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America's 10 Most Endangered Rivers 2008

WASHINGTON, DC, April 17, 2008 (ENS) - Diminished by drought, impounded by 11 hydroelectric dams, and the subject of a U.S. Supreme Court water battle between the states of North and South Carolina, the Catawba-Wateree River today was named the most endangered river in the United States.

The Catawba River begins its 300 mile run to the Atlantic Ocean high in the Blue Ridge mountains of western North Carolina, and flows through the Charlotte metropolitan area before reaching South Carolina, where its name changes to the Wateree River.

This river supplies drinking water to more than a million people along the way and supports the water needs of numerous coal and nuclear power plants. Duke Energy's renewal of its federal license to manage the Catawba is set to expire this year.

"Water will be the oil of the 21st century," said Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers, the conservation group that issues the annual ranking of the country's most endangered rivers.

"Yet all across the country, water mismanagement is on full display as politicians resort to placing another straw in their rivers, or outright stealing water from their neighbors, instead of adopting water policies that will make our communities more resilient in the face of global warming," said Wodder.

Those risks are only exacerbated by global warming, she said.

Each year since 1986, American Rivers has published a list of the 10 most endangered rivers in the country. To select the rivers to list, American Rivers solicits nominations from thousands of river groups, environmental organizations, outdoor clubs, local governments, and taxpayer watchdogs

The report highlights the rivers facing the most uncertain futures rather than those suffering from the worst chronic problems. 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.

Being named as one of America's Most Endangered Rivers is not an end for the river, but rather a beginning, she said. With the listing comes a national spotlight and action from thousands of activists across the country. These 10 rivers have a chance to be reborn, and to serve as models for other rivers all across America.

"These 10 rivers are at a crossroads, and the choices made by local and national decision makers will determine not only the rivers' future, but the future of America's fresh water resources," said Wodder. "Water is a precious resource, we must treat it as such; the future of our communities, our nation, and our planet depends on it."



The Catawba River near its headwaters in North Carolina. A real estate development is planned for this stretch of the river. (Photo courtesy [River Club Lifestyle](http://RiverClubLifestyle.com))

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America's Most Endangered Rivers in 2008 are:

- **#1: Catawba-Wateree River** in North Carolina and South Carolina

While the entire southeastern United States suffers the effects of drought, policy makers want to take more water from the Catawba-Wateree River, rather than focusing on 21st century policies like water conservation and smart development.

Without a major change in direction in public policy, the river that provides drinking water for millions of people, pumps tens of millions of dollars into local economies, and is directly responsible for thousands of jobs could be irreparably damaged; and the communities that depend on it will suffer.

American Rivers says lawmakers in the Carolinas are among the first to reach this ominous fork in the road, and the direction they choose to take will affect water policy in the Southeast for generations.

- **#2: Rogue River** in Oregon

One of America's original Wild and Scenic rivers could soon have its wild character destroyed if a plan to log key Rogue River tributaries moves forward. The clearcuts would choke the river with sediment and harm the unique river experience that draws thousands of boaters and anglers each year.

The fate of the Rouge River lies in the hands of Congress. American Rivers says lawmakers should pass legislation to grant Wild and Scenic River protections to 98 miles of vital tributaries in the lower Rogue canyon and designate the unprotected roadless areas in the Rogue canyon as Wilderness Areas.

- **#3: Poudre River** in Colorado

Colorado's only Wild and Scenic River could soon lose much of its remaining water thanks to a scheme proposed by some decision makers to unnecessarily divert billions of gallons of water away from the Cache la Poudre. Such action could cripple Fort Collins, which has christened the river as one of the town's "economic engines."

The proposed Northern Integrated Supply Project, NISP, would cost homeowners and taxpayers almost a billion dollars, and subject residents and future generations to the debt for 30 years.

The NISP/Glade project, a massive dam-and-reservoir project that would include the 177,000 acre-foot Glade Reservoir, is the largest engineering project proposed along Colorado's Front Range in a quarter century.

If built, the project would divert about 35 percent of the water out of the Poudre River as it flows through Fort Collins, in addition to the 60 percent of water that is already diverted out of the Poudre. It would wipe out a scenic valley just north of Fort Collins and require the relocation of part of Highway 287 at an enormous cost to ratepayers.



These Poudre River advocates say the NISP/Glade project is too expensive and will create more problems than it solves. (Photo courtesy [Save the Poudre](#))

"Because of the NISP/Glade project, Fort Collins has been saddled with a very dubious distinction," said Gary Wockner of the Save The Poudre Coalition.

"Fort Collins and the region have been called the 'Best Place to Live in America' by Money Magazine and a 'New American Dream Town' by Outside Magazine. We can't let the proposed Glade Reservoir drown our city's reputation. We need to stop this project."



"Instead of projects like NISP, we should implement proven and effective water-saving measures," said Wockner. "We also need to work proactively with farmers to find flexible solutions for the benefit of the region - that's the best solution to meeting our water needs, not further draining our rivers."

- **#4: St. Lawrence River** in New York and Canada

Tens of millions of people in two countries depend on the St. Lawrence River. The health and vitality of this North American waterway is threatened by outdated management plans of the Moses-Saunders Dam that date back to the Eisenhower administration. These 50 year old policies continue to harm the river that supplies drinking water to large sections of the United States and Canada.

The Moses-Saunders Power Dam is jointly owned by the New York Power Authority and Ontario Power Generation and generates about two million kilowatts of electricity.

The management plan for the dam is up for revision. Research conducted by more than 180 scientists from both countries agree that the river's vitality can be improved by implementing a plan known as B+.



The Moses-Saunders Dam on the St. Lawrence River (Photo courtesy [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service](#))

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York State Department of State said in a joint statement March 28 that they are "deeply concerned" over the months-long refusal of the International Joint Commission, IJC, to work in good faith with New York State on the plan for Lake Ontario/St. Lawrence River water levels.

"It is our understanding, from several sources, that the IJC intends to go forward with an alternative, dubbed "Plan 2007," which at best, is nearly identical to the ecologically destructive protocol that is currently in place, known as "Plan 1958 DD," the New York State agencies warned.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, NOAA and the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service have all expressed support for Plan B+. Both the New York Power Authority and its Canadian counterpart also prefer Plan B+ because it would improve hydroelectric power production to a significant extent. The only U.S. federal agency to express opposition to Plan B+ is the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation of the U.S. Department of transportation.

The Province of Ontario is still reviewing its options, but Environment Canada has expressed support for Plan B+.

- **#5: Minnesota River** in Minnesota

The first major tributary to the Mississippi River could soon be robbed of much of its water, due to a plan that would build a coal power plant on the shores of Big Stone Lake.

Not only would the proposed Big Stone II project take more than six million gallons of water a day from the Minnesota River, but it would also emit greenhouse gases and mercury into the air.

American Rivers says the power plant would cripple the river that brings tens of millions of dollars into the regional economy and spell disaster for the wildlife that inhabits the Minnesota River.

- **#6: St. Johns River** in Florida

Florida's longest river could soon be robbed of much of its water in an attempt to quench the unending thirst of development in the Sunshine State. The St. Johns River, one of only 14 American Heritage Rivers in the country, is an

ecological wonderland that may be damaged or destroyed by water withdrawal.

Thriving economies in the region that depend on tourism and recreation dollars. Some of the fastest growing counties in America lie in the St. Johns' watershed and the region's population is expected to double to more than six million people by 2025.

The average Floridian uses 160 gallons of water a day; the average American uses only 100 gallons. American Rivers says conservation is the answer that will protect the St. Johns and allow Florida to continue to grow.

In addition, the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus in the lower St. Johns River exceeds the amount the river can receive and maintain its health, which in the past has led to harmful algal blooms. The St. Johns River Water Management District mounted a campaign April 1 designed to heighten awareness of river health issues, educate the public on how human behaviors impact the river and motivate positive behavioral changes.

- **#7 Gila River** in New Mexico and Arizona

New Mexico's last free flowing river could soon see some of its water diverted. American Rivers is concerned that New Mexico's Interstate Stream Commission is considering a possible multimillion dollar diversion project to take water out of the Gila for development and growth near Silver City.

Governor Bill Richardson said today he will consider proposing a law forbidding dams or diversion projects on the Gila River in southwestern New Mexico.

"While this designation is ominous," said the governor, "I am hopeful that this year's listing will result in a renewed effort to protect the Gila River."

If enacted, the diversion project could deplete a desert oasis. "As the entire Southwest deals with issues of water scarcity, water managers deciding the fate of the Gila should know that the eyes of America are on them," American Rivers said today.

- **#8 Allagash Wilderness Waterway** in Maine

One of the most important wild rivers in the entire country is being jeopardized by development pressures and a lack of political leadership, says American Rivers. The Allagash Wilderness Waterway, Maine's only nationally designated Wild and Scenic River, is losing its protections.

The Allagash Wilderness Waterway was established by the Maine Legislature in 1966 to preserve, protect, and enhance the natural beauty, character, and habitat of a unique area.

The 92 mile long ribbon of lakes, ponds, rivers, and streams winds through the heart of northern Maine's vast commercial forests.



A view of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway (Photo courtesy [Allagash Canoe Trips](#))

A newly appointed advisory council is deciding what to do next on the Allagash. Conservation groups say the Council should advocate for legislative reaffirmation of the original mandate to enhance the "maximum wilderness character" of the Allagash Wilderness Waterway.

Conservationists say the plan should restrict motor vehicle access, reduce logging roads and bridges, preserve the native fishery, and designate areas for non-motorized winter recreation.

- **#9 Pearl River** in Louisiana and Mississippi

A development scheme masquerading as flood protection threatens the Pearl River and shows that the painful lessons of Hurricane Katrina still have not been learned, American Rivers says.

At risk are a thriving recreational and fishing industry and the source of natural flood protection to riverine communities.

The danger has been compounded by failed leadership at the Corps of Engineers, which has refused to look beyond the dangerous scheme and develop a comprehensive approach to flooding and environmental problems along the Pearl.

Developers and local politicians are pushing plans to dam and dredge the Pearl to create lakes and islands for commercial development. Also under consideration are large earthen levees, similar to those that failed in New Orleans. All told, almost 140 square miles of wetlands and bottomland hardwood forests would be dredged or drowned.

- **#10 Niobrara River** in Nebraska

One of Nebraska's biggest tourist attractions, and one of the state's most beautiful rivers, is slowly losing water and in danger of losing more.

A Wild and Scenic River that attracts tens of thousands of paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts to the nation's heartland, the Niobrara could soon be stressed by increased irrigation.

In addition to supporting a booming tourist economy, the Niobrara supports irrigation of more than 600,000 acres. Additional irrigation applications are currently pending with Nebraska's Department of Natural Resources. These additional irrigation applications threaten to upset that balance, damaging the Niobrara today and they will make surrounding communities even less resilient to the potential impacts of global warming.

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