatives for managing the increasing sedimentation on the lower Niobrara. These studies use regulated flows of the Missouri River to flush the accumulating sediment below Gavins Point Dam. Now, the USACE must develop and implement a sediment management plan for the area of the confluence of the Niobrara and Missouri rivers. This plan must implement the minimum flow and the shortest duration needed to transport sediment while minimizing downstream flooding risks. The plan should also include appropriate modifications of Gavins Point Dam and methods to suspend existing sediment deposits.

Furthermore, the USACE must dedicate funding in its Fiscal Year 2015 budget to implement this plan. Without such a plan in place, this one-of-a-kind river will be buried, and its Wild and Scenic qualities will be gone forever. There is increasing urgency to preserve the economic, recreational, natural, and historical assets of the Missouri River Basin for future generations.

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Photo: Joachim S. Müller [flickr]

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## How You Can Help

- Go to [www.americanrivers.org/NiobraraRiver](http://www.americanrivers.org/NiobraraRiver) and TAKE ACTION!
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Photo: Dan Gutwein [flickr]

# Merced River

California

Special  
Mention

Threat: Cutting Wild and Scenic protections  
At Risk: Wildlife habitat and recreation

## Summary

The Wild and Scenic Merced River is a special destination for paddlers, anglers and hikers, and is home to a variety of fish and wildlife, including a rare salamander. These outstanding values are threatened by a proposal to raise the New Exchequer Dam, which would flood a stretch of river and wildlife habitat. Congress must halt legislative proposals to remove Wild and Scenic protections for the purpose of raising the dam. Removing protections would degrade this special place for a very minor amount of water storage capacity, and set a dangerous precedent for Wild and Scenic Rivers across the country.

## The River

The Merced River flows from the Sierra Nevada 135 miles through Yosemite Valley to the Central Valley of California. Along the way it is dammed by the New Exchequer Dam, McSwain Dam, Merced Falls Dam, and Crocker Huffman Dam.

The river was federally designated as Wild and Scenic in two portions (1987 and 1992; 122.5 miles total) to protect its outstanding recreation, wildlife, fisheries, and habitat values. The lower portion of the watershed is home to 26 fish species, including Chinook salmon, Sacramento sucker, and smallmouth and largemouth bass. Steelhead used to swim up to Yosemite Valley before the river was dammed. Nearly 130 species of birds frequent this river valley, including several endangered species, such as White-Tailed Kite and Swainson's Hawk. The limestone salamander, an extremely rare amphibian that is fully protected by California law, is only found in the Merced Canyon downstream of Yosemite Valley, including near the edge of the New Exchequer Dam's reservoir.

## The Threat

The Merced Irrigation District is seeking to remove long-standing Wild and Scenic River protections from a section of the Merced River to pursue raising a spillway at New Exchequer Dam and inundate a stretch of one of California's most remarkable rivers. Representative Tom McClintock has introduced legislation (H.R. 934) that would accomplish this attack on the Wild and Scenic Merced. If the U.S. Congress passes legislation in favor of removing protections from the Merced River, it would mark the first time a federal Wild and Scenic River was stripped of its protected status for the purpose of raising a dam.



Photo: Erick Gustafson [flickr]



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The proposed raising of New Exchequer's spillway by 10 feet would allow Merced Irrigation District to deliver only 2.5 percent more water in an average year. In return, a beautiful recreational and ecological haven would be drowned. In addition, Merced Irrigation District does not need this legislation to conduct the studies necessary to determine whether it is feasible to raise the spillway. It is not clear whether their proposal will meet dam safety concerns, be economically feasible, or comply with state law. It makes no sense to permanently remove Wild and Scenic protections for the Merced before anyone knows if the district's proposed project is even feasible.



Photo: Marije, Peru eta Lili [flickr]

Raising the dam would also harm the limestone salamander, which is listed as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act and has been given "fully protected" status, meaning salamanders and their habitat cannot be harmed at all. The limestone salamander is found in the area surrounding the reservoir, and would certainly be harmed by the proposed raise, in violation of state law.

Not only would H.R. 934 roll back protections for a stretch of the Wild and Scenic Merced River, but it would set a dangerous precedent for other Wild and Scenic rivers across the country. Less than 0.25% of our nation's rivers and streams are protected as Wild and Scenic—citizens fought hard for their protection, and we have a responsibility to ensure their legacy lives on for future generations.

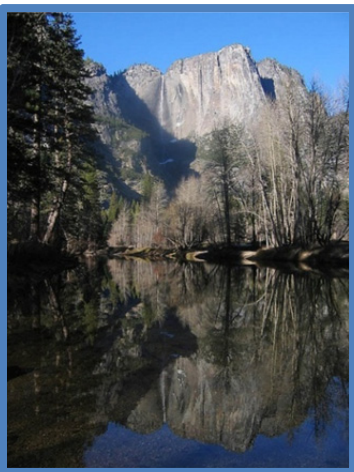


Photo: Dave Ciskowski [flickr]

### What Must Be Done

Congress must prevent any attempts to weaken Wild and Scenic protections for the Merced River by rejecting bills such as H.R. 934. Not only would raising the New Exchequer Dam flood a stretch of one of California's magnificent rivers for a small increase of water storage, but this project would also endanger the existence of the limestone salamander and negatively impact recreation.

Removing a Wild and Scenic designation to raise a dam sets a bad precedent for protected rivers across the country—namely that it is acceptable to flood a Wild and Scenic River, supposedly protected in perpetuity, in order to raise a dam. California is facing a second year of limited water supply due to a below average Sierra snowpack, and this will cause hardship for many in the state. However, the proposed project would not contribute meaningfully toward solving the state's longer-term water challenges. The benefits from raising the New Exchequer Dam are small, and the impacts to the Merced River and the integrity of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System are simply not worth the consequences.

### For More Information:

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Photo: Grant Schweppe [flickr]

### How You Can Help

- Go to [www.americanrivers.org/MercedRiver](http://www.americanrivers.org/MercedRiver) and TAKE ACTION!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2013
- Share Merced River posts on our [Facebook](#) page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about the Merced River to decision-makers and with your friends!

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