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# PEARL RIVER

**THREAT: Dredging and dam construction**

**STATES:** Louisiana, Mississippi

**AT RISK:** Clean drinking water, local and downstream communities, fish and wildlife habitat

## SUMMARY

The Pearl River is one of the most biodiverse rivers in the U.S. and the primary drinking water source for Jackson, Mississippi. But this natural treasure is threatened by a devastating private real estate development scheme masquerading as a flood control project. This “One Lake” project would dredge and dam the Pearl River to create new waterfront property, destroying vital fish and wildlife habitat, worsening Jackson’s flooding and drinking water crisis, increasing toxic contamination, and reducing freshwater flows critical to the region’s important seafood and tourism economies. The Biden administration must stop this project and invest in environmentally-sustainable flood relief for the predominantly Black community of Jackson while protecting the Pearl River and all the communities and economies that rely on it.

## THE RIVER

From its headwaters on native Choctaw lands, the Pearl River flows nearly 500 miles through Mississippi and Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico. The Pearl River provides habitat for more than 300 species of birds, fish, and wildlife, including the federally threatened Gulf sturgeon and ringed sawback turtle, and 125,000 acres of wetland and bottomland hardwood conservation lands. The Pearl supplies freshwater flows critical to the health of the Gulf of Mexico; the region’s oyster, crab, shrimp and tourism industries; and hundreds of industrial and municipal users.

The Pearl is the only public drinking water source for the city of Jackson, which includes 150,000 residents, 83 percent of whom are Black. The city has struggled for decades to maintain basic water and sewer service and is currently under an Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) consent decree to enforce established rules and regulations due to sewage discharge violations in the billions of gallons annually. In 2022 the city’s residents were left without clean drinking water for months when one of the city’s two drinking water treatment plants failed.

## THE THREAT

One Lake is a private real estate development scheme masquerading as a flood control project that threatens public health and safety, river and coastal ecosystems, and regional economies. It will dredge 10-miles of the Pearl River, destroying 2,500 acres of mostly wetland habitat, disturbing eight highly contaminated toxic sites with no plan to protect public health, and causing a harmful rise in the river’s water temperature. A new dam will be constructed to contain the dredged 1,900-acre impoundment, and the dredged material will be used to build new waterfront property for real estate development putting more people in harm’s way.

JENNIFER COULSON

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# PEARL RIVER

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### OLIVIA DOROTHY

American Rivers  
(217) 390-3658  
[odorothy@americanrivers.org](mailto:odorothy@americanrivers.org)

### JENNIFER COULSON, PH.D

Orleans Audubon Society  
(504) 717-3544  
[OrleansAudubon@aol.com](mailto:OrleansAudubon@aol.com)

### ANDREW WHITEHURST

Healthy Gulf  
(601) 954-7236  
[andrew@healthygulf.org](mailto:andrew@healthygulf.org)

### JILL MASTROTOTARO

Audubon Delta  
(504) 481-3659  
[jill.mastrototaro@audubon.org](mailto:jill.mastrototaro@audubon.org)

### LOUIE MILLER

MS Chapter of the Sierra Club  
[louie.miller@sierraclub.org](mailto:louie.miller@sierraclub.org)

### MELISSA SAMET

National Wildlife Federation  
(415) 762-8264  
[sametm@nwf.org](mailto:sametm@nwf.org)

### ABBY BRAMAN

Pearl Riverkeeper  
[pearlriverkeeper@gmail.com](mailto:pearlriverkeeper@gmail.com)

### DEBRA HILL

Lawrence County, MS  
[dhill@co.lawrence.ms.us](mailto:dhill@co.lawrence.ms.us)

### STACY ORTEGO

Louisiana Wildlife Federation  
(337) 351-3973  
[stacy@lawwildlifefed.org](mailto:stacy@lawwildlifefed.org)

### MAYOR MARTHA WATTS

Monticello, MS  
(601) 320-0156  
[mayor@monticello.ms.gov](mailto:mayor@monticello.ms.gov)

### CHARLES PFEIFER

Jackson Audubon Society  
(504) 307-0187  
[cpragopan@aol.com](mailto:cpragopan@aol.com)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
PEARLRIVER2023](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/PEARLRIVER2023)



In addition to the massive loss of floodplain, wetlands, and in-stream habitats, One Lake will worsen Jackson's significant urban flash flooding and stormwater drainage problems. One Lake will permanently elevate water levels in eight tributary creeks that flow through primarily low-income Black neighborhoods in Jackson. During the four years of project construction, Jackson will be forced to somehow find an alternative water source for the one drinking water plant that was able to operate during the city's most recent drinking water crisis. One Lake will then add to the city's drinking water and water quality problems, including by confining the rampant discharges of raw and

poorly treated sewage that has already closed the Pearl to public contact recreation in the Jackson area. The low-head dam will reduce and alter the delivery of freshwater flows and nutrients vital to a healthy river-Gulf ecosystem and the communities and industries that rely on those flows.

Instead of subsidizing private real estate development, the federal government should invest in already identified flood relief solutions, including setting some levees farther back from the river, investing in floodplain and wetland easements, targeted elevations, and voluntary relocations of structures in flood-prone areas.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

One Lake is a federal civil works project that was rejected by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers multiple times in the past. This project has been revived by local developers under a unique process that allows non-federal project sponsors to study federal civil works projects. While the Army Corps is currently reviewing the environmental documents developed by the private interests and has yet to decide whether the project merits moving, the agency has already committed \$221 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to construct the project.

The incredibly destructive One Lake project will not protect communities from flooding. Instead, it will result in more environmental injustice harm in metro Jackson's communities of color by worsening urban flooding, exacerbating the city's long-standing drinking water crisis, and funneling critically needed investments and resources away from marginalized communities—all for the benefit of private real estate developers.

The US Army Corps of Engineers, US Environmental Protection Agency, and US Fish and Wildlife Service must protect the Pearl River for people and wildlife by rejecting the One Lake project. These agencies should prioritize non-structural and natural infrastructure solutions to provide effective, environmentally sustainable flood relief to Jackson while protecting the river's unique ecology and wildlife.