

## **American Rivers announces America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2023**

*List underscores threats to human health and public safety*

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Washington -- American Rivers released its annual list of America's Most Endangered Rivers® today, spotlighting ten rivers where human health and safety are at risk. The report amplifies the voices of local partners and spotlights decisions that will determine the fates of the rivers.

"Healthy rivers are essential to human health and public safety. When rivers are sick, people suffer," said Tom Kiernan, President and CEO of American Rivers. "This report sounds the alarm. It is a national call to action to defend these rivers and all of the life they support."

This year's list underscores how health and safety are threatened by climate change, pollution, dams, and other threats to rivers. Communities of color and Tribal Nations are disproportionately impacted by these threats.

Toxic pollution in the Ohio River and Montana's Clark Fork is raising serious concerns for the health of people and wildlife. Cultural health, sacred places, and traditional food sources are threatened along the Colorado River's Grand Canyon, Alaska's Chilkat River, and Washington's Snake River. And from Pennsylvania's Lehigh River to Mississippi's Pearl River, harmful development and flooding threaten community safety and drinking water sources.

On the Colorado River's Grand Canyon, #1 on this year's list, climate change and outdated river management have harmed unique cultural and ecological values. The Bureau of Reclamation is considering changes to how water is released from Glen Canyon Dam into the Grand Canyon, which could cause substantially more harm to this iconic place. More than a dozen Tribal Nations and Pueblos consider the canyon sacred, and millions of visitors a year are drawn to Grand Canyon National Park, one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. The canyon is rich in wildlife, from bighorn sheep and mountain lion, to endangered fish including humpback chub and Colorado River pikeminnow. The river is the lifeblood of this special place and if flows are reduced, people and wildlife will all feel the impact.

"The Grand Canyon is one of the most beloved and important landscapes in the world. This is a critical test for how we prioritize the environment as a key component of public health and safety as we solve the Southwest's water crisis and strive to meet the

basin's water needs. If decision makers sacrifice the health of the river that would be shortsighted and ultimately disastrous for the health and livelihoods of the 40 million people who depend on the Colorado River," Kiernan said.

"*Diné* Natural Law tells us that we should treat Mother Earth as we would treat our own mothers. When she is in distress we should respect and nurture her," said Erik Stanfield, Navajo Nation Historic Preservation Department. "Our concern for her should not be a reflection of self-interest, but rather an altruistic endeavor to give back when we have taken. We cannot repay all of her gifts, but we can show her kindness, gratitude, and a willingness to sacrifice when she suffers. This is the ethic that we would like to impart to the world outside of *Diné*-land. The Colorado River, *Tooh* in *Diné Bizaad*, is in deep crisis and needs our kindness, gratitude, and sacrifice to heal."

Nationwide, two-thirds of our water comes from rivers. Rural and urban areas depend on rivers for clean drinking water, food production, economic vitality, and cultural connection. But the EPA estimates that forty-four percent of waterways in the U.S. are too polluted for fishing or swimming. Freshwater species are going extinct faster than ocean or land species, and rivers are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Climate change is fueling more severe floods and droughts, and unjust policies put the burden of these impacts disproportionately on communities of color and Tribal Nations.

"America's Most Endangered Rivers is a snapshot of the threats facing rivers nationwide," Kiernan said. "We must defend these ten rivers and demand greater protections for all three million miles of rivers across our country."

"Rivers and streams are our nation's circulatory system, like the veins and arteries in our own bodies. Our health and our future are directly linked to our rivers."

In its 38<sup>th</sup> year, America's Most Endangered Rivers amplifies the voices of local leaders speaking up for rivers at risk. By generating national attention and mobilizing the public to act, the campaign delivers results for rivers and all of the life they support.

American Rivers reviews nominations for America's Most Endangered Rivers from local groups and individuals across the country, and selects rivers based on three criteria:

- 1) The river's significance to people and wildlife
- 2) The magnitude of the threat to the river and communities, especially in light of climate change and environmental injustice
- 3) A decision in the next 12 months that the public can influence

## **America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2023**

### **1) Colorado River, Grand Canyon (Arizona):**

THREAT: Climate change, outdated water management

AT RISK: Ecosystem health, reliable water delivery, regional economy

**2) Ohio River (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois):**  
THREAT: Pollution, climate change  
AT RISK: Clean water for 5 million people

**3) Pearl River (Mississippi):**  
THREAT: Dredging and dam construction  
AT RISK: Clean drinking water, local and downstream communities, fish and wildlife habitat

**4) Snake River (Idaho, Oregon, Washington):**  
THREAT: Four federal dams  
AT RISK: Tribal treaty rights and culture, endangered salmon runs, rural and local communities

**5) Clark Fork River (Montana):**  
THREAT: Pulp mill pollution  
AT RISK: Public health, fish and wildlife

**6) Eel River (California):**  
THREAT: Dams  
AT RISK: Fish and wildlife, tribal culture and sustenance

**7) Lehigh River (Pennsylvania):**  
THREAT: Poorly planned development  
AT RISK: Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, rural and local communities, open space

**8) Chilkat and Klehini rivers (Alaska):**  
THREAT: Mining  
AT RISK: Bald eagle, fish, and wildlife habitat, tribal culture and sustenance

**9) Rio Gallinas (New Mexico):**  
THREAT: Climate change, outdated forest and watershed management  
AT RISK: Clean drinking water, farming, watershed functionality

**10) Okefenokee Swamp (Georgia, Florida):**  
THREAT: Mining  
AT RISK: Fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, water quality and flow

### **About American Rivers**

American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways. Healthy rivers provide people and nature with clean, abundant water and natural habitat. For 50 years, American Rivers staff, supporters, and partners have shared a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. For more information, please visit [AmericanRivers.org](http://AmericanRivers.org)