



**AMERICAN  
RIVERS**  
Life Depends on Rivers™

# America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2024

**A CALL TO ACTION FOR CLEAN WATER**



# America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2024

**“All water is connected. We cannot allow pollution anywhere without risk to the rivers we rely on for our drinking water. America's Most Endangered Rivers is a national call to action to defend the streams and rivers on which all life depends.”**

— Tom Kiernan, President  
and CEO of American Rivers

COVER PHOTO: VALLES CALDERA NATIONAL PRESERVE, NEW MEXICO  
JIN EKSTRAND  
BLACKWATER RIVER, WEST VIRGINIA / FRANK GEBHARD

Rivers make life possible, yet we are losing them.

Much of our drinking water comes from rivers, and natural river habitats support thousands of plant and animal species.

But America's rivers and clean water supplies are in crisis. Forty-four percent of waterways in the U.S. are too polluted for swimming or fishing, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Freshwater species are going extinct faster than ocean or land species, and rivers are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Meanwhile, climate change is fueling more severe floods and droughts — and unjust policies put the burden of

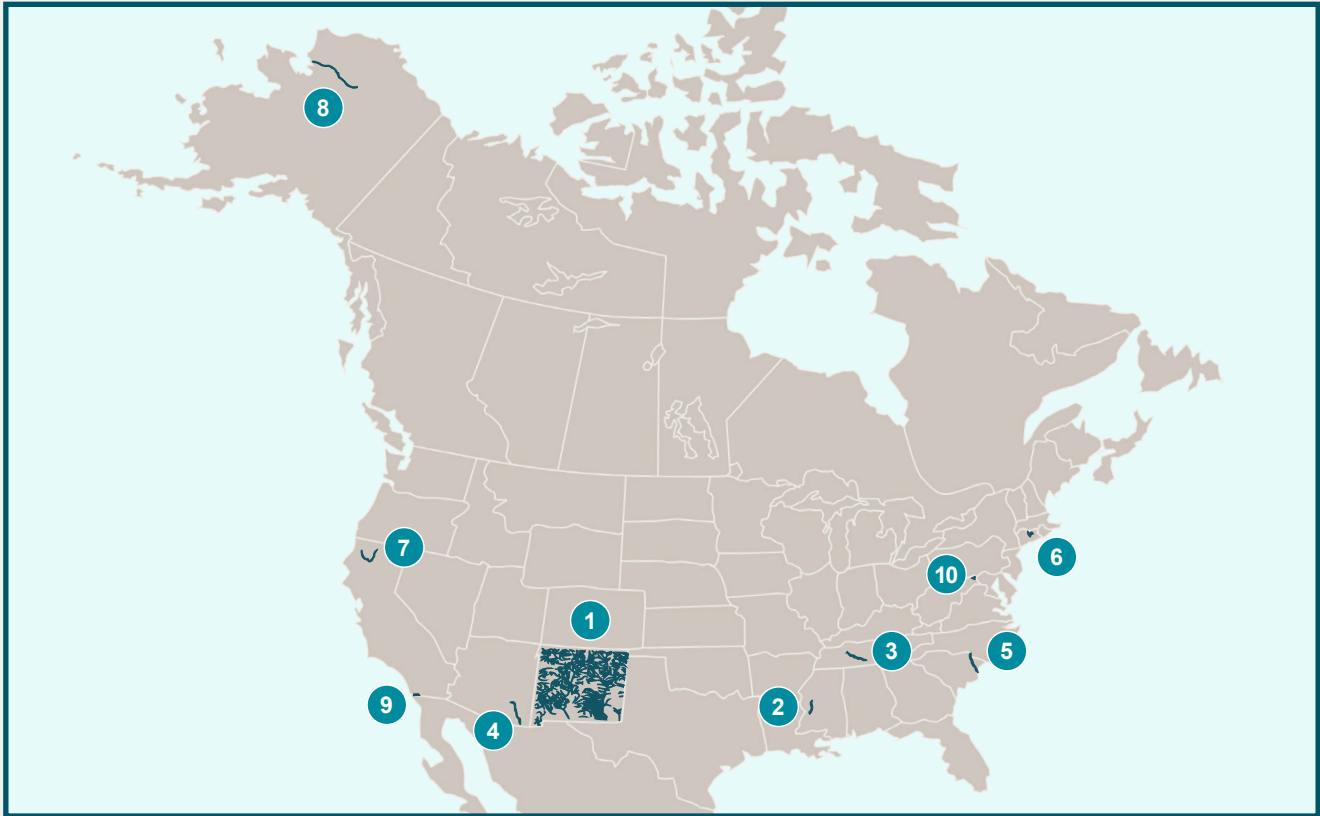
all these impacts disproportionately on Communities of Color and Tribal Nations.

In addition, a 2023 Supreme Court ruling slashed Clean Water Act safeguards, leaving many small streams and wetlands unprotected. Since all water is connected, leaving these areas without protection risks pollution flowing into the rivers that are our sources of drinking water.

America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2024 is a call to action for clean water. We must shore up safeguards for streams and wetlands at the state level, and we must strengthen the Clean Water Act to ensure rivers everywhere are protected.

American Rivers is proud to work with our local partners advocating for the future of America's Most Endangered Rivers®. Together, we must defend these 10 rivers — and demand greater protections for all 3 million miles of rivers across our country.

**Freshwater species are going extinct faster than ocean or land species, and rivers are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet.**



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American Rivers reviews nominations for the America’s Most Endangered Rivers® report from river groups and concerned individuals 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 people and nature.
- » The magnitude of threat to the river and its communities, especially in light of climate change and racial injustice.

## 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<sup>SM</sup>.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [AMERICANRIVERS.ORG](https://www.americanrivers.org)

# 1

# RIVERS OF NEW MEXICO

**THREAT:** Loss of federal stream and wetland protections

**STATES:** New Mexico

**AT RISK:** Clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation, agriculture, cultural resources

## SUMMARY

New Mexico's rivers are its lifeblood, providing clean drinking water, irrigation, fish and wildlife habitat, and rich cultural resources. But a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Sackett v. EPA*, has stripped federal clean water protections for small streams and wetlands nationwide—arguably harming New Mexico the most out of all the states. This federal action has removed federal clean water protections for the vast majority of the state's streams and wetlands—opening the door to pollution and habitat damage, with harmful downstream impacts to rivers such as the Rio Grande, Gila, San Juan, and Pecos.

To address the gap in clean water protections left by the Supreme Court decision, New Mexico must secure durable funding to establish a state-led surface water permitting program to protect its rivers, streams, and wetlands. The state's heritage, environment, people, and economy depend on it.

## THE RIVER

From the Upper Rio Grande to the Gila River, New Mexico's rivers and streams are the lifeblood of the state's economy, environment, cultural history, and quality of life. In addition to sustaining life for plants and animals, rivers and streams provide a source of clean drinking water for a majority of New Mexico's population. Water used to grow healthy food, including New Mexico's world famous chiles, comes from rivers and streams. Clean water from rivers and streams is essential for New Mexico's Acequias and community ditches, which are integral to New Mexico's traditions and economy. A large portion of the state's multi-billion-dollar recreation economy (rafting, fishing, boating, and hunting) is dependent on healthy rivers and clean water.

New Mexico's rivers, streams, and wetlands are a critical part of the culture and way of life for the diverse communities who call the state home. New Mexico's Indigenous communities, including 23 sovereign Pueblo and Tribal governments, have stewarded these lands and waters since time immemorial, and remain integral to protecting the waters on which all New Mexicans depend.

## THE THREAT

A recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Sackett v. EPA*, overturned decades of federal clean water protections for the vast majority of New Mexico's streams, and wetlands—with potentially devastating consequences to clean water, agriculture, acequias, economies, fish and wildlife habitat, and cultural resources.

The court decision scaled back national Clean Water Act safeguards to include protections only for “relatively permanent” streams, and wetlands with a “continuous surface connection” to these protected streams. This means streams that only run during the rainy season or for periods of the year after snowmelt—which is very typical in this arid state—no longer have federal protections. The court also stripped

GERAINT SMITH

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# RIVERS OF NEW MEXICO

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protections for “isolated” wetlands—that is, wetlands not physically connected to other covered waters. In addition, waters found in New Mexico’s closed basins, which represent 20% of land area of the state, are also left federally unprotected due a previous Supreme Court decision in 2006. These rulings fly in the face of established science and ignore the value that small streams and wetlands have to their broader watersheds, communities, and economies, particularly in places with dry climates like New Mexico.

Permits that regulate pollution and mitigate damage to waterways and wetlands from

certain wastewater treatment plants, mines, industrial sites, and development projects may no longer be required for many of the state’s waters under the federal Clean Water Act. Without a state permitting program, the majority of New Mexico’s streams and wetlands would lack protection.

Despite the state’s commitment and proven record of protecting its clean water and remarkable natural resources, the new threat to New Mexico is real. This is because New Mexico’s state surface water permitting program is not yet in place to ensure its rivers are appropriately protected.

There is good news: New Mexico is committed to protecting clean water. Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham has been a vocal advocate for clean water protections and publicly opposed the U.S. Supreme Court decision. The New Mexico Environment Department, under the governor’s leadership, has begun building the foundation of a state permitting program. The legislature and the governor solidified this support by appropriating \$7.6 million in the 2024 legislative session to set up a state-led program and for shared infrastructure with the existing groundwater permitting program. Importantly, New Mexico’s definition of “Waters of the State” is more comprehensive than the federal definition and can eventually protect all of the state’s waterways, including isolated wetlands and small streams, when a state program is established and funded.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The state of New Mexico needs strong public support to develop, fund, and implement a state surface water permitting program to protect the rivers, streams and wetlands that lost federal protections due to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling. The public has an opportunity to influence the development of this program when the New Mexico Environment Department issues a draft rule for the state surface water permitting program in the fall of 2024. Public participation during the rule comment period and hearing process will be necessary to ensure a program that meets the needs of New Mexico’s water resources and communities. Significant funds were secured in the 2024 session to help set up this program, but the work is just beginning. For the state of New Mexico to establish and implement a program that protects all of the state’s rivers, streams, and wetlands, including those still protected by EPA, state legislation and additional funding will be needed.

# 2

# BIG SUNFLOWER & YAZOO RIVERS

**THREAT: Wetland destruction, environmental injustice**

**STATES:** Mississippi

**AT RISK:** Wetlands; birds, fish, and wildlife; local communities

## SUMMARY

The Big Sunflower and Yazoo Rivers are home to an abundance of wetlands and habitats that support more than 450 species of birds, fish, and wildlife in the heart of the Mississippi Flyway. This special place, home to one of the last intact bottomland hardwood forests in America, is threatened by a harmful project known as the Yazoo Backwater Pumps. The project would damage thousands of acres of wetlands while reinforcing historical environmental and racial injustices for predominantly Black, impoverished communities. The Yazoo Pumps proposal was vetoed by EPA in 2008 due to their environmental impact. Unfortunately, the project was revived in 2021. Instead of reviving this costly, damaging pump proposal, EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers should prioritize immediate, effective flood relief using nature-based and non-structural solutions to help local communities while conserving vital wetlands that provide natural flood protection and climate resilience.

STEPHEN KIRKPATRICK

## THE RIVER

In the heart of the Mississippi Delta, the Big Sunflower River begins in Coahoma County and flows for 250 miles until it reaches the Yazoo River, a tributary of the Mississippi River. According to the EPA, the Big Sunflower supports some of the nation's "richest wetland and aquatic resources," including nearly 29 million migrating birds annually. Hunting, fishing and nature tourism fuel the state's annual \$3.37 billion-dollar outdoor recreation economy and the river is an area rich in culture and heritage. Many famous blues musicians launched their careers on the banks of the Big Sunflower, including Sam Cooke, Ike Turner, Muddy Waters, 2020 Grammy nominee Christone "Kingfish" Ingram, and more.

While agricultural production is common throughout the Big Sunflower and Yazoo River watersheds, nearly one-quarter of the region has been protected as public land or enrolled in conservation programs. Despite tens of thousands of acres of federal, state, and privately-owned conservation lands being protected in the Yazoo Backwater Area, agricultural water withdrawals, pollution, and development have had major impacts on the watershed since at least the 1970s.

## THE THREAT

The Big Sunflower and Yazoo Rivers are threatened by a destructive project known as the Yazoo Backwater Pumps. In 2008, the Corps agreed that a similar proposal would impact at least 67,000 acres of wetlands in the heart of the Mississippi Delta. In light of the Supreme Court's recent Sackett v. EPA decision, as well as the historic cumulative loss of 80 percent of wetlands and native forests in the Mississippi alluvial plain, the impacts of the Yazoo Pumps would be an astounding loss of critical habitat that cannot be reasonably mitigated.

Recently, the Corps has revived the pump project—and the impact to the environment and communities is substantial. Pumps would make wetlands drier and reduce the

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# BIG SUNFLOWER & YAZOO RIVERS

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STEPHEN KIRKPATRICK

number of days fish can swim during crucial spawning seasons. This is especially problematic since aquatic life is already seeing regular die-offs in the area due in part to agriculture and water management decisions.

The pumps would reinforce historic racial and environmental injustices for some of the nation's poorest communities, especially for Sharkey and Issaquena Counties, which are 70-percent Black with poverty rates significantly higher than Mississippi's average and more than triple the national average. In the Corps' 2021 Pumps proposal, they acknowledged that, even had the pumps been

operating during the 2019 major flood event, 83 percent of the Yazoo Backwater lands that flooded would still have been underwater. Many local leaders and community members of color recognize that the pumps are a false promise that will not protect them from flooding. The Yazoo Pumps, that will likely cost federal taxpayers more than \$1.4 billion, would provide little protection to homes in the sparsely populated area that the pumps are supposed to protect, and could increase flooding in downstream communities.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Federal programs are funded and available today to help provide effective, economical, and environmentally sound protections for people's lives and property. These commonsense measures include elevating homes and roads, voluntary buyouts, and compensating farmers who volunteer to take their land out of production and restore it back to wetlands. Rural and urban communities across the U.S. are embracing these natural infrastructure and non-structural measures to provide immediate relief and manage long-term flood risk.

Like all Clean Water Act vetoes, EPA's original and renewed vetoes of the Yazoo Pumps were based on rigorous analysis of potential impacts and broad public input, and issued to permanently block construction of an exceptionally destructive project. In the wake of the Supreme Court's decision to limit protection of wetlands across the nation, it is critical that the public speak out to defend this ecologically significant place from destruction and defend the integrity of the Clean Water Act and its critical veto authority.

We must urge the Army Corps of Engineers to drop the pump project from the Yazoo plan; enact nature-based, non-structural flood solutions to protect people and the environment in lieu of the pumps; and protect the Clean Water Act Veto.



3

# DUCK RIVER

**THREAT:** Excessive water withdrawals

**STATES:** Tennessee

**AT RISK:** Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat

## SUMMARY

The Duck River is a beautiful Tennessee waterway and the most biodiverse river in North America. The river is recognized as one of three global hot spots for fish and mussel diversity and is home to endangered fish and wildlife. Yet the Duck River is threatened by extreme development pressures from some of the fastest growing communities in the region. The river is used locally for drinking water, agriculture, and large-scale manufacturing processes, and demand for water from the Duck is rapidly outpacing what the river can sustainably provide. Overconsumption of the Duck River's water threatens its long-term use by local communities and its invaluable fish and wildlife. Tennessee Governor Bill Lee must protect this incredible waterway by convening a technical working group, directing the Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation to develop a comprehensive water protection plan, and funding much-needed scientific studies to understand the flow needs of the river and ensure its long-term health.

BYRON JORJORIAN

## THE RIVER

The Duck River flows 269 miles through seven counties in Middle Tennessee. It is one of the top three most biodiverse rivers in the world, home to 22 aquatic snail species, 56 mussel species and 151 fish species. Many species in the Duck are federally listed as endangered or threatened, including a few whose only remaining viable populations are found in the river.

The Duck is a beloved destination for anglers, boaters, and kayakers, and serves as a backbone to the local outdoor recreation economy. Over 150,000 people recreate on the Duck River and its tributaries each year. The river is also the drinking water source for nearly 250,000 people and provides water for the region's growing population and industry.

The Duck River has long been a place of cultural import. Since time immemorial, Tribes such as the Muscogee (Creek), Yuchi, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Cherokee, Shawnee, and Seneca have been its stewards and inhabitants. The Duck River Temple Mounds is one of several riverside archaeological sites, and the Duck River Cache is arguably one of the most significant collections of prehistoric Native American art discovered East of the Mississippi.

## THE THREAT

Tennessee is one of the fastest growing states in the nation, and explosive growth in Middle Tennessee is having a major impact on local waterways, including and especially the Duck River. Population and industry growth has led to extreme development pressures, and local water utilities are trying to dramatically increase the amount of water they withdraw from the Duck. Unsustainable overconsumption of water from the Duck threatens to drain the river during periods of low flow and drought. This puts long-term water supply for local communities and the river's aquatic inhabitants at risk.



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# DUCK RIVER

Continued

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HIGHER PURSUITS

The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) has proposed to issue water withdrawal permits which would allow several local water utilities to increase the amount of water they pull from the Duck River by approximately 16 million gallons each day. Yet TDEC is in the process of issuing these permits with an inadequate plan to manage the long-term health of the river and without sufficient scientific understanding of the impact that these withdrawals will have on local habitat or threatened and endangered species. What's more, some local utilities are already claiming that the proposed withdrawal amounts are not enough, and they are advocating that TDEC allow them to pull even more water from the river.

Development pressures along with climate change-driven droughts are putting immense pressure on the Duck River and its wildlife. Even now, experts are observing mussel stranding events when there is too little water in the Duck River. These events will only become more frequent and severe if Tennessee does not proactively plan for the long-term, sustainable use of the river and continues to issue water withdrawal permits without sufficiently protective conditions.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Tennessee Governor Bill Lee must take three important actions to protect the Duck River at this critical juncture in its history. First, Governor Lee must convene a technical working group to provide expertise and recommendations regarding water management and conservation in the Duck River watershed. Second, Governor Lee must direct TDEC to develop a

comprehensive plan to proactively manage the long-term and sustainable use of the Duck River. Doing so is critical to ensure the river remains a resource for fish and aquatic life, public drinking water supply, recreation, and local industry. Finally, Governor Lee should fund much-needed scientific studies to understand the flow needs of the river. If water levels in the Duck River get too low due to short-sighted management decisions and unsustainable water withdrawals, it will hurt local economies, impede recreational use, and harm or even kill downstream species—including threatened and endangered species. These three actions are critically needed to protect the river and its world-class biodiversity, maintain a sustainable water supply for local communities, and ensure that the Duck River continues to be a waterway used and enjoyed by current and future Tennesseans.



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# SANTA CRUZ RIVER

**THREAT:** Water scarcity

**STATES:** Arizona (United States), Sonora (Mexico)

**AT RISK:** Community and cultural connection, fish and wildlife

## SUMMARY

The Santa Cruz River was once a desert oasis that was dried up and polluted for decades – and only recently is it coming back to life. Climate change and water scarcity however, threaten progress to ensure clean, flowing water in the river. What's more, rollbacks to clean water protections at the federal level could add new challenges to the health of the watershed longer term. To ensure this river remains a community treasure, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should establish an Urban National Wildlife Refuge.

JULIUS SCHLOSBERG

## THE RIVER

The Santa Cruz River has provided life-sustaining water to humans for more than 12,000 years—including some of the oldest communities in North America. The Tohono O'odham Nation have stewarded these lands and waters since time immemorial, and both the Tohono O'odham Nation and Pascua Yaqui Tribe continue to live in the area today. After western expansion in the 1800s, over a century of intensive groundwater withdrawals caused the Santa Cruz River's perennial flows to end in 1913 and seasonal flows ceased by 1940. The intervening decades saw partially treated wastewater discharges into the Santa Cruz, creating harmful conditions for the native ecosystem and human residents alike.

The Santa Cruz River has been on a steady path to recovery since 2008 when wastewater treatment facilities along the river began to upgrade. Wastewater facilities now provide approximately 35 miles of perennial flows—improved water quality, and native fish, birds, reptiles, vegetation, and people are all returning to the river. These gains are seen in beautiful flowing sections in Santa Cruz County that support a rare cottonwood–willow forest within the unique and extraordinary Sonoran Desert, as well as a vibrant urban corridor through the City of Tucson. The river has historically provided for strong communities of ranchers and farmers, and now contributes to the success of the Tumacácori National Historic Park, the de Anza Trail, and Sweetwater Wetlands as important recreation and birding sites. The growing tourism and service industries complement those still working the land and add to prosperity for the region.

## THE THREAT

While binational, state, local, private, and academic institutions have put time and money into reconnecting people to the Santa Cruz, the river's recovery remains tenuous. The greatest challenge to the Santa Cruz River today is maintaining the water that remains and

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# SANTA CRUZ RIVER

Continued

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to avoid backsliding on the progress made over the past decade.

As an effluent-dominated river, the Santa Cruz is reliant on consistent source water, and in Tucson, that water comes from the import of Colorado River water. As those water supplies dwindle due to climate change and overuse, so could flows in the Santa Cruz. Nonetheless, climate change has dried Tucson's drinking water source (Colorado River) and changed local rainfall patterns, increasing the likelihood that we will again return to depleting groundwater reserves and reallocating Santa Cruz River water for advanced water purification (i.e., direct potable reuse).

Longer droughts, rising temperatures, and intense competition for water threaten limited supplies. Southern Arizona has a growing population and a rebounding economy, which both increase water use. The amount of effluent going into the river is also at risk because local, state, and federal jurisdictions all influence how treated waste water is used, and how water owners are credited. There is no guarantee that effluent will remain in the river unless changes are made.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Sonoran Institute, in partnership with The Wilderness Society has been working to establish a Santa Cruz River Urban National Wildlife Refuge. The purpose is to celebrate the river's diverse and rich cultural heritage, honor the revitalized river, increase access to the nature, and protect this crucial greenspace. An Urban National Wildlife Refuge would establish parcels which will be put into permanent federal protection, create an acquisition boundary—within which future parcels can be purchased and likewise protected—and would bring much-needed national attention to this ecologically and culturally significant waterway. Increased recreational use and appreciation of the Santa Cruz River through the Urban National Wildlife Refuge program would be a powerful and strategic protection tool toward preserving the ecological value—including flowing water.

To ensure this river remains a community treasure, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service should establish an Urban National Wildlife Refuge. The public can take action by urging Secretary Deb Haaland to designate this new wildlife area for birds, wildlife, and people!

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# LITTLE PEE DEE RIVER

**THREAT:** Highway development

**STATES:** South Carolina, North Carolina

**AT RISK:** Clean water, wetlands, wildlife habitat

## SUMMARY

The Little Pee Dee River, situated primarily in the upper coastal plain of South Carolina, is recognized as one of the Southeast's most unique blackwater rivers, holding remarkable value for people and wildlife. Along its 118-mile course are miles of forested wetlands, which provide a critical habitat for endangered species of fish and wildlife. The river has remained mostly untouched by development, but the looming threat of highway development and poor resource management puts this river, and the communities that depend on it, at risk.

## THE RIVER

From its headwaters at Gum Swamp and Shoeheel Creek in North Carolina, the Little Pee Dee River flows into South Carolina at Marlboro County and continues southeast until it converges with the Great Pee Dee River at the tri-county connection with Georgetown County. The free-flowing, unaltered river system is an important resource for inland fisheries with its streams, sloughs, oxbow lakes, and cypress gum swamps, providing a diverse habitat for fish and other aquatic species. Its biodiversity includes remote swamplands that feature bald cypress forests and other hardwoods, and sandhills and bluffs that provide sanctuary to breeding and migratory waterfowl. The numerous floodplains within the watershed encompass large acreages of wild and undeveloped forestland, while wetlands connect to an abundance of creeks and streams.

## THE THREAT

The construction of Interstate 73 would cross the Little Pee Dee River and run through the Little Pee Dee Heritage Preserve. This highway construction would destroy wetlands and critical wildlife habitat, impact the health of the river, and exacerbate flooding for disadvantaged communities already challenged with property damage and displacement.

I-73 would impact hundreds of acres of pristine wetlands in the watershed. Based on the submitted permit application to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 313 acres of wetlands would be impacted by just a segment of the proposed I-73. In addition, 13 perennial streams would be disturbed between the existing I-95 and South Carolina Highway 22. Numerous marginalized communities will be displaced and at-risk from the threats of exacerbated flooding and the infrastructure will hinder wildlife reproduction leading to a decline in the population of land and aquatic species.

BECKY RYON

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# LITTLE PEE DEE RIVER

Continued

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Development of I-73 will create the loss of natural habitat with the cumulative effects of ecosystem imbalances and increased flooding of the communities that live along the river.

Wetlands act as natural water filters and store floodwater that threatens the health and safety of nearby residents. Floodwater can carry raw sewage, toxic chemicals, and runoff from hazardous waste sites and factory farms. It can pollute drinking water supplies and cause numerous health conditions. When floodwaters recede, bacteria and mold may remain, increasing rates of respiratory illnesses, such as

asthma. Flooding can also contribute to mental health illnesses, lead to economic loss, and uproot whole communities. Every community deserves access to clean water and, with the destruction of wetlands from building I-73, it will impair the quality of life for thousands of South Carolinians.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

With historical land use practices already causing wetland degradation, the ruling in Sackett v. EPA has significant implications to freshwater wetlands in the Little Pee Dee River watershed, including impacts on flooding, water quality, and wildlife habitats. Despite rollbacks at the federal level, South Carolina can enact their own legislation and we must urge state legislators to establish new wetland protections. Additionally, as a home rule state, counties in South Carolina can enact ordinances above and beyond state regulations. Using the already developed Little Pee Dee Lumber Focus Area Conservation Plan, we can advocate for protection at both the state and local levels to ensure a healthy and resilient watershed.

Although I-73 is permitted and shovel ready, the state has not yet identified the \$2 billion in funding needed for construction. This year, Horry County residents will vote on a transportation sales tax which could include \$450 million for a portion of the interstate. We must remain vocal in opposition to funding this interstate and urge Horry County voters to oppose the sales tax. We must remain vocal in opposition to funding this unnecessary new interstate.



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# FARMINGTON RIVER

**THREAT:** Hydropower dam

**STATES:** Connecticut, Massachusetts

**AT RISK:** Clean drinking water, fish and wildlife

## SUMMARY

The Farmington River is a vital source of clean drinking water for the region, supports diverse fish and wildlife, and provides boating and other recreation opportunities. But the Rainbow Dam, an outdated hydropower dam, is sapping life from the river, blocking fish migration and spurring outbreaks of toxic algae blooms that are harmful to people, pets, and wildlife. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP) and Farmington River Power Company (FRPC) must ensure that dam operations meet reasonable standards for the health of the river as well as public health and safety.

## THE RIVER

The Farmington River watershed covers over 600 square miles in Massachusetts and Connecticut. It holds two national Partnership Wild & Scenic River designations and is a major tributary to the Connecticut River which spans across 4 states. The watershed has been utilized and stewarded by Indigenous people for more than 12,000 years, and in the 1600s, Algonkian speaking groups such as the Tunxis and Mahican Tribes called this area home. Due to colonization and displacement, there are currently no federally recognized Tribal lands along the river, but descendants of these groups still live throughout Connecticut and surrounding areas.

The Farmington and its tributaries support cold-water resident fish species and habitat for various important migratory fish species. The watershed is highly regulated as a public drinking water supply for the Hartford region with impoundments and diversions governed by a variety of contracts and management agreements. There are currently three active hydropower projects at the mouth, upstream, and in the headwaters of the river.

The West Branch of the Farmington is a highly regarded trout fishery and the river provides stretches of whitewater, used by individuals including world-class paddlers, and outfitters, further adding to its cultural value as a coveted recreation destination. The Farmington is a crucial part of life to plants, animals and people alike, all of which depend on it for survival and wellness.

## THE THREAT

The continued success of decades of work to protect and restore the Farmington River as a world-class cold-water fishery, recreation destination, and potential home for hundreds of thousands of migratory fish species hinges on threats posed by the first dam in the watershed.

FARMINGTON RIVER  
WATERSHED ASSOCIATION

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# FARMINGTON RIVER

Continued

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Eight miles upstream from where the Farmington River joins the Connecticut River is the Rainbow Dam, owned by the FRPC. This small hydropower dam has been in operation since the early 20th century, but due to a quirk of law, it has no federal oversight. Federal regulation of hydropower dams requires that a river be deemed “navigable,” and over fifty years ago the Farmington—despite its significant flows and many boaters consistently using the river—was ruled “non-navigable” by the federal government.

The resulting lack of federal oversight and limited state jurisdiction has allowed this small and poorly maintained

hydropower project, whose inadequate and outdated fishway often led to fish mortality before it was shut down in 2023, to effectively render more than 95% of the watershed’s habitat inaccessible to river herring, shad, eel, and sea lamprey. The dam is also responsible for creating river conditions in the upstream reservoir that have repeatedly caused toxic algae blooms that can be a health hazard to people, and can be lethal to pets and wildlife. These blooms have forced the state to seasonally close a public boat ramp and a summer camp located on the river to prohibit swimming and boating during periods of the summer. The FRPC’s operation of the dam releases large pulses of water at unpredictable times, harming aquatic life. The state has said these flows harm the river, and the section below the dam is listed as impaired for aquatic life due to flow. Because of its current operation and failure to safely pass migratory fish, the Rainbow Dam causes the Farmington River to be in violation of the federal Clean Water Act and state laws.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Farmington River Power Company needs to be held accountable for dam operations and ensuring they meet reasonable standards for public health and safety, and the health of the river. The company can take advantage of current unprecedented funding opportunities to make a difference this year before they expire. At a minimum, this includes changing operations to fix the Clean Water Act violations, eliminate the toxic algae outbreaks, and to provide safe, timely and effective fish passage. The company has had well over a century of largely unrestricted use of the Farmington River—it is time for dam operations to meet reasonable standards so the public can have clean water and a healthy river.



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# TRINITY RIVER

**THREAT:** Excessive water withdrawals, inadequate temperature protection

**STATES:** California

**AT RISK:** Tribal fishing and water rights, clean drinking water, fish and wildlife

## SUMMARY

The Trinity River—the largest tributary of the Klamath—plays a vital role for salmon, steelhead and green sturgeon. The Trinity, known as Hun’ to the Hoopa Tribe, who have resided on its banks for millennia, holds remarkable value to wildlife and people. The Hoopa Valley and Yurok Tribes have been stewarding and defending the river for generations, fighting for Tribal rights and environmental justice for the people and the waters. The Trinity is threatened from excessive water diversions, new water demands, and the effects of drought and climate change. Governor Newsom and Interior Secretary Haaland must take action to ensure protection of the Trinity River and to support Tribal Nations and their federally reserved fishing rights, culture, and livelihoods.

AARON MARTIN, YUOK TRIBE

## THE RIVER

The Trinity River of northwestern California is the largest tributary of the Klamath River. The river begins in the Trinity Alps and Scott Mountains, then flows 165 miles through the Klamath Mountains and Coast Ranges, until it finally meets the Klamath River where the Hoopa and Yurok Reservations intersect.

The Trinity River flows through the Hoopa Valley Reservation and is the lifeblood of the Hoopa Valley Tribe, Yurok Tribe, and Nor El Muk Band of Wintu Indians. The Hoopa Tribe maintains fishing rights and relies on the river for their drinking water, ceremonies and their main food source—salmon. The Hoopa Valley and Yurok Tribes’ stewardship of the Trinity River goes beyond activism and advocacy. As guardians of the Trinity, members of the Tribes have pushed relentlessly for decades to ensure the health of the river, defending the Trinity—from the courtroom to the White House—and ensuring the river could persist in the face of the threat posed by diversions.

The Trinity is a designated Wild and Scenic River, a source of clean, cold water for salmon and people downstream, and produces hydroelectricity at four locations as it is diverted into the Sacramento River for agricultural purposes. Coastal commercial fishermen also rely on Trinity River salmon as the Klamath Basin’s largest salmon spawning tributary.

## THE THREAT

The Trinity River is diverted into the Sacramento River for the Central Valley Water Project. Until a Record of Decision (ROD) was signed to restore the river in 2000, up to 90% of the river was diverted. The ROD—which allows up to 49% of river to stay in the watershed—provides no meaningful protections for cold water reservoir storage; State water right policies have not been updated to recognize Tribal rights



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# TRINITY RIVER

Continued

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PHOTO: CARLOS JARAMILLO  
VOGUE MAGAZINE

or provide adequate cold river temperatures. Consequently, Biological Opinions enacted during the Trump administration have led to reservoir depletion, rising river temperatures, and other environmental impacts that put threatened coho salmon and chinook salmon at risk. Currently the Tribes are also dealing with some of the lowest salmon returns in history and toxic algae outbreaks, which impacts their cultural use, food security, wellness and livelihoods. Additionally, commercial and recreational salmon fishing has been prohibited in recent years.

With the removal of the Klamath River dams, a watershed-wide

restoration effort has begun. The Trinity River—the main source of cold, clean water for the Lower Klamath River where over 65,000 adult salmon died in 2002—is critical to this restoration. A long-term plan for the Lower Klamath River specified that Trinity River water can be released to stop Klamath fish kills; however in drought years, diversions from Trinity Reservoir threaten the availability of this cold, clean water.

There are currently plans to issue new Biological Opinions for the Central Valley Water Project, and to build a new reservoir (Sites) and a tunnel under the Delta (Delta Conveyance) - all of which threaten the Trinity River. Some proposed alternatives for the Biological Opinion threaten to weaken the ROD instead of protecting reservoir storage and flows. The State Water Board is also planning to amend the Bay-Delta Plan using “Voluntary Agreements” that would use more Trinity River water to avoid decreasing diversions to water users.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Trinity River needs permanent protections from Central Valley water uses. To protect this vital and cherished river, the public may request the following actions:

- The State Water Board must ensure that the Trinity River is protected in the Sites Reservoir and Delta Tunnel water right orders.
- The U.S. Department of Interior must protect the Trinity River through the Biological Assessment and Environmental Impact Study while renegotiating Central Valley Project contracts, as well as any future reviews of the California Water Project. New environmental analyses should explore impacts of removing the Trinity River’s lower dam (Lewiston Dam).
- The State Water Board should protect the Trinity River through its Bay-Delta Planning phases, including updating Water Right Order 90-5 and Trinity River Basin Plan temperature requirements using current science to protect Trinity River fisheries from the impacts of excessive diversions, proposed Bay-Delta Voluntary Agreements, and climate change.
- Central Valley water users must phase out/reduce the use of Trinity River water and stop pushing for unsustainable permanent water contracts to the Westlands Water District, which is located almost 400 miles from the Trinity River.

# KOBUK RIVER

**THREAT:** Mining, development, climate change

**STATES:** Alaska

**AT RISK:** Iñupiat subsistence traditions and economy, clean water, fish and wildlife

## SUMMARY

The free-flowing Kobuk River lies north of the Arctic Circle in Alaska, at the northern edge of the boreal forest that flanks the Brooks Range. The river meanders through homelands of the Indigenous Iñupiat who continue to live from their ancestral lands as they have for millennia. The river's abundant fish and wildlife provide spiritual, cultural, and nutritional sustenance to the Iñupiat communities. With no road connections or industrial development, the river offers a rare glimpse into an almost primordial North American landscape. The proposed Ambler Road and associated mining development would cause irreparable harm to the Kobuk's water quality and fish and wildlife, threatening communities all along the river. The Biden Administration must revoke all permits allowing construction of the road.



NICK JANS

## THE RIVER

The 380-mile-long Kobuk River originates in the heart of America's northernmost mountain range—the Brooks Range—and flows west to the Arctic Ocean. Its headwaters cut through steep canyons of cascading rapids, then it gradually mellows as it approaches a wide delta with a rich maze of waterways. The middle and lower river winds through a ribbon of boreal forest, and from October to May, the river is frozen, covered by a thick layer of ice that becomes a winter “highway” for wildlife and people.

The river has long supported the Iñupiat with its natural resource bounty, including intact salmon runs, abundant waterfowl, Alaska's second largest caribou herd (the Western Arctic herd), and spawning grounds of the famed sheefish. The salmon runs also support a locally-based commercial fishery that provides jobs and income to over a hundred families in the area. The Kobuk River is rich in archeological evidence, including the renowned Paatitaaq, or Onion Portage, where the Iñupiat have hunted caribou for more than 8,000 years. Today five Iñupiat communities with a total population of about 1,800, sit along the Kobuk River, as well as numerous scattered family fishing and hunting camps.

In recognition of its outstanding values, a 110-mile stretch of the Kobuk was designated a Wild River in 1980 by the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

## THE THREAT

The proposed Ambler Road, a huge threat to the Kobuk River, is a 211-mile road that would begin at the Dalton Highway and cut westward to the Kobuk River watershed, allowing for the development of multiple open-pit mines currently under exploration. The Ambler Road project would weaken permafrost and require thousands of

# KOBUK RIVER

Continued

crossings over streams, rivers and wetlands, impacting the river's water quality, migration patterns and habitat of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, the second largest caribou herd in Alaska, as well as salmon and sheefish populations found in the Kobuk River watershed.

It is hard to overestimate the impact of this proposed road on the Kobuk River. The Kobuk River currently has no road connections to the rest of the world, which would make the Ambler Road the first to access what has remained a remote region up until now. The land, fish, and wildlife in the Kobuk River watershed are as pristine as can be found in the modern world. The Iñupiat have been excellent stewards of the Kobuk River for untold generations.

According to the Bureau of Land Management's own Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, subsistence access for 66 remote villages would be reduced if the Ambler Road is approved. All villages along the length of the Kobuk River (Kobuk, Shungnak, Ambler, Kiana, and Noorvik) as well as all other communities in the Northwest Arctic Borough (Kotzebue, Selawik, Deering, Buckland, Noatak, and Kivalina) and several villages on the North Slope, Seward Peninsula, and the Interior regions of Alaska would be impacted. The Ambler Road development presents a food sovereignty issue in communities that do not have year-round employment and depend on the land for their food, culture, and way of life.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the lead agency in the environmental review process of the

Ambler Road. In the fall and winter of 2023, Kobuk River residents and people from across the United States submitted over 135,000 comments to the BLM. Folks from the Kobuk River region also attended BLM hearings, highlighting the detrimental impact to subsistence and asking that the Ambler Road project be stopped.

The final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) is expected to be published in the first half of 2024. The Draft SEIS included numerous new data that detail the massive subsistence, cultural, and ecological impacts to the Kobuk River and the people who live along it. We ask the public to take immediate action by signing the petition to the BLM, Department of Interior, and President Biden requesting that they revoke all Ambler Road permits.

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SETH KANTNER

# TIJUANA RIVER / RIO TIJUANA

**THREAT:** Pollution

**STATES:** California (United States), Baja California (Mexico)

**AT RISK:** Clean water, public health

## SUMMARY

The Tijuana River Watershed, ancestral and current homeland of the Kumeyaay Nation and home to millions of people on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border, is steeped in rich multicultural identities. The river joins the Pacific Ocean at beautiful beaches that were once frequented by families, swimmers, and surfers but are now choked with pollution, limiting coastal access and causing serious threats to public health.

Decades of mismanagement and under-investment in wastewater infrastructure have led to egregious and long-running Clean Water Act violations, hurting ecosystems, forcing beach closures, and causing widespread illnesses. Frontline communities have been advocating for solutions for decades, but despite recent progress, roadblocks continue to stand in the way. President Biden and Congress must act now to address this crisis.

## THE RIVER

The Tijuana River travels 120 miles through northwest Baja California and the Tijuana Estuary in southern California before reaching the Pacific Ocean. Its 1,750-square-mile watershed is home to the Kumeyaay Nation and over 2.8 million residents on both sides of the border. While the lower watershed in the United States is largely undeveloped, the majority of the Tijuana River Watershed lies within northwestern Mexico and is extensively developed.

The Tijuana estuary is a National Estuarine Research Reserve with several diverse and sensitive habitats. As the largest remaining natural coastal wetland in southern California and one of the few remaining salt marshes, it provides home to over 370 birds and multiple endangered species.

The river mouth flows into a marine protected area and a world-renowned surf break known as “The Sloughs.” With unparalleled beauty and world-class waves, surfers used to flock to this break but now sewage-laden waters put their health at risk. The local health agency has closed the beach for over 780 days and counting.

## THE THREAT

For over a century, toxic waste and raw sewage have flowed into the Tijuana River Watershed and out into the Pacific Ocean, sickening people and wildlife. These year-round transboundary flows easily measure 35-50 million gallons per day and carry trash from Tijuana’s urban area, untreated wastewater from failing treatment systems and sub-standard sewage disposal, and toxic industrial waste from factories upstream. When it rains, the high volume of water and pollution overwhelms regional infrastructure and creates dangerous conditions for the natural environment and local communities in the U.S. and Mexico.

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# TIJUANA RIVER / RIO TIJUANA

Continued

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Wastewater treatment plants on both sides of the border regularly fail and are severely under-capacity due to decades of under-investment and deferred maintenance. The resulting sewage discharges into the Pacific Ocean do not meet U.S. or Mexican regulations and travel up the coast with summer currents, impacting visitors, residents, and ecosystems. A study by Scripps Institute of Oceanography linked 34,000 illnesses in 2017 to water pollution on the affected Imperial Beach coastline. Recent studies reported that sewage routinely aerosolizes in the air from sea spray, causing widespread respiratory illnesses.

People are getting sick not only when playing in the ocean or sitting on the beach, but also while standing in their own backyards from breathing in toxins. Doctors are noting correlations between urgent care visits and coastal pollution events. San Diego County is installing air monitors in inland border communities to understand air quality and public health impacts. Lifeguards, emergency responders, Navy Seals, and Border Patrol Agents work and train in contaminated environments, risking their own health. “An entire generation of children is growing up in South San Diego County, having only experienced polluted beaches”, wrote Imperial Beach Mayor Aguirre in her June 6 letter to the Biden administration. This is a grave public health crisis and an environmental justice emergency.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

We now have the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution (CIS), vetted by the EPA, impacted community members, and relevant agencies to begin to solve this

decades-long public health crisis. Yet, we still don't have the full funding needed to upgrade and expand the International Wastewater Treatment Plant (ITP) in the U.S. and make other needed infrastructure fixes. In August 2023, Hurricane Hilary revealed that years of deferred maintenance at the ITP will cost significantly more to fix, bringing the total price tag to nearly \$1 billion. Additional funding will be continually required to maintain border water infrastructure and prevent this from happening again.

There are few existing pathways to fund this project, all of which require action by Congress or the President. Until enough political will is galvanized to prioritize this crisis—and provide the immediate relief and funding needed to solve the border water infrastructure problems once and for all—border communities will continue to suffer, ecosystems will continue to be destroyed, and our beaches and tourism industries will continue to decline.

Congress and the Biden Administration must take decisive and immediate action to address the crisis in the Tijuana River Watershed by fully funding the solutions needed to restore a clean and safe environment for the affected communities.

WILDCOAST

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# BLACKWATER RIVER

**THREAT:** Highway construction

**STATES:** West Virginia

**AT RISK:** Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, recreation and tourism economy

## SUMMARY

West Virginia's Blackwater River headwaters in the Canaan Valley—and Blackwater Falls State Park—are a beloved recreational and scenic treasure, and a popular destination for wildlife and nature lovers, boaters, cyclists, hikers, skiers, hunters and fishers. But the Blackwater is at risk. The current State-proposed route for a major four-lane "Corridor H" highway complex would divide local communities and cross sensitive headwater streams, destroy delicate habitat, and pollute key tributaries. Local community members and businesses are insisting that policy-makers, including the Federal Highway Administration, mandate an alternative Northern Route—one that would safeguard river health and enhance the heritage, character, and economies of local communities.

## THE RIVER

The Blackwater River flows 34 miles through the High Allegheny Mountains of Tucker County, West Virginia, draining 142 square miles. Tannins from spruce and hemlock trees impart an amber color to the river as it meanders through Canaan Valley, over Blackwater Falls and into the eight-mile-long Blackwater Canyon, site of Class 4-5+ whitewater rapids. The Blackwater River region is a popular outdoor recreational resource and destination for a growing sustainable tourism economy. The Blackwater is fed by the Canaan Valley Wildlife Refuge and Big Run Bog, a National Natural Landmark. The river corridor is home to the endangered Cheat Mountain salamander, Virginia big-eared bat, northern long-eared bat and Indiana bat, the rusty patched bumble bee, and the rare West Virginia northern flying squirrel, eastern brook trout, and eastern hellbender. On the banks of the Blackwater, in the quaint towns of Davis and Thomas, locals and visitors enjoy nature and solitude. The surrounding Monongahela National Forest and the park offer a multitude of trails for all seasons.

## THE THREAT

The Blackwater River is threatened by the currently State-preferred (but not yet adopted) route for a major four-lane highway that would cross all of the river's headwater streams with major construction activity at each. This route would have severe negative impacts on the area's unique cultural, historic, and environmental integrity, as well as the livelihoods of many people who live, work and recreate in the area.

A huge cement bridge and roadway complex would bisect the towns of Thomas and Davis, and another would straddle the gateway to the Blackwater Canyon, the North Fork of the Blackwater. The many rare animal and plant species in the river

FRANK GEBHARD

10

# BLACKWATER RIVER

Continued



FRANK GEBHARD

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corridor would struggle to escape the habitat destruction that comes with highway construction—including deforestation, earth disturbance, giant cuts and fills.

What's more, the currently preferred route would pass across a large former strip mine that has not been reclaimed, underlain with a honeycomb of mine tunnels that are filled with acid mine drainage pollution. Construction in this area would be a recipe for disaster for water quality and stability of structures as mine tunnels collapse and spill polluted water into the river.

Blackwater Falls State Park views would be marred by the route, and by the intrusion of truck noise and lights. The same impacts will also degrade the outdoor experience on the nearby section of the Monongahela National Forest. The famous Olson Fire Tower on the Monongahela River, which looks out over an undisturbed landscape, would become a viewing platform for tri-axle trucks and speeding cars.

Additionally, the current preferred route would degrade five major recreational cycling routes in the area. Construction on the North Fork Bridge could disrupt the Coketon area—one of the poorest communities in the county—and would shut down access to healthy recreation for the local and larger community.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

A public comment period before a final decision on a route by state and federal highway authorities will occur this year. The “Corridor H Go North Campaign” is mobilizing the voices of concerned community members everywhere to affect those authorities. Local businesses, civic and

environmental groups, and hundreds of people who appreciate the Blackwater River, are vigorously promoting a “Northern Route” alternative that would protect the Blackwater River and the people and natural systems that depend on the river.

The Campaign notes that the currently proposed route was designed 30 years ago, with little thought to preserving the Blackwater River’s unique cultural, historic, and environmental integrity. A Northern Route will maintain the river-centric regional economy while allowing highway access that meets the needs of state and federal authorities.

Please take action now to save the Blackwater and urge the State and Federal Highway Administration to mandate an alternative Northern Route.



WETLANDS, MISSISSIPPI  
STEPHEN KIRKPATRICK



**AMERICAN RIVERS**

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

American Rivers acknowledges, works, and seeks to amplify Indigenous leadership in river protection and honors the traditional ecological knowledge and perspectives held by Indigenous People and Tribal Nations.

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