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2014

America's Most Endangered Rivers® 2014

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 1984, 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,
www.facebook.com/americanrivers,
and www.twitter.com/americanrivers.

For More Information
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San Joaquin River diversions outside Stockton, CA; Photo: Sarah Craig

#1: San Joaquin River

California

Threat: Outdated water management and excessive diversions

At Risk: River health and resilient communities

The River

The San Joaquin River and its principal tributaries—the Merced, the Tuolumne, and the Stanislaus—originate on the high slopes of the southern Sierra Nevada, and flow through the fertile San Joaquin Valley south of Sacramento. For millennia, the cool waters of these rivers sustained the southernmost runs of king salmon and vast wetlands that supported millions of waterfowl, herds of tule elk, and even grizzly bear.

Today, approximately four million people live in the San Joaquin watershed. These rivers support some of the most productive and profitable agriculture in the world, irrigating more than two million acres of arid land. The rivers also generate over 3,000 megawatts of hydropower, provide drinking water to over 4.5 million people (including the City

Summary

The San Joaquin is Central California's largest river, supporting endangered fish and wildlife, communities, and one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. However, the river is so overtapped that it runs completely dry in stretches, threatening water quality, endangering fish and wildlife, creating uncertainty for farmers, and leaving communities vulnerable in the face of more frequent and severe droughts. The California Water Resources Control Board must act this year to increase flows in the San Joaquin so that the watershed is healthy enough to support fish and wildlife, sustainable agriculture, and resilient communities for generations to come.



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Photo: jcookfisher

of San Francisco), and support numerous endangered or declining species. From the headwaters, including Yosemite National Park, to the mouth at the San Francisco Bay-Delta estuary, these rivers support a thriving billion dollar recreational industry that includes world class whitewater rafting, bass tournaments, waterfowl hunting, and a native rainbow trout fishery.

The Threat

Years of managing the San Joaquin for agriculture, hydropower, and flood control have taken their toll on the river. Dams, levees, and excessive water diversions have hurt river habitat and

opportunities for recreation and community access. Over one hundred miles of the mainstem river have been dry for over fifty years, and water diversions along the tributaries take more than 70 percent of the natural flow. The river's salmon and steelhead populations are on the brink of extinction. Excessive diversions, groundwater overdraft, and unsustainable water management have also made communities vulnerable to increasingly frequent and severe droughts.

The present drought places additional stress on the river and its communities, but we must not allow the drought to force rash decisions— like cutting environmental protections— that will harm the river, fish and wildlife, and communities for years to come.

What Must Be Done

The current drought underscores the need to take long-overdue action to restore the San Joaquin River. We must plan for a more sustainable future that includes both a healthy river and sustainable agriculture.

The California State Water Resources Control Board, the agency charged with allocating water rights and protecting water quality, is developing a plan for management of the river. The Board must act to increase flows in the river to protect water quality, fish, recreation, and community access, and support sustainable agriculture.

Additionally, Congress must oppose all efforts to overturn state and federal water laws designed to protect the environment, which would further dry up the San Joaquin River.

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/SanJoaquin and TAKE ACTION!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2014
- Share San Joaquin posts on our Facebook page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about the San Joaquin to decision-makers and with your friends!



Photo: Amy Halverson



San Joaquin dry river bed
Photo: Christopher Beaver, Tales of the San Joaquin

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Moffat Water Diversion East Portal; Photo: Ken Neubecker

#2: Upper Colorado River

Colorado

Threat: Water diversions
At Risk: River health and recreation

The River

The Colorado River Basin in the State of Colorado includes the mainstem Colorado River and headwater rivers, such as the Eagle, Roaring Fork, Blue, Yampa, Green, and Gunnison. Gold medal trout fisheries, world class paddling, and glorious massive canyons can be found throughout this river system. The resort areas of Winter Park, Breckenridge, Aspen, Steamboat Springs, Crested Butte, and Vail, as well as much of the urban Front Range (on the other side of the Continental Divide), all get some or all of their drinking water from these rivers. The Upper Colorado River Basin is home to 14 native fish species, including several fish listed as endangered.

The Threat

In 2013, American Rivers listed the Colorado River as #1 on our list of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® due to the overarching concern of outdated water management throughout the entire basin. To begin addressing this concern in the

Summary

The Upper Colorado River and its tributaries include some of the most heavily degraded rivers and some of the last truly healthy rivers in the West. The rivers are critical to Colorado's heritage; they are the life-line for much of the state's fish and wildlife, they sustain a vibrant agricultural economy, and they provide world-class opportunities for fishing, paddling, and hiking. However, these renowned rivers are threatened by increasing water demands and new proposed water diversions. The Governor of Colorado must take a stand now and keep water flowing in the rivers by promoting responsible conservation measures in the Colorado Water Plan.



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Fishing on the Blue River
Photo: Spencer Blake

Upper Basin, Colorado Governor John Hickenlooper has directed the Colorado Water Conservation Board to develop the first statewide Water Plan to determine how Colorado will meet its water needs in the future. With its population expected to double by 2050, Colorado must seize this opportunity to chart a more sustainable course for water management.

Approximately 80% of Colorado's population lives on the Front Range in cities like Denver, Colorado Springs, and Fort Collins, but 80% of Colorado's snow and rain falls on the Western Slope, primarily within the Upper Colorado River Basin. The Front Range has long depended on "trans-mountain" projects that pump, pipe, and divert water over the Continental Divide from the Colorado River Basin for municipal use, lawn irrigation, and agriculture. These dams and diversions decrease river flows, degrade the environment, and harm river recreation that is a key element for the tourism economy on the Western Slope. Having tapped the headwaters of the Colorado mainstem, some Front Range water interests are currently considering diversions from rivers further away, like the Yampa and Gunnison Rivers—rivers not yet impaired by trans-mountain diversions.

The Governor of Colorado and the Colorado Water Conservation Board cannot afford to fall back on outdated, expensive, and harmful water development schemes as acceptable solutions when they develop the water plan for Colorado's future. Rivers are vitally important for Coloradans, and protecting and restoring rivers needs to be a top priority. If we want rivers to continue to support fish, wildlife, agriculture, and a multi-billion dollar tourism industry, we must ensure they have enough water.

What Must Be Done

Colorado Basin Rivers have played an important role providing water for Front Range development, but many of the rivers are drained and have no more water to give. The Draft Colorado Water Plan is scheduled to be released in December 2014, and the Governor and Colorado Water Conservation Board must make the following common sense principles a core part of the plan:

1. Prioritize protecting healthy flowing rivers and restoring degraded ones
2. Increase water efficiency and conservation in cities and towns
3. Modernize agricultural practices and make it easier for irrigators—who now use more than 80% of Colorado's water—to share water with urban areas in ways that both maintain valuable ranches and farms and keep rivers healthy
4. Avoid new major trans-mountain diversion projects so as not to further harm Upper Colorado rivers and the communities that depend upon them

Adopting these strategies will allow sustainable use of water from the Upper Colorado River Basin, without building costly, environmentally harmful, and ultimately ineffective projects on these cherished rivers. Greater cooperation, innovative technologies, and best practices will enable Colorado to build prosperous communities, support thriving agricultural and tourism industries, and keep our rivers healthy and flowing. Colorado's Water Plan will influence water development and impacts to rivers in Colorado for decades to come. Taking additional water from the Upper Colorado River Basin, already over-taxed by existing water diversions, should not be an option and will be unnecessary if the Governor and Colorado Water Conservation Board adopt a sensible Water Plan.

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/UpperColorado and **TAKE ACTION!**
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2014
- Share Upper Colorado posts on our [Facebook](#) page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about the Upper Colorado and its tributaries to decision-makers and with your friends!



Roaring Fork River, a tributary to the Colorado River
Photo: Justin Jensen

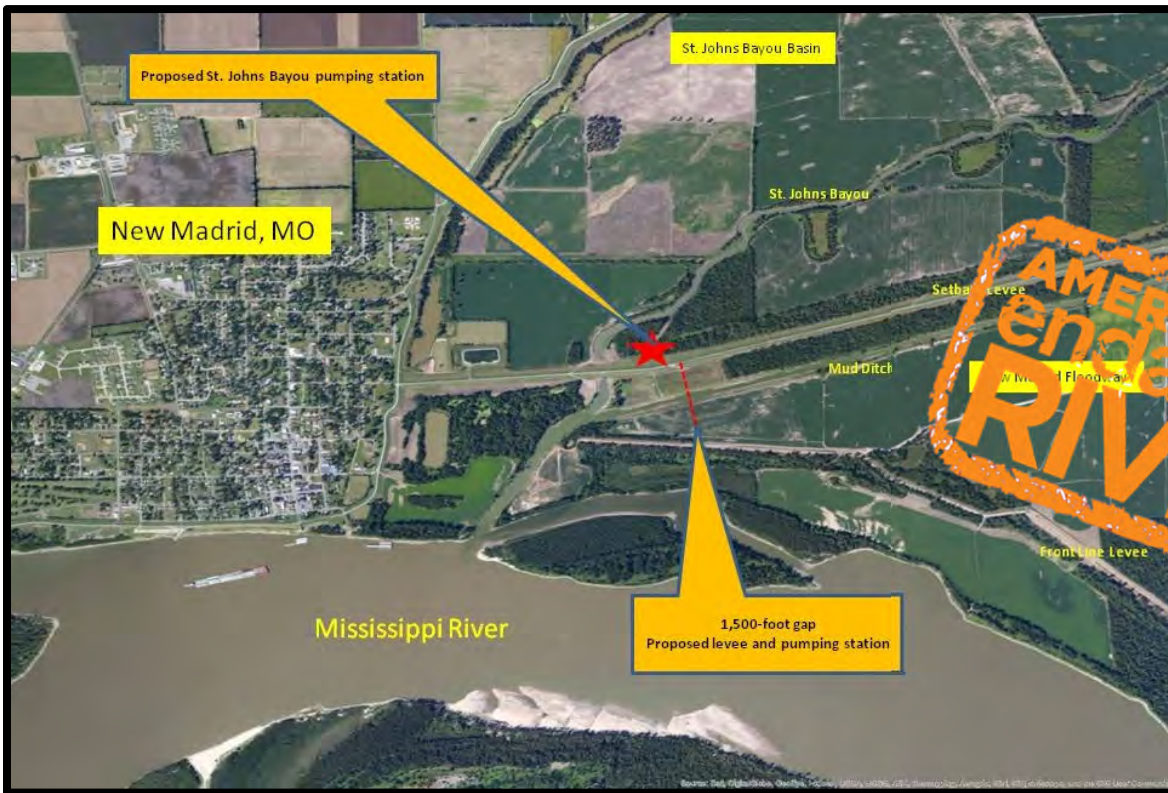
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#3: Middle Mississippi River

Missouri, Illinois, Kentucky

Threat: Outdated flood management
At Risk: Habitat and public safety

The River

The great Mississippi River once experienced seasonal floods that spread out over its floodplain, creating a mosaic of backwaters, wetlands, and sloughs. These periodic floods were the driving force behind robust and diverse ecosystems that were home to an amazing array of fish, birds, and wildlife. The Missouri “bootheel”, located at the confluence of the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, was once one of the nation’s largest and richest wetland areas.

As people altered and harnessed the Mississippi River to advance navigation and reduce flood damages, these floodplain ecosystems were drained and cut off from the river with levees and other structures. The New Madrid Floodway within the bootheel was also drained for intensive agricultural production.

Summary

The Mississippi River’s ability to spread out into its floodplain is important for fish and wildlife and for protecting downstream communities from floodwaters.

Unfortunately, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to cut off the Mississippi River from one of its last floodplain connections by constructing a new levee at the bottom of the New Madrid Floodway. The Corps should abandon the New Madrid Levee project. If they do not, the Environmental Protection Agency should veto the project.



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Despite these modifications, a gap in the bottom of the floodway levee system provides a critically important natural connection that allows the river to sustain vital backwater floodplain habitat, including bottomland hardwood forests that are home to bald cypress, nuttall oak, and tupelo gum. The floodway is critical for migrating ducks, geese, and shorebirds like the golden-plover. It supports a rich and regionally distinctive fishery that includes an important white bass fishery and rare species like the golden topminnow, chain pickerel, and banded pygmy sunfish. The gap in the floodway levee system is the key to supporting this diverse backwater floodplain.



Photo: Ted Heisel

The Threat

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is proposing to cut off the last connection between the Mississippi River and its natural backwater habitat in the State of Missouri by constructing a new 1,500 foot levee across the gap at the bottom of the New Madrid Floodway. This levee would prevent water from reaching 75,000 acres of floodplain habitat, eliminating the most important spawning and rearing habitat for fish in the middle Mississippi River and destroying habitat that is essential for an array of birds, waterfowl, and mammals.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has repeatedly called upon the Corps to stop this project because it will cause, “dramatic losses of nationally significant fish and wildlife resources that cannot be mitigated,” and will, “greatly diminish rare and unique habitats found in southeast Missouri.” Furthermore, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has said the project, “will cause the greatest loss of wetlands functions in EPA Region 7’s history.” Many outside experts agree that the adverse impacts of the project are so significant that they cannot be mitigated, and believe that the project will be the straw that breaks the camel’s back for the health of this portion of the Mississippi River.

In addition to the significant and unacceptable harm to fish and wildlife, the proposed levee puts river communities at increased risk by promoting more intense use and development in the New Madrid Floodway, which in turn will make it even more politically difficult to activate the floodway during catastrophic floods. The New Madrid Floodway is used as a relief valve when high water in the Mississippi threatens nearby towns like Cairo, IL. During flooding in 2011, a last minute lawsuit attempted to stop the Corps from taking this important action. When the floodway was finally activated, water levels in the Mississippi River dropped 2.7 feet at Cairo in just 48 hours, sparing the city from potentially devastating flood damage.



Photo: Ted Heisel

The Corps is currently finalizing an Environmental Impact Statement for this fundamentally flawed project that was first dreamt up more than 60 years ago. Cutting the river off from its floodplain would destroy critical fish and wildlife habitat and is an entirely unacceptable practice for modern floodplain management.

What Must Be Done

The New Madrid Floodway Project, as proposed, is so environmentally destructive that it simply should not be built. The Corps should abandon this project by selecting the “no action” alternative in its final EIS. If the Corps refuses to abandon this environmentally devastating project, the Environmental Protection Agency should veto it under Section 404(c) of the Clean Water Act.

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How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/Mississippi and TAKE ACTION!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2014
- Share Mississippi posts on our Facebook page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about the Mississippi to decision-makers and with your friends!



Photo: Patrick Alexander

#4: Gila River

New Mexico

Threat: New water diversions
At Risk: River health, fish & wildlife, recreation, and tourism

The River

A tributary to the Colorado River, the Gila originates in America's first designated wilderness area, the Gila Wilderness, and is rich in biological diversity and cultural history. The Gila River supports healthy riverside forests, cold water fisheries, and a remarkable abundance of wildlife. The river is critical to the long-term health of these wild ecosystems.

The Gila's forests provide high quality bird habitat—supporting one of the highest concentrations of breeding birds in America—including the endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher, threatened Yellow-billed Cuckoo, and other species unique to the region, such as the Common Black-Hawk, Montezuma Quail, and the Elf Owl.

The Gila River also supports some of the most intact native fish populations in the Lower Colorado River Basin, including the federally endangered loach minnow, spike dace, and threatened Gila trout. The Gila provides significant economic value to the region in terms of unparalleled opportunities for outdoor recreation, nature-based travel, and wilderness experience.

Summary

New Mexico's last free-flowing river, the Gila, is threatened by an expensive and unnecessary water diversion and pipeline project. The new diversions, pipelines, and storage reservoirs would not only harm wildlife, fish, and river health, but would negatively impact local economies dependent upon outdoor recreation and tourism. **New Mexico Governor Susana Martinez must protect the Gila River and ensure that her Interstate Stream Commission consider and implement cheaper and more effective non-diversion alternatives to meet southwest New Mexico's water supply needs.**



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Photo: Donna Wells

The Threat

Recently, a small but influential group of farmers, business interests, local government boosters, and the state water development agency—the New Mexico Interstate Stream Commission, or ISC—have been advocating for construction of a large diversion on the Gila River. Authorized to capture an average of 14,000 acre-feet of water annually, or double the current withdrawals, this “new” water supply is intended to increase crop production and urbanization in the region. Up to \$100 million in federal subsidies are available to New Mexico to plan and construct this project. A water development project of this magnitude could severely impact the Gila’s unique ecological and recreational values.

Analysis from a former ISC director demonstrated that the ISC’s Gila River diversion proposal is fatally flawed from an engineering standpoint and would likely cost two to three times more than current cost estimates of \$300 million to \$500 million, provided that the technical deficiencies of the proposal could actually be overcome.

However, economic and legal analyses support sustainable and less expensive alternatives to construction of a large diversion of this wild river. Cost-effective solutions, such as municipal and agricultural conservation, effluent reuse, sustainable use of existing groundwater supplies, and watershed restoration could meet the region’s future water needs quicker, easier, and cheaper than a diversion and pipeline project.

Under the Arizona Water Settlements Act, New Mexico can receive over half of the federal subsidy to implement non-diversion alternatives to meet the future water demand of the region. This approach would help maintain the flow of the river while saving taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars in an unnecessary and ecologically destructive project.

When asked in a June 2013 poll which approach they would prefer to address the state’s water situation, New Mexico residents overwhelmingly supported alternatives to diversions. In fact, 85 percent of residents support using current water supplies more wisely, by continuing to conserve water, using new technology to help reduce wasted water, and increasing recycling of water.



Photo: Dennis O’Keefe

What Must Be Done

By December 2014, New Mexico must notify the Secretary of Interior of its chosen approach— either diverting the Gila River or implementing non-diversion, water conservation and efficiency alternatives. The New Mexico ISC and Governor Susana Martinez must protect the Gila River to sustain local recreation and tourism-dependent economies, and ensure that the ISC considers and implements cheaper and more effective non-diversion alternatives to meet southwest New Mexico’s water supply needs.

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/Gila and **TAKE ACTION!**
- Retweet from [@americanrivers](https://twitter.com/americanrivers) on Twitter and use the hashtag **#MER2014**
- Share Gila posts on our [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/americanrivers) page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about the Gila to decision-makers and with your friends!

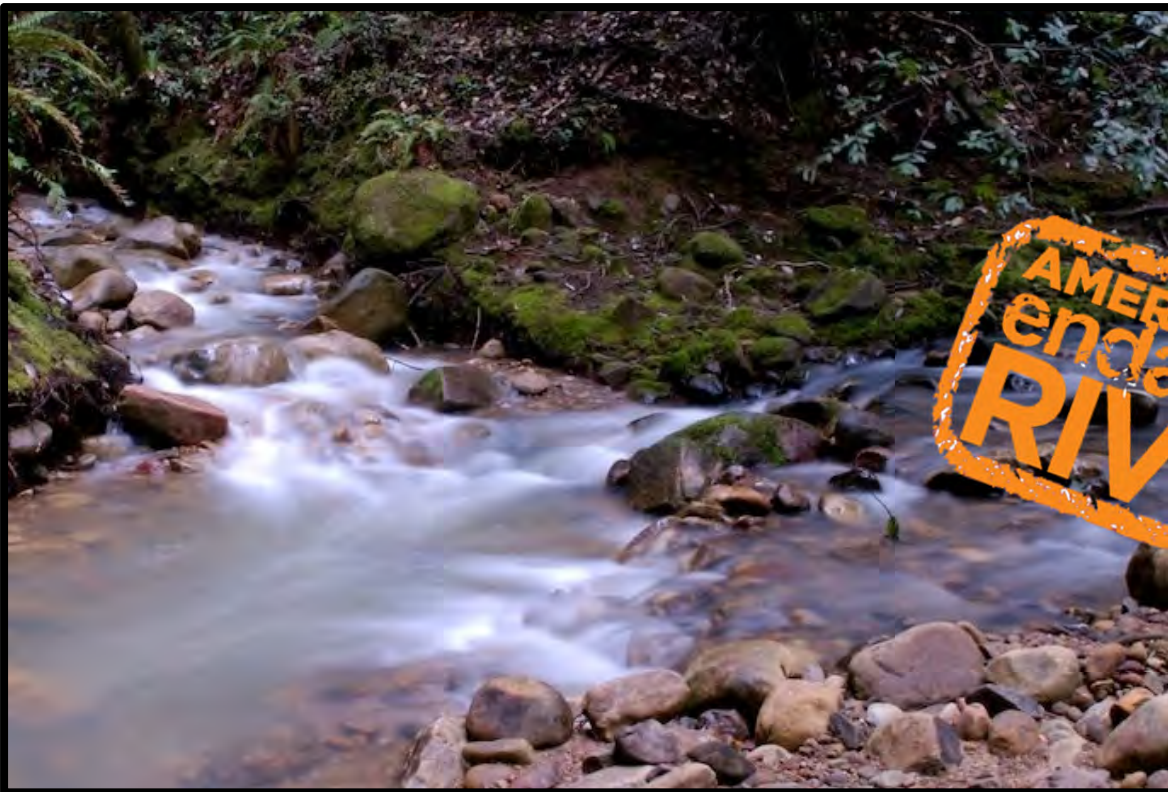
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Streams merge in the protected headwaters of San Francisquito Creek; Photo: Matt Stoecker

#5: San Francisquito Creek

California

Threat: Outdated dam

At Risk: Threatened fish and wildlife habitat and public safety

The River

Fueled by winter rains and year-round springs, the 45 square mile San Francisquito Creek watershed gathers dozens of small tributaries draining the Eastern Slope of the Santa Cruz Mountains through the towns of Portola Valley and Woodside. The San Francisquito mainstem, formed at the confluence of Bear Creek and Corte Madera Creek, flows for 12 miles east through Stanford University, and the cities of Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and East Palo Alto, before meeting the southern portion of San Francisco Bay, the largest estuary on the West Coast.

This creek is unique because it remains one of the only San Francisco Bay streams that is not confined to a concrete channel. This fortunate circumstance exists because the creek serves as a boundary between San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, and the counties could never agree on a plan for its channelization. This political twist of fate protected the creek from the problems faced by most other urban streams. Additionally, much of the upper watershed has been protected as open space

Summary

San Francisquito Creek is a natural refuge in an urban setting, providing recreation opportunities for nearby communities as well as a home to rare fish and wildlife. However, Stanford University's 65-foot Searsville Dam blocks threatened steelhead from reaching 20 miles of habitat upstream, impairs water quality, and poses flooding risks for local communities. It is time for Stanford to remove this obsolete dam to restore the health of the creek and secure the safety of its communities.



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Observation of no summer flow released from the dam
Photo: Matt Stoecker

land to provide recreation activities for nearby communities. As a result, San Francisquito Creek largely retains its natural character despite its urban setting, and is home to many rare and threatened native species, including steelhead trout, red legged frog, western pond turtle, San Francisco garter snake, and tiger salamander. Significant stretches of the creek have been designated as critical habitat for these species and the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration named San Francisquito an anchor watershed for the recovery of wild steelhead trout in the bay.

The Threat

Despite its relatively pristine condition, San Francisquito was not spared entirely. Below the confluence of several key tributaries stands Searsville Dam, owned by Stanford University. Built more than 120 years ago to provide drinking water, the 65 feet tall and 275 feet wide dam never served that purpose and is no longer needed for Stanford’s non-potable water supply, but it continues to cause significant harm to the creek and fish and wildlife that live in it. The dam and sediment it traps also pose safety risks to several nearby communities.

Searsville Dam is a complete barrier to steelhead trout, which depend on their ability to migrate out to the ocean and back into their natal streams to spawn. The dam blocks access to 20 miles of steelhead habitat upstream of the dam and reduces instream flows below the dam, often blocking all flows in summer. Additionally, the dam drowned the confluence of five creeks and extensive wetlands that provided important riparian habitat for many species of birds and other wildlife, replacing it with a slack water reservoir. The reservoir is bad for native species because it has lower water oxygen levels, higher water temperatures, supports invasive species and algae blooms, and encourages the loss of water through evaporation.

More than 90 percent of Searsville Reservoir is already filled in with sediment, eliminating its usefulness as a water storage facility. Unless Stanford takes action soon, the reservoir will fill in completely in coming years— sending rocks and debris over the top of the 65 foot dam, likely eroding the dam face as they fall. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, State of California, and San Mateo County characterize Searsville as a “high hazard dam,” meaning that a dam failure would cause significant economic losses, environmental damage, and human casualties.



The next generation looks for answers as steelhead regularly die in dewatered reaches below the dam.
Photo: Mike Lanza



Algae blooms degrade water quality in the disappearing reservoir; Photo: Kerri McLean

What Must Be Done

Beyond Searsville Dam, a coalition of 34 conservation groups, including American Rivers, persuaded Stanford to study alternative futures for the dam, including dam removal. The Searsville Alternatives Study Steering Committee will present its recommendation to the University President and Provost at the end of 2014. Studies show that feasible alternatives exist to replace Searsville's water storage and water diversion functions. Stanford must select an alternative that removes the dam to restore this unique creek while protecting local residents from flooding.

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/SanFrancisquito and TAKE ACTION!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2014
- Share San Francisquito posts on our Facebook page and share our posts on yours
- Keep talking about San Francisquito to decision-makers and with your friends!

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Photo: Hugo Krispyn

#6: South Fork Edisto River

South Carolina

Threat: Excessive water withdrawals
At Risk: Fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, and water quality

The River

The Edisto River is the longest free-flowing blackwater river in the country. It flows more than 250 miles from its headwaters between Columbia and Aiken to the coast, and is characterized by extensive bottomland forests and broad floodplains. The river is home to endangered shortnose and Atlantic sturgeon, as well as American shad and striped bass. Its floodplain habitats harbor the charismatic swallow-tailed kite and numerous other wildlife. The Edisto has four state parks along its course, including Aiken State Park on the South Fork. The ACE basin, formed by the Ashepoo, Cumberahee, and Edisto rivers, is a National Estuarine Research Reserve. More than 130,000 acres of land in the ACE basin have been protected through public/private partnerships.

Summary

The Edisto River is one of South Carolina's most iconic rivers for paddlers and outdoor enthusiasts. However, excessive agriculture withdrawals can take up to 35 percent of the river's flow during summer months, threatening river health and downstream water users, including other farmers. The legislature must amend state law to create fairness among all water users and ensure enough water stays in the river to protect river health.



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The Threat

Lax state laws enable excessive water withdrawals, threatening the Edisto and other rivers in South Carolina. Existing laws permitted a potato farm agribusiness to receive a water withdrawal registration in 2013 that would have allowed most of the river's flow to be taken during the summer from the headwaters of the South Fork of the Edisto.

Through legal action and subsequent settlement negotiations, Friends of the Edisto was successful in cutting the registered withdrawal in half. However, even with this decreased allowance, the agribusiness is allowed to take up to 35 percent of the river's flows during droughts—times when water is most critical to the river health. This is an extremely large withdrawal for any river, and scientific studies have documented that fish and wildlife are adversely affected by far less severe flow alterations than those on the South Fork. The withdrawals impair fishing and boating as well, especially during the summer months when naturally low flows and high irrigation demand are in direct conflict.

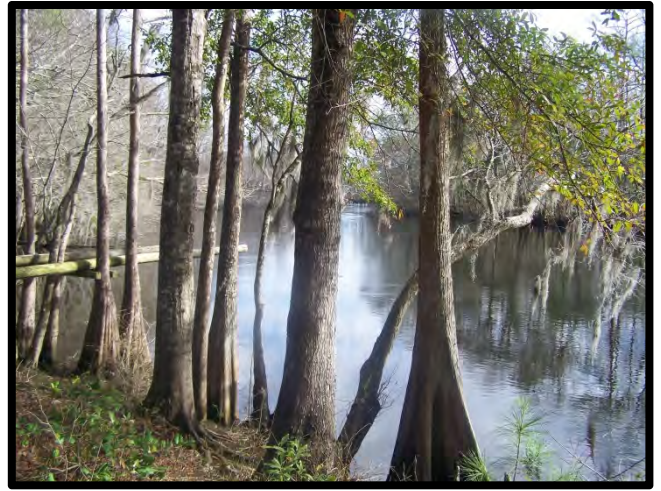


Photo: Mullen Taylor

In South Carolina, agricultural users are exempt from state permitting and are not required to curtail water withdrawals at any time. The state water agency, the Department of Health and Environmental Control, reviewed and allowed the registration on the potato farm without any public notification or consultation with its sister state agency responsible for managing fish and wildlife. State law and regulations, which require public notice and consultation for other water users, exempt agricultural registrations from these and other safeguards. The state fish and wildlife agency and citizens who cherish the Edisto River did not find out about the registration until more than a year after the application was filed.

What Must Be Done

The South Carolina Surface Water Withdrawal, Permitting, Use, and Reporting Act, which passed in 2010, set in place a state permitting process required for industrial and municipal users, and set levels of river flow that must be protected for fish and wildlife, water quality, recreation, and downstream users. Now, the law needs to be strengthened to provide greater protection and ensure there is enough water for downstream farmers. The 2010 law has no safeguards for agricultural withdrawals and there is no requirement to limit or stop withdrawals even during the most extreme droughts. There is also no requirement for public notice or public meetings for new agricultural withdrawal registrations. Additionally, the 2010 law allows far too much water to be allocated for withdrawal, with the “safe yield” for water use being set at 80 percent of a river's average annual flow. This liberal allocation for off-river uses sets up future conflicts among water users and takes too much of the water needed for healthy rivers.



Water withdrawal site; Photo: Hugo Krispyn

The South Carolina Legislature and Governor Haley must amend the 2010 surface water law to protect the health and integrity of the state's rivers, and to make it fair for all water uses—drinking water, industrial, and agricultural.

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How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/Edisto and **TAKE ACTION!**
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Photo: outdoorPDK



#7: White River

Colorado

Threat: Oil and gas development
At Risk: Fish and wildlife habitat and drinking water supplies

The River

The two forks of the White River start high up in the Flat Tops Wilderness Area—the second largest wilderness area in Colorado—within the White River National Forest. Originating from the melting snow and ice above Trappers Lake, the North Fork of the White River flows freely through beautiful canyons and countryside to the desert plains of the Uintah Basin. The North Fork joins the South Fork near the small hamlet of Buford as it winds west, passing through a bucolic valley dotted with hay meadows, farmhouses, and abundant wildlife. Roughly 7000 citizens, the majority residing in the towns of Meeker and Rangely, depend on water supplies from the White River. The river provides habitat for imperiled fish and wildlife species, and is home to some of North America's largest big game herds. The warmer, lower reaches of the White River are also home to four endemic endangered fish species.

Summary

The White River is one of Colorado's hidden gems, home to abundant fish and wildlife, and providing excellent fishing, boating, and other recreational opportunities. However, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is proposing to allow 15,000 new oil and gas wells in the region, which threatens to industrialize this remote and beautiful area and ruin clean water and wildlife habitat. The BLM must instead act to protect the White River and balance new development with conserving the area's unique wild values for future generations.



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The Threat

The White River Basin is threatened with an unprecedented level of oil and gas development—roughly 15,000 new oil and gas wells have been proposed—that will cause irreparable change not just to the river, but the entire character of the region. In 1997, the BLM forecasted that 1100 oil and gas wells would be drilled over the next 15 to 20 years. However, in 2006, faced with increased demand for oil and gas development, the BLM announced it intended to amend the White River Field Office's Resource Management Plan (RMP). Since BLM had just recently completed an RMP revision, funding was not available for another planning process. Instead of waiting for federal funding to become available for a full RMP Revision, BLM reached an agreement whereby the oil and gas industry paid for the plan—seemingly a conflict of interest.



Photo: Jeffrey Beall

The Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) released in August 2012 provided a range of alternatives that would allow anywhere from 6,600 to more than 20,000 wells to be drilled, with a preferred alternative allowing for more than 15,000 wells, making this the largest public lands development proposal in Colorado history. This would impact so great an area that the preferred alternative has a management “goal” that could allow for a 30% decline in mule deer populations over the life of the plan, which would exacerbate the disastrous drop in mule deer populations from an estimated 120,000 deer in 2006 to less than 44,000 in 2011.

The likely impacts of this scale of development are seemingly endless—pollution and dewatering of surface and groundwater supplies, the conversion of agricultural lands, degradation of air quality, long-term socioeconomic impacts to local communities, and the destruction of habitat for numerous species, including the imperiled greater sage grouse, Colorado cutthroat trout, big game, and many other plants and animals.



Cryogenic natural gas plant in the Piceance Basin
Photo: Ecoflight

What Must Be Done

BLM must release a plan that adequately protects the diverse array of unique resources and values of the White River, Colorado. That means completing a Master Leasing Plan that protects the air and viewshed of Dinosaur National Monument as well as the Greater sage-grouse and big game populations of Blue Mountain. In addition, BLM must conserve the numerous “Lands with Wilderness Character” units within the purview of the White River Field Office. These units provide refuge from the pressures of development not only for a variety of wildlife—including Colorado cutthroat trout—but also for the backcountry recreation experiences that people seek out in White River Country.

Finally, BLM must propose a development program that will protect wildlife habitat as well as ensure that the air and water quality of the

region will not be detrimentally affected. By taking these actions, BLM would not only fulfill its obligation as a multi-use agency, it would prevent a flawed and damaging plan from being adopted and allow a part of rural Colorado to retain its heritage and culture. Managing the White River watershed in a holistic manner—instead of a narrow-sighted focus on energy development—would ensure that the health of local communities, rivers, and the landscape as a whole are protected in a manner consistent with the agency's mission, “To sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America's public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

How You Can Help

- Go to www.americanrivers.org/WhiteRiverCO and TAKE ACTION!
- Retweet from @americanrivers on Twitter and use the hashtag #MER2014
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Photo: Andrew Larsen

#8: White River, WA

Washington

Threat: Outdated dam and fish passage facilities

At Risk: Salmon, steelhead, and bull trout populations

The River

Originating from the Winthrop, Emmons, and Fryingpan glaciers on Mt. Rainier, the White River travels 68 miles and drains 494 square miles before flowing into the Puyallup River and Puget Sound. The White River is enjoyed by kayakers, fishermen, hikers, and visitors to Mt. Rainier National Park and the surrounding area. The river is home to four species of salmon (Chinook, coho, chum, and pink), as well as steelhead and bull trout. The river's salmon and steelhead are central to the culture of the Muckleshoot and Puyallup Indian tribes.

The Threat

Over \$150 million in taxpayer funds are spent each year to restore salmon to rivers and streams around the Puget Sound. This investment is undermined every year when thousands— even hundreds of thousands in some years— of salmon and

Summary

Washington's White River is a haven for salmon and steelhead, iconic fish treasured by tribes and recreational anglers. However, these fish are blocked by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Mud Mountain Dam and are often killed at its unsafe and outdated fish collection facility at the Buckley Diversion Dam a few miles downstream. To protect salmon and steelhead runs which are critical to river health, the Corps must pledge to design and implement a new state-of-the-art fish passage system by 2017.



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steelhead die at the antiquated and dangerous Buckley Diversion Dam fish collection facilities on the White River, due to the poor condition of this dam and its undersized fish trap. The Buckley fish trap was built in 1941 and is no longer sufficient to transport the large numbers of salmon attempting to return to their spawning grounds above Mud Mountain Dam. Even if salmon do make it into the overcrowded fish trap, they are often exhausted, delayed, impaled on rebar, and/or injured from the cramped holding facilities, which reduces their chances of survival after release.

Routine temporary repairs to Buckley Dam require sharply reduced water releases from the upstream Mud Mountain Dam, drying up 29 miles of river and stranding juvenile fish migrating to Puget Sound. Worst of all, as many as hundreds of thousands of adult salmon are left to die below Buckley Dam before they can spawn. The highest mortality takes place during pink salmon runs, which occur every odd numbered year in Puget Sound rivers.

Buckley Dam's failure as a fish passage facility is ironic— since it ceased diverting water to a hydropower project 10 years ago, the Buckley Dam's primary purpose has been to serve, however poorly, as a fish passage facility for the much larger Mud Mountain Dam five miles upstream.

Since 2007, NOAA Fisheries has stated that repairing the dam and upgrading the fish trap is necessary for the Corps to meet its legal obligations under the Endangered Species Act to protect threatened Puget Sound Chinook and steelhead, but the Corps has failed to take action. This failure to act is particularly egregious because the White River Chinook salmon run includes a wild spring run component that NOAA Fisheries has determined must be restored if the larger population of Puget Sound Chinook salmon is to recover.



Stranded fish at Buckley Dam
Photo: Eric Marner, Muckleshoot Tribe



Fish trap at Buckley Dam
Photo: Russ Ladley

What Must Be Done

As operator of the Buckley Diversion Dam and owner and operator of the fish trap and Mud Mountain Dam, the Corps must pledge to design and install a modern diversion structure and updated fish trap by 2017— the soonest feasible time for completion of such a project while avoiding another massive fish kill during the 2017 pink salmon run. Replacing the dam and fish trap is a relatively

modest investment (approximately \$60 million) in light of the billions spent to date to protect and restore Puget Sound salmon. Modern fish trap facilities exist on nearby rivers like the Baker and Cedar, and there is no reason for the White River— and its rare Puget Sound spring Chinook salmon population— to lag behind. The Corps has an obligation to provide safe, timely, and effective fish passage. Meeting its obligation to the White River and its salmon means the Corps must allocate funding for a complete fix to the dam and fish trap.

How You Can Help

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Photo: Haw River Assembly

#9: Haw River

North Carolina

Threat: Polluted runoff

At Risk: Clean water and public health

The River

The Haw River flows 110 miles from its headwaters in the north-central Piedmont region of North Carolina to the Cape Fear River just below Jordan Lake Reservoir. The river and its watershed provide drinking water to nearly one million people living in and around the cities of Greensboro, Burlington, Chapel Hill, Cary, and Durham. This 1700 square mile watershed is home to a variety of fish and wildlife, including blue heron, bald eagle, beaver, deer, otter, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bowfin, crappie, carp, and bluegill. The Haw also contains important habitat for the endangered Cape Fear shiner and an assortment of rare freshwater mussel species.

Local residents appreciate the Haw for its outdoor recreational opportunities, including hiking, paddling, swimming, fishing, picnicking, as well as the solitude and quiet the river offers. The Haw River is the most popular whitewater paddling river in the North Carolina Piedmont Region, and Jordan Lake (a 14,000 acre reservoir) provides recreation for about 1 million visitors a year for boating, swimming, camping, and fishing.

Summary

The Haw River is an important resource for more than a million people providing drinking water and recreation in central North Carolina. Unfortunately, rollbacks of rules designed to address water pollution threaten the health of local residents and fish and wildlife. The North Carolina legislature must act to clean up this important river in order to protect the water supply and a key recreational resource for major cities in North Carolina.



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The Threat

The Haw River has been the victim of death by a million cuts. Millions of gallons of wastewater and polluted runoff (i.e., rainwater that picks up pollution as it flows over roads and parking lots) have washed into the Haw. Population growth since the 1960s has overwhelmed the systems put in place to protect clean water. Aging pipes and infrastructure have resulted in raw sewage spills of millions more gallons, including the 3.5 million gallon spill in Burlington this year. This pollution, containing excess nitrogen and phosphorous, has caused large algal blooms in Jordan Lake, a major drinking water reservoir, which impacts the health of people and fish.

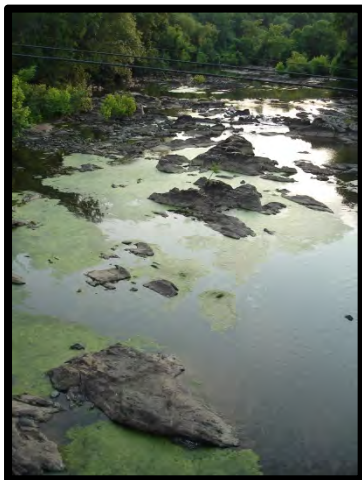


Photo: bobistraveling

North Carolina was required to develop a cleanup plan by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) under the Clean Water Act to address the pollution problem in the Haw. This cleanup plan developed by the state in 2009—commonly known as the Jordan Lake Rules—requires communities to upgrade their wastewater systems to today's standards, limit or eliminate new sources of polluted runoff, and reduce polluted runoff from existing development over a long and reasonable timetable.

Unfortunately, the cleanup of the Haw River has never been given a chance to succeed. The NC General Assembly has passed laws delaying and weakening the cleanup plan causing the clean water problems to worsen for communities across the watershed. Most recently, an effort by developers and some municipalities within the upper watershed has resulted in the stalling of the cleanup plan in order to carry out an unjustified experiment that would put 36 huge “mixers” into the Jordan Lake Reservoir in an attempt to avoid treatment of the causes of pollution. These mixers will be a potential hazard to boaters and wildlife that come in contact with them. This experimental strategy is only a cosmetic fix doing nothing to remove the pollutants from the water and ignores the scientific data underpinning the cleanup plan developed in 2009. Worse, it means that the polluted water would just be passed on down the river into the Cape Fear for downstream communities to deal with.

In addition, the NC General Assembly has appointed a committee to review the cleanup rules for the Haw River watershed. The committee is predominately made up of legislators that represent the communities and constituencies that are contributing pollution to the river, instead of those that would benefit from a restored river system. That committee is expected to report back to the General Assembly with a recommendation on how to move forward in May 2014.



Algae accumulation from water pollution
Photo: Haw River Assembly

What Must Be Done

The Haw River watershed cannot be cleaned up unless polluted runoff and wastewater overflows are reduced. The existing cleanup rules are based on state law that protects drinking water supply reservoirs and the federal requirement under the Clean Water Act to address water pollution. Policies must be restored that will remove pollutants at their source by better managing runoff, reducing nitrogen and phosphorus in wastewater, and upgrading infrastructure. The goal of the cleanup plan is to reduce pollution, not just send it downstream. The North Carolina General Assembly must stop delaying the rules and clean up the Haw River by implementing the original 2009 Jordan Lake Reservoir Nutrient Management Strategy.

How You Can Help

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Photo: Kevin Lewis

#10: Middle Fork Clearwater & Lochsa Rivers

Idaho

Threat: Industrialization of a Wild and Scenic River corridor

At Risk: Scenery, solitude, world-class recreational values

The Rivers

Flowing for roughly 100 miles through the Clearwater National Forest, the Middle Fork Clearwater and Lochsa rivers traverse the homeland of the Nez Perce people. In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition crossed Lolo Pass and followed the Lochsa and Clearwater to the Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean. Since time immemorial, the rivers provided sustenance and travel routes for the Nez Perce people. The rivers teem with wildlife and are home to several rare and threatened species, including Chinook and coho salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and westslope cutthroat trout.

Summary

The Middle Fork Clearwater River and one of its main tributaries, the Lochsa River, were among America's first rivers to be designated under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Home to the Nez Perce Tribe and rich in early American history, these rivers are cherished by anglers and paddlers for their thriving coldwater fisheries, thrilling whitewater, and spectacular scenery. In stark conflict with these values, the energy industry wants to use the rural highway paralleling these rivers to transport huge megaloads of industrial equipment bound for the Canadian tar sands. The U.S. Forest Service must ban the shipment of these megaloads from this corridor to protect the rivers' unique Wild and Scenic character.



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Photo: Keith Ewing

In the early 1960s, the rivers became more accessible when U.S. Highway 12 was completed, and in 1968, Congress designated the Clearwater and its two main tributaries, the Lochsa and Selway rivers, as America's first Wild and Scenic Rivers. In later years, Highway 12 was designated as a National Scenic Byway due to its circuitous route through a narrow river canyon of unparalleled beauty. Today, this river corridor supports a vibrant recreational economy while remaining an integral component of the Nez Perce Tribe's way of life.

The Threat

The development of the tar sands in northern Alberta, Canada, requires massive infrastructure over an extended period of time. In their quest to maximize profits, some of the world's largest corporations are contracting the manufacture of mining and refinery

equipment in Asia and along the West Coast of North America, then transporting these "megaloads" via barge up the Snake River to Lewiston, Idaho. From there, they want to truck the megaloads up Highway 12 through the Wild and Scenic River corridor then over Lolo Pass into Montana and ultimately to northern Alberta.

Massive in scale, these megaloads are hauled on truck beds and can be as large as 30 feet high, 30 feet wide, 350 feet long, and weigh nearly a million pounds. Travelling at a slow crawl, these megaloads take a minimum of four nights to traverse the Middle Fork Clearwater-Lochsa River corridor and often much longer due to weather and mechanical difficulties. During the day, these loads are parked in turnouts along the Wild and Scenic River, creating a visual blight in an otherwise pristine area and blocking access to river recreation. At night, the transport creates a massive rolling roadblock that interferes with normal highway traffic, presents numerous safety hazards, and degrades visitor experiences. Furthermore, if a megaload truck were to fall off the highway and into the river, it would be virtually impossible to remove due to its giant size and the narrow width of the highway.

Since 2010, a coalition of local citizens, conservation groups, and the Nez Perce Tribe have fought successfully to preserve the intrinsic values of the river corridor using a mix of advocacy, direct action, and litigation. To date, these efforts have blocked over 225 megaloads while less than 15 have traversed the river corridor. While generally successful in the short term, the overall threat has not diminished.

What Must Be Done

The U.S. Forest Service is the federal agency charged with protecting the Wild and Scenic values of the river corridor. Despite successful federal litigation that affirms the authority of the Forest Service to engage on this issue, the Clearwater National Forest has yet to take a leadership role and develop adequate rules to ban the shipment of megaloads along this route. The Forest Service needs to hear from concerned citizens across the country that our Wild and Scenic Rivers are a national treasure and deserve better than becoming an industrial shipping route. The Forest Service must take responsibility for management of this Wild and Scenic corridor, and ban the shipment of megaloads along Highway 12.



Megaload on Route 12
Photo: Borg Hendrickson

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