



**AMERICAN  
RIVERS**

Life Depends on Rivers<sup>SM</sup>

**40<sup>TH</sup>**  
ANNIVERSARY  
EST. 1984

# America's Most Endangered Rivers<sup>®</sup> of 2025

TEN RIVERS. TEN SOLUTIONS.  
TEN OPPORTUNITIES TO  
PROTECT CLEAN WATER AND  
COMMUNITIES.

# America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2025

“Rivers and clean water are essential to our nation’s health, safety, and prosperity. But pollution and extreme weather are putting rivers, people, and wildlife at risk. For 40 years, America’s Most Endangered Rivers® has been a powerful call to action, advancing commonsense solutions and protecting the rivers we all depend on.”

— Tom Kiernan, president and CEO of American Rivers



COVER PHOTO: MISSISSIPPI RIVER, ST. CLOUD, MINNESOTA  
JACOB, ADOBE STOCK  
CLEARWATER RIVER, IDAHO / JOHN WEBSTER

Rivers make life possible, yet we are losing them.

Much of our drinking water comes from rivers, and healthy rivers help power strong local economies. Natural river habitats support thousands of plant and animal species. But America’s rivers and clean water supplies are in crisis.

Half of the rivers in the U.S. have unsafe levels of pollution, threatening drinking water. Freshwater species are going extinct faster than ocean or land species, and rivers are among the most threatened ecosystems on the planet. Increasingly severe floods and droughts are devastating rivers and the communities that depend on them.

America’s Most Endangered Rivers® is an annual call to action for the solutions our rivers need. By teaming up with local partners and generating national attention, we mobilize the public to act and deliver results for rivers and all of the life they support.

Now celebrating its 40th anniversary, America’s Most Endangered Rivers® has a track record of success: from preventing pollution in Arkansas’ Buffalo National River, to stopping a harmful diversion project on New Mexico’s Gila, to restoring Maine’s Penobscot and safeguarding special places like Wyoming’s Hoback River and Minnesota’s Boundary Waters, to rallying support for rivers nationwide.

American Rivers is proud to work with our partners advocating for the future of America’s Most Endangered Rivers®. Together, we must protect these 10 rivers — and ensure every river in our country is clean and healthy for people and wildlife.

**Half of the rivers in the U.S. have unsafe levels of pollution, threatening drinking water.**



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American Rivers reviews nominations for America’s Most Endangered Rivers® from individuals and organizations across the country. Rivers are selected based upon the following criteria:

- » A major decision that the public can help influence in the coming year.
- » The significance of the river to people and nature.
- » The magnitude of threat to the river and its communities.

## ABOUT AMERICAN RIVERS

American Rivers is a national conservation organization working to make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife. We combine evidence-based solutions with enduring partnerships to safeguard the 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams that are essential to our nation’s clean drinking water, extraordinary wildlife, and strength of our communities. For more than 50 years, our staff, supporters, and partners have been driven by a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers®.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: [AMERICANRIVERS.ORG](http://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG)

# 1

# MISSISSIPPI RIVER

**THREAT:** Increased flooding, inadequate disaster prevention and response

**STATES:** Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana

**AT RISK:** Public safety, river health

## SUMMARY

The Mississippi is “America’s River,” flowing through the nation’s heartland, providing drinking water for 20 million people and supporting vital agriculture, industry, and recreation. But frequent and severe floods are threatening lives and businesses, while the river’s health declines. Communities along the river need significant support for disaster prevention and response, as well as river restoration – but the fate of the Federal Emergency Management Agency hangs in the balance. The Trump administration should modernize FEMA to improve river health and maximize the safety, security, and prosperity of Mississippi River communities.

## THE RIVER

The Mississippi River flows 2,350 miles through ten states, with nearly 20 million people relying on it as their source of water. The entire Mississippi River Basin encompasses all or parts of 31 states and two provinces, and is home to roughly 70 million people. The water flows through the ancestral lands of the Ojibwe, Mdewakanton Dakota, Sioux, Sauk, Choctaw, and other Indigenous communities who continue to rely on the river’s abundance for sustenance, health, culture, and livelihood.

The Mississippi River supports a shipping industry worth approximately \$400 billion annually, and its broad, rich floodplain is vital to U.S. agriculture. It also drives a vibrant outdoor recreation economy that supports more than 400,000 jobs and generates approximately \$25 billion annually. The river provides vital habitat to many rare, threatened, and endangered species. It is a globally significant flyway, supporting approximately half of all North American waterfowl, and is home to nearly half of the duck hunters in the U.S., accounting for at least 40 percent of the nation’s annual duck harvest. And, it has been essential to American arts and culture, inspiring authors like Mark Twain, artists like George Catlin, and musicians like B.B. King and Muddy Waters.

## THE THREAT

Changes to federal flood management agencies put the health of the Mississippi River at risk and jeopardizes the clean water and safety of those who live along and depend on it.

Flooding is the most costly and common natural disaster across the United States and certainly within the Mississippi River Basin. Increasingly frequent and severe floods have damaged homes, businesses, and agriculture, and pose an ongoing threat to public safety and clean water. The magnitude of major floods in the Basin has

SEAN PAVONE

# MISSISSIPPI RIVER

Continued



JOE CHRISTENSEN  
ISTOCK

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### EILEEN SHADER

Director, River Restoration  
American Rivers  
570-856-1128  
[eshader@americanrivers.org](mailto:eshader@americanrivers.org)

### MICHAEL SERTLE

Senior Director, Central Region  
American Rivers  
618-230-9383  
[msertle@americanrivers.org](mailto:msertle@americanrivers.org)

### MARY BART

Communications Manager  
Association of State Floodplain Managers  
[mary@floods.org](mailto:mary@floods.org)

### MARIE RISALVATO

Policy Manager  
1Mississippi  
[mrisalvato@1mississippi.org](mailto:mrisalvato@1mississippi.org)

### EMILY DONAHOE

Policy Specialist  
National Wildlife Federation  
[donahoe@nwf.org](mailto:donahoe@nwf.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
MISSISSIPPIRIVER2025](https://www.americanrivers.org/mississippiriver2025)

increased in frequency and intensity, and recent floods have broken records for both size and duration, with the 2019 flood along the Mississippi, for example, inundating communities for over 100 days. The combined cost of that flood event to the United States was an estimated \$20 billion, and a dozen lives were lost.

In addition to the loss of life and financial impacts, there are often unseen damages to drinking water supplies, native plants and animals, and overall river health. In many communities, wastewater treatment plants are located in the floodplain, and flood damage leads to sewage spills, risking clean water and public health.

Much of the Mississippi has been

channelized between levees, cutting the river off from important floodplain and wetland habitat, which has further led to higher, longer, and more severe flooding.

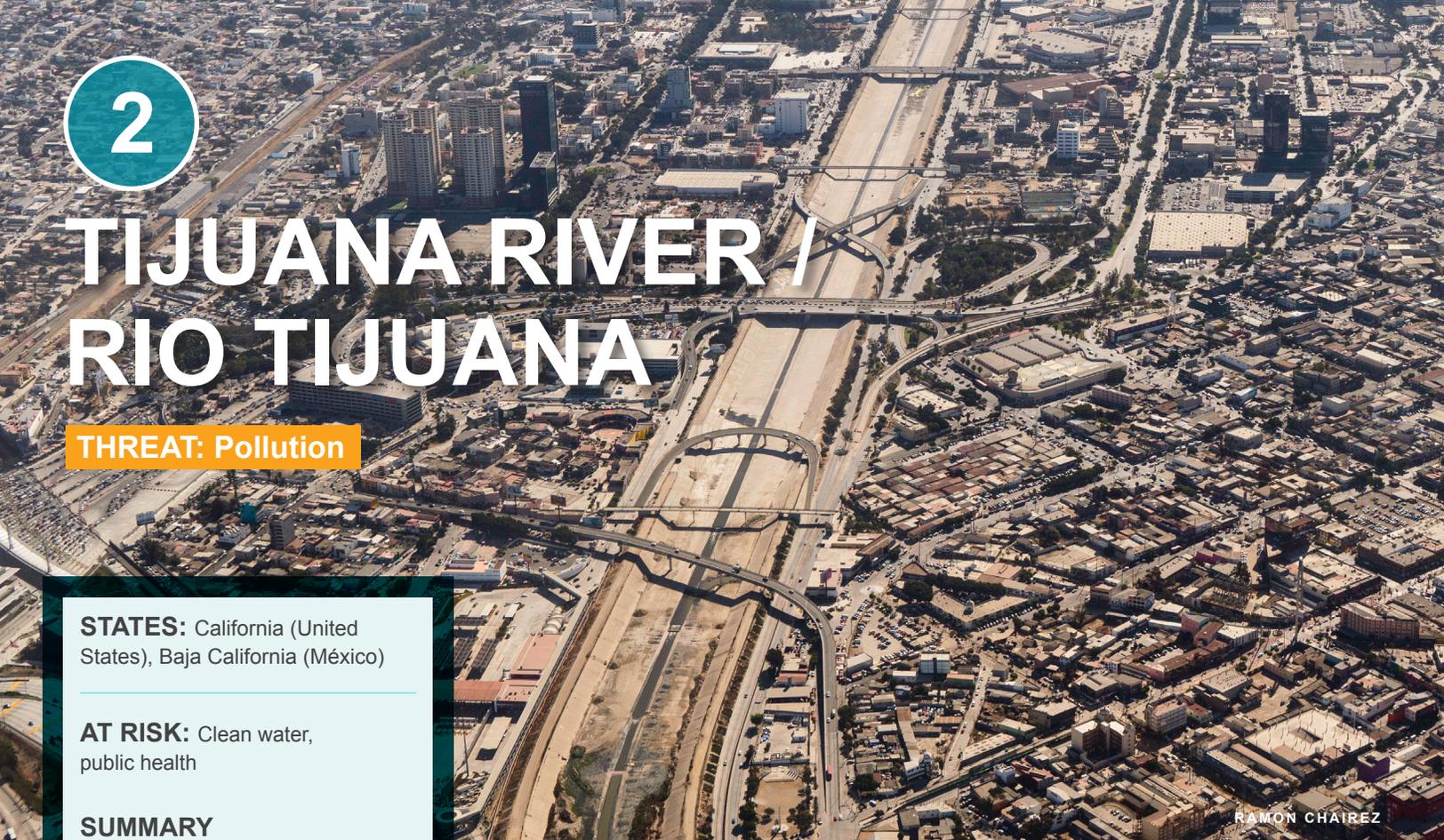
Mississippi River communities require local, state, and federal agencies to work together to prepare for, respond to, and recover from floods. Federal agencies, like the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, produce flood risk maps, provide minimum standards to ensure development is safe from floods, and help homeowners rebuild on higher ground.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Trump administration is currently evaluating several of the federal agencies, including FEMA, that play a critical role in flood management. As the new FEMA Review Council conducts a needed review, it should focus on providing states and communities with necessary flood and disaster relief, while also ensuring the health of rivers and streams that are necessary for healthy communities to thrive.

It is essential that the federal government maintain a robust role in managing floods and other natural disasters since rivers know no borders. Core federal capabilities that must be maintained and improved include providing publicly available data related to flood risks, modernizing floodplain development standards to ensure investments are resilient to flooding, and improving granting efficiencies to help communities improve their resilience to floods faster.

There is significant room for improvement, and as extreme weather brings more flooding to river communities, a more effective and efficient FEMA is essential to helping communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from floods, while supporting a healthy and thriving Mississippi River.



2

# TIJUANA RIVER / RIO TIJUANA

**THREAT:** Pollution

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

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

## SUMMARY

The Tijuana River is known for its communities on both sides of the U.S./Mexico border as well as stunning beaches, world-class surf breaks and diverse wildlife. This region, however, has been plagued with severe pollution for decades. Every day, millions of gallons of contaminated stormwater, sewage, harmful chemicals, and trash flow down the river into the Pacific Ocean. Major federal investments are needed to solve this growing environmental and public health crises.

## THE RIVER

The Tijuana River travels 120 miles through northwest Baja California and the Tijuana River Valley 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's home to over 370 bird species and multiple endangered wildlife species.

The river mouth flows into a marine protected area and a world-renowned surf break known as "The Sloughs." Surfers used to flock to this break but now sewage-laden waters put their health at risk. As of January 2025, San Diego County has closed the southernmost beach for over 1,200 days and counting.

## THE THREAT

The Tijuana River Watershed has been plagued with severe pollution for decades. Every day, millions of gallons of contaminated sewage choke the river. The transboundary flows, that regularly exceed 35 to 50 million gallons per day, carry sewage and trash from Tijuana's urban area, wastewater from sub-standard and failing sewage treatment systems, and toxic industrial waste from factories upstream in Tijuana's maquiladora zones. When it rains, raw sewage mixes with stormwater, overwhelming water treatment infrastructure and creating dangerous water quality conditions for people, fish, and wildlife on both sides of the border.

RAMON CHAIREZ

2

# TIJUANA RIVER / RIO TIJUANA

Continued



RAMON CHAIREZ  
LA TIMES

Local health authorities have issued closures to protect public health at the once world-class beaches, where the Tijuana River empties into the Pacific Ocean. Recent studies have also shown that aerosolization of toxins in the surf and in the main river channel are causing health issues such as respiratory distress, chronic headaches, allergic reactions, and gastrointestinal illness. Children and people with compromised immune systems are particularly at risk.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### KRISTAN CULBERT

Associate Director of California  
River Conservation  
American Rivers  
510-788-1443  
[kculbert@americanrivers.org](mailto:kculbert@americanrivers.org)

### RAMON CHAIREZ

Director of Education  
and Environmental Advocacy  
Un Mar de Colores  
619-794-3877  
[ramon@mar-de-colores.org](mailto:ramon@mar-de-colores.org)

### SARAH DAVIDSON

Clean Border Water Now Manager  
Surfrider Foundation  
619-837-8199  
[sdavidson@surfrider.org](mailto:sdavidson@surfrider.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/)  
[TIJUANARIVER2025](https://TIJUANARIVER2025)

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Community activists and local leaders have formed a coalition by uniting over 50 local organizations, policymakers, and government agencies to build awareness of pollution-related public health threats and advocate for solutions at all levels of government.

The coalition's advocacy efforts have helped to secure hundreds of millions of dollars in funding to implement the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution (CIS) – vetted by the federal government, impacted communities, and local governments – but Congress needs to authorize millions more to finish the project, ensure long-term maintenance, and to fund a much needed river diversion project, which would prevent harmful pollution from flowing in the main river channel near residential neighborhoods and schools.

Protecting our communities and ensuring clean water is a non-partisan issue — it's a matter of basic governance and national responsibility. A federal emergency declaration by the Trump administration would prioritize funding needs and would provide immediate relief to frontline communities, such as air filters, baseline health studies, pollution monitoring, and regional public advisories.

Without swift action, communities will continue to suffer, ecosystems will degrade, local economies will decline — and, as members of the military and Border Patrol are sickened by the pollution, national security will be threatened. The Trump administration must act decisively to declare a federal emergency to address this public health crisis.

# 3

# RIVERS OF SOUTHERN APPALACHIA

**THREAT:** Extreme weather, flooding, unsafe dams, lack of federal capacity

**STATES:** North Carolina, Tennessee, South Carolina, Georgia

**AT RISK:** Water quality, public safety, local economy

## SUMMARY

The rivers of Southern Appalachia weave a rich tapestry, vital to the region's culture and economy, and supporting an abundance of life. But Hurricane Helene devastated these rivers and communities with record flooding and landslides. Federal, state, and local partners have already allocated resources to the region, but there is a long road to recovery and preparation for the next storm in the years to come. Together we must continue to restore the rivers, invest in communities, and remove unsafe dams to strengthen the region so people and businesses can thrive despite increasingly extreme weather.

## THE RIVER

Southern Appalachia's rivers span the eastern continental divide, providing clean drinking water to over 2 million people throughout more than a dozen communities from Newport, Tennessee to Charlotte, North Carolina. These rivers are the economic, recreational, and environmental drivers of the region and are vital to the local and regional economy. The French Broad River watershed alone contributes over \$3.8 billion annually to the region, largely from tourism and recreation.

The Rivers of Southern Appalachia are home to unique and rare species of fish like bright orange tangerine darters and Southern Appalachian brook trout, and other species like the river otter, majestic blue heron, and Eastern hellbenders.

In September 2024, Hurricane Helene devastated communities in the French Broad watershed (including the French Broad, North and South Toe, Cane, Nolichucky, Swannanoa, and Pigeon Rivers), Broad River (including Green and Pacolet Rivers), Watauga River (including the Elk River), New River, Catawba River, and many other rivers, creeks, and waterways. The record rainfall and the largest flood in the region's history claimed 104 lives, destroyed drinking water and wastewater infrastructure, sent debris and pollution into waterways, reshaped river valleys in a landscape-scale event, breached dams, and obliterated sensitive fish and wildlife habitat.

Despite the risks of significant flood events, population growth and development continue unabated, which has led to such significant levels of pollution that several of the rivers are on state and federal lists for polluted water bodies. This indicates that they are limited in their ability to provide clean water and healthy recreation to the communities that depend on them.

RIVERLINK

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# RIVERS OF SOUTHERN APPALACHIA

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**ERIN SINGER MCCOMBS**  
Southeast Conservation Director  
American Rivers  
828-649-7887  
[emccombs@americanrivers.org](mailto:emccombs@americanrivers.org)

**GRAY JERNIGAN**  
MountainTrue  
828-423-0578  
[gray@mountaintrue.org](mailto:gray@mountaintrue.org)

**LISA RALEIGH**  
RiverLink  
970-274-2012  
[lisa@riverlink.org](mailto:lisa@riverlink.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

**[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
RIVERSOFAPPALACHIA2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/RIVERSOFAPPALACHIA2025)**

## THE THREAT

Hurricane Helene caused the economic and environmental destruction, but how the response is handled will create the path forward for the vulnerable human, plant, and wild-life communities left in the wake of this storm. Local communities need support and partnership from each other as well as from government sources. The federal government has a critical role in delivering resources and coordinating the response across state lines and throughout the region. Specifically, federal support is needed to address:

- **Unsafe Dams:** More than 44 dams failed or were damaged leaving a trail of high hazard dams in poor condition which threaten communities when the next storm comes, unless we remove these hazards from the landscape.
- **Debris:** Storm debris ranging from cars and fuel tanks to litter like plastic hanging from riverside trees and garbage along the riverfront harm wildlife and people and put the local economy from the river's recreation industry at risk.
- **Floodplains:** Many property owners are eligible for voluntary buyouts to get themselves out of harm's way before the next flood comes.
- **Erosion:** Miles of streambanks have been scoured of vegetation and undercut by erosion, leading to property loss and sediment pollution that threatens fish habitat and other sensitive aquatic life.
- **Economic Development:** Federal actions can help the region's economy – which relies heavily on

outdoor recreation and agriculture – bounce back as quickly as possible. Federal and state parks need to be safe and open to the public. Reconstruction permit review needs to be efficient. Crop and forestry support must be provided. Without the capacity to address these issues within the federal agencies, communities will suffer long-term economic consequences.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The fate of Southern Appalachian rivers impacted by Helene rests on decisions that prioritize long term recovery and resilience funding. Mountain communities must not be forgotten and should have the capacity to address these impacts. Recovery efforts will require robust funding and staffing to ensure our region's economic recovery, to keep our communities safe during the next storm, and to bring back the health of the Rivers of Southern Appalachia. Regional nonprofits and local governments are poised to act as funding becomes available.

Federal natural resource agencies should prioritize the restoration and protection of the region's rivers so that they are resilient to future storms. Funding must be released to implement projects on the ground including debris cleanup, floodplain buyouts, infrastructure improvements, streambank stabilization, dam removals, floodplain protections, and stormwater mitigation. Congress must provide oversight of the federal agencies to ensure that there is adequate staffing to effectively implement the work as directed and funded by Congress including ensuring the Federal Emergency Management Agency, U.S. Forest Service, and regulatory agencies have boots on the ground needed to respond to the needs of communities.

ERICA SHANKS

# 4

# PASSAIC RIVER

**THREAT: Industrial Pollution**

**STATES:** New Jersey, New York

**AT RISK:** Water quality, public health and safety

## SUMMARY

The Passaic River has always been a vital resource, supporting livelihoods and economic growth. But it has also been badly contaminated by the chemical manufacturing industry. Thanks to the work of many committed people, there is now a plan in place to clean up the contamination and begin to restore the river. We recognize the decades of effort that brought us here and urge the federal government to help see this cleanup through to completion — restoring fisheries, boosting tourism and recreation, creating jobs, and improving public health. At the same time, we urge local residents to get to know the river and help shape the restoration. A cleaner Passaic River means a stronger economy and a healthier future for New Jersey's communities.

## THE RIVER

From its headwaters in Morris County, New Jersey, the Passaic River flows approximately 80 miles through a landscape of contrasts. Its uppermost reaches are located in the Highlands, which is largely rural and protected from development. The river continues its flow through a patchwork of wetlands and suburbs, joining with the Rockaway and Pompton Rivers before entering the dense urban landscapes of Paterson and Newark, and finally completes its journey at Newark Bay.

As both a resource and a means of transport, the river has supported the region's economic development, allowing large manufacturing companies to grow and prosper on its banks. Its watershed is home to ten reservoirs and three drinking water facilities that serve more than two million people. Its publicly-accessible parks and natural areas serve over two and a half million people residing in its watershed. Since pre-colonial times, the Passaic River was a vital resource to the Mohican and Munsee-Lenape people who settled in the region.

## THE THREAT

The Lower Passaic River was designated as a Superfund site in 1984, owing to nearly two centuries of pollution by heavy industry and manufacturing along the river. From America's earliest textile mills, to the chemical manufacturers of DDT and Agent Orange to name a few, companies have used the river for waste disposal and economic gain. This has resulted in an accumulation of toxic waste that includes heavy metals, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and very high concentrations of dioxins in the riverbed sediments in the river's tidal zone below Dundee Dam. The worst of this pollution is located in the lowermost eight miles, from Belleville, New Jersey to Newark Bay.

JACOB KELLER

# PASSAIC RIVER

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### LIA MASTROPOLO

Director, Clean Water  
Mid Atlantic Region  
American Rivers  
860-208-8213  
[lmastropolo@americanrivers.org](mailto:lmastropolo@americanrivers.org)

### ISIAH CRUZ

Founder & CEO  
Ama Earth Group  
201-780-0390  
[isiah@amaearthgroup.com](mailto:isiah@amaearthgroup.com)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
PASSAICRIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/PASSAICRIVER2025)



JACOB KELLER

Many of the companies responsible for the pollution have agreed to fund a substantial portion of the cleanup effort, which is estimated to cost in total as much as \$1.8 billion. In 2022 – nearly 40 years after the site was added to the Superfund list – a group of 85 responsible polluters entered into an agreement with the US Environmental Protection Agency to pay \$150 million toward the cleanup of both the upper and lower portions of the river. But how the additional costs will be paid, and by whom, is still being negotiated.

Thanks to committed people working through a robust system of environmental laws, a safe,

toxin-free Passaic is on the horizon. As remediation and restoration work begins, it is vital that the momentum continues. The federal government has done much to move this cleanup forward over the past 40 years, and now more than ever must continue to make it a priority. Federal leadership, combined with engagement by local communities and contributions from the private sector, can pave the way towards a brighter future for the Passaic River.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

To restore the Passaic River to its full potential, contamination must be fully remediated as quickly and efficiently as possible. That will involve addressing dioxins, PCBs, sewage, and other contaminants in the full length of the Lower Passaic River. But the work must not stop there. We envision a future where the Passaic River is not only toxin-free, but healthy and enjoyable for the people who live along it.

First, we ask the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 2 Office to maintain its commitment to the people of New Jersey and ensure that the cleanup continues to be a top priority. This means continued support of the experienced federal staff working to advance the cleanup, as well as maintaining proactive oversight of the Superfund legal process to ensure participation by all responsible parties.

Second, we celebrate the many years of hard work by advocates such as the Ironbound Community Corporation, the NY/NJ Baykeeper, the Trust for Public Land, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, the Passaic River Community Advisory Group, and others. Together these organizations and individuals have successfully mobilized the Passaic River cleanup to be poised for action. Looking forward, we call on all those who care about environmental health, flooding, and access to safe outdoor spaces and clean waters to join these advocates in shaping the Passaic River restoration.

5

# LOWER RIO GRANDE

**THREAT:** Water scarcity, overallocation, aging infrastructure, harmful border policies

**STATES:** Texas (United States), Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas (México)

**AT RISK:** Public health, drinking water security, wildlife, local economies, binational cooperation

## SUMMARY

The Rio Grande is an icon of the west and lifeblood of the American Southwest, providing water and life to over 6 million people. The river is a vital economic, cultural, and ecological resource for people and wildlife of the United States and Mexico. But despite its immense value to people and nature, the river has been under constant threat for decades. Today, the danger is nowhere more urgent than in the Lower Rio Grande basin where water scarcity, pollution, and overallocation harm the river and communities that rely on it. The recent Minute 331 agreement established a Binational Environmental Working Group, creating a critical opportunity to advance conservation efforts and advocate for much-needed federal funding to ensure the river can continue to support people and nature.

## THE RIVER

The Rio Grande — also known as the Rio Bravo del Norte in Mexico — is the third longest river in the United States and the source of water for over 6 million people. For those in the lower basin, it is often the only source of drinking water. From its headwaters in the San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado, the main stem stretches approximately 1,990 miles through diverse geographies of forest and desert, cliffs and flatlands, until it reaches its final destination at the Gulf.

The springs and streams that feed the river support an invaluable agricultural economy and provide a crucial stop for several of the Western Hemisphere's largest migratory flyways. They are home to various highly prized birds and pollinators, including the endangered Monarch butterfly. South Texans rely on the Rio Grande and its reservoirs, Amistad and Falcon, for their drinking water, and these reservoirs also serve as critical recreational and ecological assets. Despite this, investment in the Rio Grande basin remains low compared to other major U.S. river systems.

## THE THREAT

Severe water scarcity driven by prolonged drought, intensifying heat, and unsustainable water use has left the Rio Grande in a near-permanent human-induced megadrought, threatening all life that depends on it. The river frequently runs dry in Big Bend National Park, changing the ecological integrity, disrupting agricultural production, and jeopardizing clean, reliable drinking water for hundreds of communities and millions of people in the lower basin. Today, less than one-fifth of the river's flows reach the sea.

However, a recent agreement between the U.S. and Mexico, presents a major opportunity to enhance river flows and water security for both people and wildlife. The International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), a federal agency that oversees the river through treaties, recently signed Minute 331. This agreement

RAUL DELGADO

5

# LOWER RIO GRANDE

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### MATT RICE

Southwest Regional Director  
American Rivers  
803-422-5244  
[mrice@americanrivers.org](mailto:mrice@americanrivers.org)

### CHANTEL DOMINGUEZ

Community Engagement  
and Campaigns Director  
American Rivers  
775-762-1755  
[cdominguez@americanrivers.org](mailto:cdominguez@americanrivers.org)

### TRICIA CORTEZ

Executive Director  
Rio Grande International Study Center  
956-319-4374  
[tricia@rgisc.org](mailto:tricia@rgisc.org)

### MARTIN CASTRO

Watershed Science Director  
Rio Grande International Study Center  
956-285-8313  
[martin@rgisc.org](mailto:martin@rgisc.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
LOWERRIOGRANDE2025](https://www.americanrivers.org/lowerriogrande2025)



FRANCISCO MENDOZA

focuses on improving the reliability of river flows and establishes a long-awaited Binational Environmental Working Group, allowing for coordinated conservation efforts, scientific assessments, and water management strategies. Yet, despite this progress, the Rio Grande received little to no federal funding from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), while other domestic river basins secured billions for water conservation and infrastructure. Without similar investment, restoration efforts will remain underfunded.

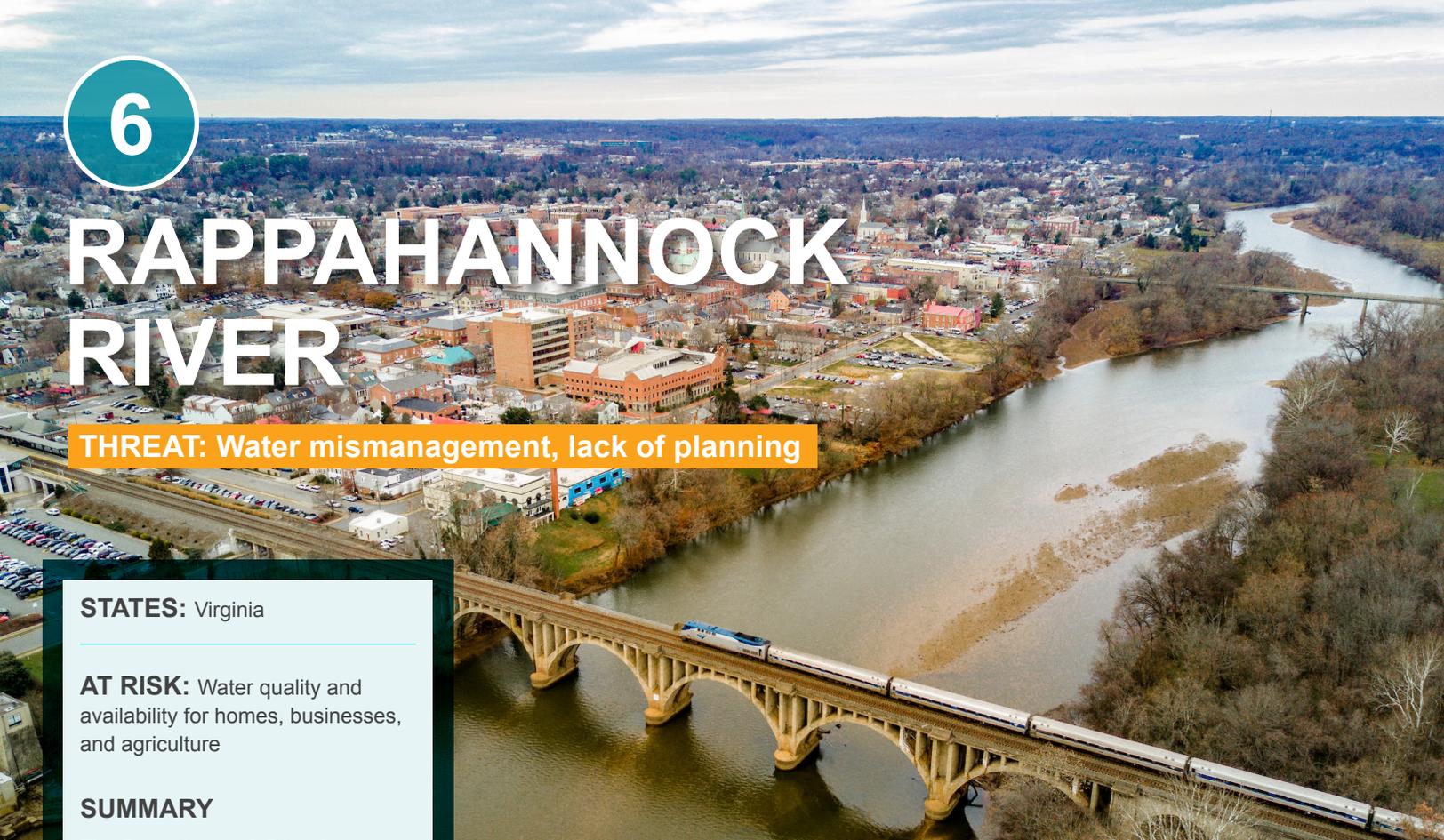
The lack of public engagement opportunities for Minute 331's implementation further limits

community involvement in shaping the river's future. IBWC data shows that water inflows into the Rio Grande have diminished by more than 30 percent, yet the causes remain insufficiently studied. If the federal government does not prioritize investments in this river, continued neglect will further threaten the communities and ecosystems that rely on it.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

It is essential that Mexico, the United States, and water users build on their collaborative efforts and continue working together to fund and implement key provisions of Minute 331. By doing so, they can help sustain the Rio Grande's flow, ensuring water security for people, farms, and the environment. A thriving river supports thriving communities — protecting the Rio Grande means securing clean, reliable drinking water for millions and restoring its natural hydrological functions.

We urge federal policymakers to prioritize dedicated funding for the Rio Grande, as their support is critical in securing federal appropriations. Investments are critical for conservation efforts, water security, and for ongoing and future repairs of Amistad Dam, both of which are vital for the region's water supply and safety. Moreover, investments and prioritization in water quality and access can increase recreational uses, and a more balanced approach between security and ecology can shift our river's narrative into a more uplifting and positive light.



6

# RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

**THREAT:** Water mismanagement, lack of planning

**STATES:** Virginia

**AT RISK:** Water quality and availability for homes, businesses, and agriculture

## SUMMARY

The Rappahannock River is a primary source of the growing region's water supply. But the river is at risk from a lack of water supply planning that would safeguard and ensure the future of the region's precious water resources for all beneficial users. Increasing demand for surface water, driven by population growth, expanding industries like data centers, and declining groundwater levels, pose a significant threat to the river's health and sustainability. New state regulations require regional water supply plans, but a coordinated basin-wide approach is crucial to safeguard the Rappahannock.

## THE RIVER

The Rappahannock River is one of Virginia's most iconic waterways, stretching over 195 miles from the Blue Ridge Mountains to the Chesapeake Bay. The river supports a diverse array of ecosystems and provides critical habitat for fish and wildlife, including American shad and Atlantic sturgeon. The Rappahannock also plays a vital role in the region's economy, supporting agriculture (Virginia's top industry) and seafood industries, and serves as the basis for robust tourism and recreational opportunities such as fishing, paddling, boating, and waterfowl hunting.

In addition to its ecological, economic, and recreational significance, the river is a crucial source of drinking water.

## THE THREAT

The increasing strain on water resources, and the absence of unified water management, threaten the river's ability to meet the needs of both people and nature. As the region continues to grow, protecting the Rappahannock's health and sustainability is more important than ever.

Unchecked development and inadequate planning threaten the Rappahannock River. Virginia is already the largest data center market in the world; the intense development in this thirsty industry, as well as continued population growth, have led to increased demand for surface water. Compounding the issue, localities east of Interstate 95 are being forced to transition from groundwater wells to surface water sources due to significant declines in the Potomac Aquifer. This shift places additional pressure on the Rappahannock River, which already faces challenges from existing surface water withdrawals, and has resulted in applications for new surface water intake permits.

Extreme weather patterns are intensifying drought conditions, increasing temperatures, and reducing river flows for extended periods of time. This volatility

# RAPPAHANNOCK RIVER

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**ADAM SCHELLHAMMER**  
Mid Atlantic Regional Director  
American Rivers  
610-424-3663  
[aschellhammer@americanrivers.org](mailto:aschellhammer@americanrivers.org)

**BRENT HUNSINGER**  
Advocacy and Coastal Programs Director  
Friends of the Rappahannock  
804-443-3448  
[brent.hunsinger@riverfriends.org](mailto:brent.hunsinger@riverfriends.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
RAPPAHANNOCKRIVER2025](https://www.americanrivers.org/rappahannockriver2025)



makes the Rappahannock River even more vulnerable to over-extraction. Without proper planning, increased pressure on the river risks depleting the river's flow, degrading the water quality, and threatening the ecosystems and communities that depend on it.

Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has established new regulations requiring regional water supply plans. While this is a positive step, the five separate planning regions within the Rappahannock watershed currently lack a coordinated basin-wide approach. Without a comprehensive plan, the cumulative impacts of

water withdrawals on the river's health remain unaddressed. These impacts include reduced water availability for downstream users, potential harm to fish eggs and larvae, and changes in salinity levels which would negatively affect withdrawals for agricultural use.

The Caroline County permit for a new surface water intake highlights the urgency of the issue. If approved without a cumulative impact study, this permit could set a dangerous precedent for future water management decisions. A fragmented approach to water supply planning threatens to undermine the long-term sustainability of the Rappahannock River, putting both human and ecological communities at risk.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

A coordinated effort is needed to protect the Rappahannock River from the threats of water mismanagement and unchecked development. The Department of Environmental Quality, Virginia Department of Health, and other state agencies should develop and implement a comprehensive, basin-wide water supply plan. Interested parties should attend regional water supply planning meetings to voice support for integrating regional plans into a unified strategy that addresses the cumulative impacts of all water withdrawals.

Additionally, a cumulative impact study on fish egg and larvae mortality and salinity from surface water intakes in the Rappahannock — conducted by the Virginia Institute of Marine Science — would provide essential data to guide water management decisions. The DEQ could also require Caroline County to return all water withdrawn from the Rappahannock River back to the Rappahannock Basin, and not allow the proposed transfer of water to an adjacent river basin.

Policies that prioritize sustainable water management are critical to protect the Rappahannock's ecological health and ensure that the river continues to thrive and support all life that depends on it for generations to come.

# 7

# CLEARWATER RIVER BASIN

**THREAT:** Commercial logging, dredge mining, dam-building

**STATES:** Idaho

**AT RISK:** Clean water, trout and salmon

## SUMMARY

The stunning Clearwater River Basin in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest is known as a “Noah’s Ark” for Chinook salmon, steelhead, westslope cutthroat trout, and bull trout because its cold, clean, high-elevation streams will be able to sustain fish populations even as temperatures warm. The clean water that filters through the old growth forests and fills 700 miles of streams is one of the most valuable resources the Forest produces. A new land management plan that relaxes restrictions on mining and dam-building while expanding commercial logging could destroy habitat, trigger erosion, and pollute these exceptional streams. The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest must strike a better balance to ensure that timber harvest and other activities don’t degrade clean water and other values.



JOHN WEBSTER

## THE RIVER

The North, South, and Middle Forks of the Clearwater River form the Clearwater River Basin, which drains into the Snake River near Lewiston, Idaho. The North Fork provides 79 continuous miles of boatable waters and is one of the few places in the Northern Rockies where anglers can legally fish for bull trout. The South Fork provides more walk-and-wade fishing for steelhead than any other river in the region. The Lochsa and Selway Rivers form the Middle Fork and are among America’s first Wild and Scenic Rivers. They are renowned for their class IV whitewater rapids, crystal clear water, and abundant wildlife, including elk, moose, black bears, and river otters.

The Clearwater River Basin is part of the ancestral and current homelands of the Nez Perce Tribe, which spends upwards of \$2.8 million annually to restore local fish populations. In this remote part of north-central Idaho, cell service and roads are few and far between, with the exception of the Highway 12 Scenic Byway, which provides access to numerous campgrounds and river access sites along the popular Lochsa River and Middle Fork.

## THE THREAT

Seven hundred miles of rivers and streams within the Clearwater River Basin and the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest are at risk from commercial logging, mining, and future dams. The Forest is planning for a four-fold increase in commercial logging and reduced protections along river corridors, endangering the clean water and trout and salmon habitat in the Lochsa River headwaters and North and South Forks of the Clearwater River. The Forest’s controversial new land management plan, released earlier this year, removes safeguards against dredge mining and dam-building, and maximizes commercial timber harvest to the

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# CLEARWATER RIVER BASIN

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### LISA RONALD

Northern Rockies Associate  
Conservation Director  
American Rivers  
406-317-7757  
[Ironald@americanrivers.org](mailto:Ironald@americanrivers.org)

### NICK KUNATH

Idaho Rivers United  
208-908-9232  
[nkunath@idahorivers.org](mailto:nkunath@idahorivers.org)

### KEVIN COLBURN

American Whitewater  
828-712-4825  
[kevin@americanwhitewater.org](mailto:kevin@americanwhitewater.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
CLEARWATERRIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/CLEARWATERRIVER2025)



detriment of clean water and fisheries for decades to come.

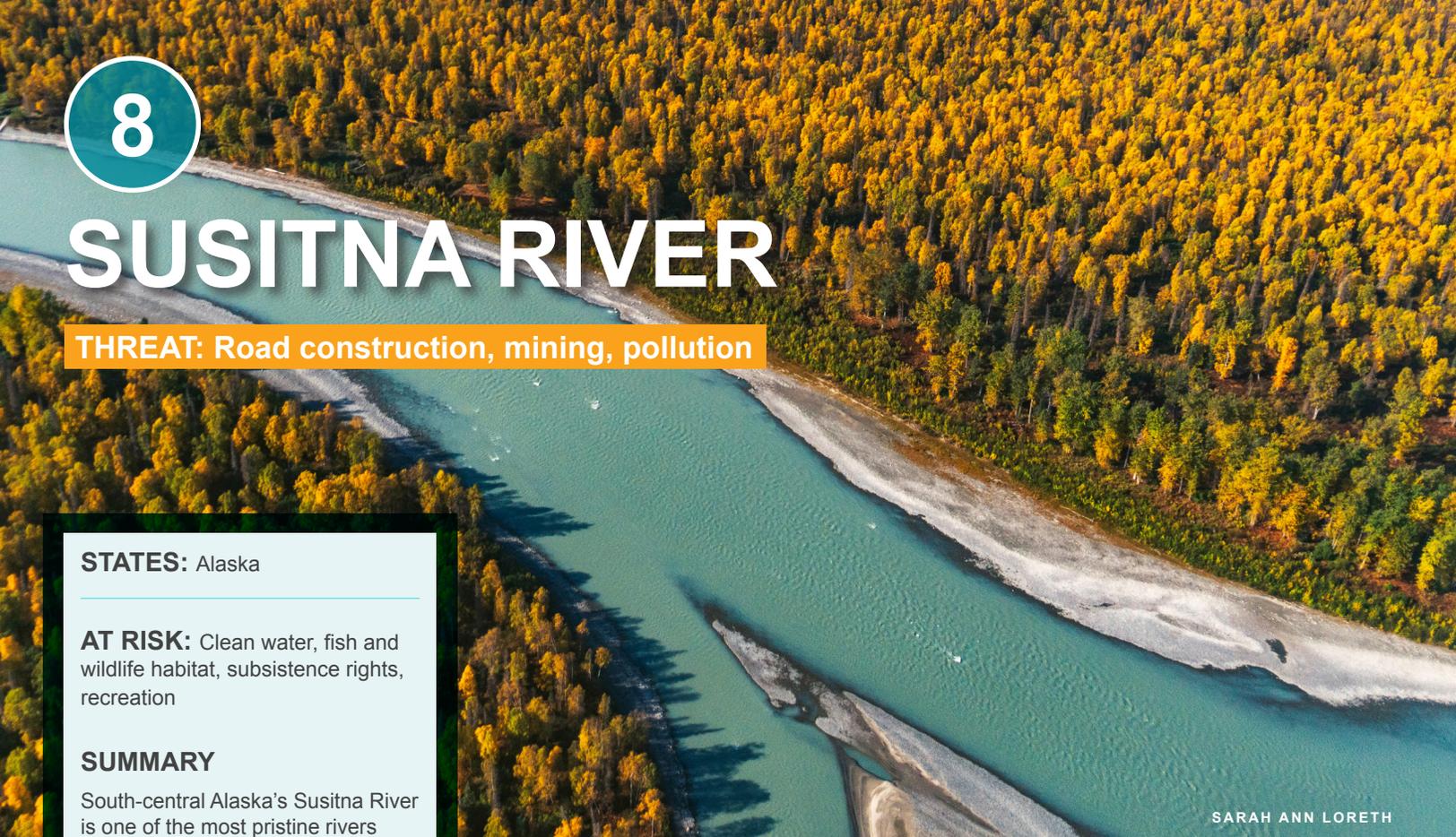
Logging, road-building, and dredge mining result in increased erosion and sedimentation, smothering aquatic insects and fish eggs with silt. Cutting down streamside trees reduces shade and increases water temperatures, which can be deadly for sensitive fish. The Lochsa and Selway Rivers are permanently protected as Wild and Scenic Rivers, meaning that mining and dams are prohibited and commercial timber harvest that harms river values is restricted within their designated corridors. Eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers, such as the headwaters of the Lochsa, receive

similar protections, but only temporarily. These upstream headwaters, as well as the North and South Forks of the Clearwater, have enjoyed temporary protections for nearly 30 years, until now.

In the new land management plan, the Forest stripped Wild and Scenic eligibility protections from 700 miles of rivers and the remote, wild watersheds they flow through. Prior to 2025, these rivers and their lush riparian corridors were protected from activities that would degrade vital native fish habitat, recreation, scenery, and water quality. Now, these rivers and riverside lands will be subject to extreme levels of commercial timber harvest, road-building, and extractive industry without adequate safeguards to protect their water quality and outstanding river values.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest must provide new direction on how to conduct commercial logging, dredge mining, and other extractive activities while protecting clean water and healthy fish and wildlife habitat. First, the Forest must revise its outdated Comprehensive River Management Plan for the Wild and Scenic designated Lochsa, Selway, and Middle Fork Clearwater Rivers to provide guidance on how to design projects to ensure protection of the values for which these rivers have been protected since 1968. Those values include scenery, recreation, and old-growth forests whose cold, clear waters are home to Chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, and westslope cutthroat trout. Second, for the 700 miles of rivers that it is no longer “Wild and Scenic eligible” under its new land management plan, the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest must issue a forest plan amendment to provide project-level guidance that formally documents how other plan components will protect these rivers from the harmful effects of unsustainable logging, dam-building, and dredge mining.



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# SUSITNA RIVER

**THREAT:** Road construction, mining, pollution

**STATES:** Alaska

**AT RISK:** Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, subsistence rights, recreation

## SUMMARY

South-central Alaska's Susitna River is one of the most pristine rivers in the United States and supports the fastest growing population in the state of Alaska. Home to an abundance of fish and wildlife, the river plays an important role for Alaska Native communities and also powers a strong economy dependent on the renewable resources of fishing and hunting. But the construction of an industrial access road to allow for mining and oil and gas development threatens the area's natural wealth and all who benefit from a healthy river. We must halt federal funding and expedited permitting for this destructive road project and protect the Susitna's irreplaceable fisheries, water quality, and communities.

SARAH ANN LORETH

## THE RIVER

From its glacial headwaters in the Alaska Range, the Susitna River flows more than 300 miles south, touching portions of Denali National Park before reaching Cook Inlet. The Susitna River watershed spans more than 20,000 square miles, a massive area nearly the size of West Virginia. The watershed encompasses a unique patchwork of land management areas, including Tribal lands, multiple unique communities, and state managed lands. More than 375,000 people visit this region annually, with many coming to experience the river's unspoiled landscapes. Crucially, the Susitna provides a vital resource for Alaskans who depend on the river for salmon harvesting, tourism, hunting, recreation, and other activities that generate thousands of jobs and millions of dollars in annual revenue. The river is home to not only five species of Pacific salmon, but critical populations of moose and both black and grizzly bears. Major tributaries of the Susitna, including the Talachulitna, Dëshka, and Yentna rivers, further sustain the region by contributing to the biodiversity that underpins local economies.

## THE THREAT

The state of Alaska and private extractive companies are proposing to construct a 100-mile road to open areas of the currently roadless Susitna watershed to destructive industrial activity, including mining and oil and gas exploration. The proposed West Susitna Industrial Access Road would cross approximately 180 streams, impacting hunting, fishing, and wildlife habitat. Subsequent mining and oil and gas activities would risk contaminating the Susitna River — which supplies clean water for local communities and essential wildlife populations — creating further water and air pollution and disrupting vital salmon spawning streams. This in turn would threaten the existing sustainable economies and livelihoods of commercial fishermen, local tourism industries, and communities, including Alaska

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# SUSITNA RIVER

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### SARAH DYRDAHL

Northwest Regional Director  
American Rivers  
503-277-3223  
[sdyrdahl@americanrivers.org](mailto:sdyrdahl@americanrivers.org)

### MELIS COADY

Executive Director  
Susitna River Coalition  
907-733-5400  
[melis@susitnrivercoalition.org](mailto:melis@susitnrivercoalition.org)

### SATCHEL PONDOLFINO

Clean Water Lead  
Cook Inletkeeper  
907-235-4068 x 26  
[satchel@inletkeeper.org](mailto:satchel@inletkeeper.org)

### CHENNERY FIFE

South Central Alaska Engagement  
Manager  
Trout Unlimited  
[chennery.fife@tu.org](mailto:chennery.fife@tu.org)

### CHIEF GARY HARRISON

Traditional Chief and Chairman  
Chickaloon Village Traditional Council  
907.745.0749  
[cvadmin@chickaloon-nsn.gov](mailto:cvadmin@chickaloon-nsn.gov)

### STEPHANIE THOMPSON

Alexander Creek, Inc.  
907.242.0263  
[aci@gci.net](mailto:aci@gci.net)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
SUSITNARIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/SUSITNARIVER2025)

SARAH ANN LORETH

Native community members who rely on the river for food and cultural practices. What's more, the West Susitna River's abundant fish and terrestrial wildlife would suffer from habitat loss and fragmentation — from salmon to iconic predators, including brown bears, wolves, and lynx, to large herbivores such as moose and Dall sheep. It's possible this threat will be exacerbated by new presidential executive orders that prioritize natural gas development in Alaska and aim to expedite permitting of energy and natural resource projects in this state while limiting public participation.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) is expected to review permit applications for the West Susitna Industrial Access Road in the coming year. American Rivers will join partners to call for USACE to deny all 404 permits and reject federal funding for this project so road construction does not move forward. By engaging early and often in the upcoming permit review process, the American public can join our effort and significantly influence whether or not USACE decides to greenlight the proposed access road. It will be crucial for public comments to emphasize essential clean water, Tribal consultation, cultural resources, fish migration, and the uniquely intact nature of this treasured region.

# 9

# CALCASIEU RIVER

**THREAT:** Pollution

**STATES:** Louisiana

**AT RISK:** Health of humans and ecosystems

## SUMMARY

For centuries, the Calcasieu River has been the lifeblood of southwestern Louisiana, sustaining local communities, abundant wildlife, and thriving ecosystems. It is home to Pinky, the beloved pink dolphin, and is a place of deep connection for generations of people. But a history of chemical mismanagement and continued unregulated dumping of toxic chemicals poses an existential threat to the river's future. The Environmental Protection Agency must update outdated federal pollution control technology standards for chemical plants, plastics manufacturers, and refineries operating along the river.

JAMES HIATT

## THE RIVER

The Calcasieu River in Southwest Louisiana runs approximately 200 miles, passing the towns of Oakdale, Westlake, Sulphur, Lake Charles, Hackberry, and Cameron before emptying into the Gulf.

The Calcasieu River and its interconnected bayous and marshes are a vital nursery for fish and wildlife and once sustained a thriving commercial fishing industry. It is home to the beloved Pinky, the famous pink dolphin of Southwest Louisiana, and her pod, who guide the shrimp boats in and out of the river to the Gulf. Fishermen and businesses – from marine mechanics to packing houses to restaurants – have depended on the river and its abundance for generations. Nearly one-third of all the seafood consumed in the United States comes from Louisiana, though this multi-billion dollar industry is increasingly threatened by plastics and petrochemical pollution.

The river holds deep historical significance, holding stories from French fur traders of the 1700s, train bandits of the early 1800s, and as the ancestral and current homelands of Indigenous communities since time immemorial. The Calcasieu was known to Spanish settlers as Rio Hondo, or “Deep River.” French settlers renamed the river “Calcasieu,” as a rough interpretation of the name of local Atakapa leader, “Katkōsh Yōk” (‘Crying Eagle’).

## THE THREAT

The Calcasieu River has long suffered from legacy pollution that continues to harm the river and local communities. For decades, chemical plants and refineries along the river have dumped hazardous waste into its waters, leading to widespread contamination that affects both the environment and public health. These pollutants have contributed to high levels of toxins in the river and surrounding ecosystems which have led to a seafood advisory for multiple species, including catfish, speckled

# CALCASIEU RIVER

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### CHANTEL DOMINGUEZ

Community Campaigns  
and Engagement Director  
American Rivers  
775-525-6522  
[cdominguez@americanrivers.org](mailto:cdominguez@americanrivers.org)

### JAMES HIATT

Director  
For a Better Bayou  
337-515-0655  
[james@betterbayou.net](mailto:james@betterbayou.net)

### ALYSSA PORTARO

Executive Director and Founder  
Habitat Recovery Project  
973-632-1695  
[alyssa@habitatrecovery.org](mailto:alyssa@habitatrecovery.org)

### CYNTHIA P. ROBERTSON

Executive Director and Founder  
Micah Six Eight Mission  
337-888-6652  
[cindy@micah68mission.org](mailto:cindy@micah68mission.org)

### JEN DUGGAN

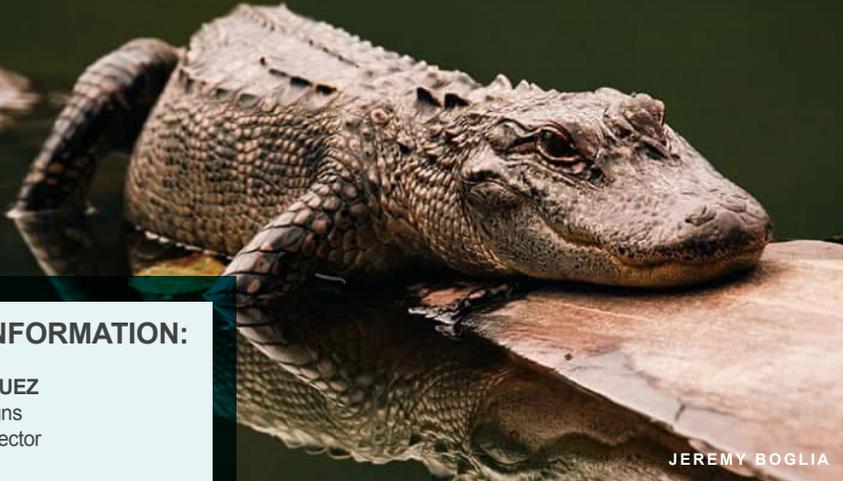
Executive Director  
Environmental Integrity Project  
202-263-4446  
[jduggan@environmentalintegrity.org](mailto:jduggan@environmentalintegrity.org)

### ANDREW WHITEHURST

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

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
CALCASIEURIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/CALCASIEURIVER2025)



JEREMY BOGLIA

trout, largemouth bass, and crabs. The Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality advises pregnant mothers to consume no more than one meal a month of fish due to dangerous levels of mercury, Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), and other carcinogenic toxins.

The river has suffered multiple catastrophic pollution events in recent decades. In 1994, over 1.7 million pounds of ethylene dichloride spilled into the west bank of the Calcasieu. In 2006, a refinery spilled millions of gallons of oil into the river, impacting an estimated 150 miles of shoreline. The results of these and other disasters have been massive fish

kills, poisoned air, forced evacuations, and countless sickened residents in historic Black communities like the 'free town' of Mossville, Louisiana.

The Clean Water Act directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to establish increasingly tight water pollution standards for our dirtiest industries. These standards are supposed to be regularly revised to keep up with technological advances, but two-thirds of the standards are more than 30 years old. This means that the plastics plants, chemical plants, and refineries discharging into the Calcasieu lack limits for known toxic pollutants, and that those living downstream from these industries continue to live with polluted and unsafe waters.

Many new chemical facilities are being planned along the river and its estuary. There is still time to stop the harmful, unnecessary, continuous dumping of toxic waste into the river before ecological collapse and the loss of the fishing industry occurs.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The EPA is currently working on its two-year review and update to technology standards. At present, the EPA is planning on completing their review by late 2025 or early 2026. We urge the EPA to update the water pollution standards for the following categories of major Calcasieu polluters and to add limits for toxic pollutants like benzene, dioxins, 1,4 dioxane, PAHs, and heavy metals.

- **Petroleum Refineries**, 40 Part 419 (4 refineries discharging to the Calcasieu)
- **Inorganic Chemical Manufacturing**, 40 CFR Part 415 (10 inorganic chemical plants discharging to the Calcasieu)
- **Organic Chemicals, Plastics, and Synthetic Fabrics**, 40 CFR Part 414 (14 plastic and organic chemical plants discharging to the Calcasieu)

We also urge the EPA to develop water pollution standards for "petcoke calciners," which have escaped federal regulation for more than 50 years. Two of these old and incredibly dirty plants are on the Calcasieu River, discharging unlimited amounts of lead and other metals.

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# GAULEY RIVER

**THREAT:** Pollution from coal mining

**STATES:** West Virginia

**AT RISK:** Clean water

## SUMMARY

The Gauley River fuels an outdoor-recreation economy that generates hundreds of millions of dollars annually — vital revenue in a region reeling from generations of boom-and-bust extractive industries. The Gauley is a world-famous whitewater destination, beloved by kayakers and rafters from around the globe. Yet, this same remarkable watershed faces a grave threat: toxic pollution from coal strip mining in the headwaters of the Cherry River, one of the Gauley's primary tributaries.



## THE RIVER

Few places in West Virginia rival the scenic splendor of the Gauley River's headwaters. Within the Monongahela National Forest, ephemeral streams and artesian springs form amidst the black earth of the Allegheny Highlands to create the Cranberry, Williams, and Cherry Rivers. These waterways meander through some of the continent's southernmost red spruce forests and cranberry bogs, including the cherished Cranberry Wilderness backcountry, offering prime spots for hiking, fishing, hunting, boating, and camping.

The Cherry River, in particular, shelters an astonishing range of life. It is home to the brilliantly colored and critically endangered fish, the candy darter, which has lost half of its habitat due to human impact. Native brook trout still swim and spawn here, and the Eastern hellbender — a two-foot-long salamander recently proposed for endangered species status — nests beneath submerged rocks and forages among the pristine cobble-bottom streams. By the time the Cherry flows into the Gauley, it boasts spectacular whitewater that anchors an adventure-based tourism economy valued at more than \$116 million annually.

## THE THREAT

In Greenbrier and Pocahontas counties, South Fork Coal Company operates a network of strip mines, haul roads, and a coal preparation plant spanning 3,600 acres, all of which discharge runoff into the Gauley River watershed by way of the Cherry River. Since 2019, the company has released heavy metals and sediment — exceeding legal limits by up to 900 percent — into the Cherry River on at least 80 documented occasions. In addition, the company is trucking over 100,000 tons of coal annually from the more than 1,100-acre Rocky Run Surface Mine across the Monongahela National Forest each year — an action that plainly violates federal law.

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# GAULEY RIVER

Continued

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

### DAVID MORYC

Senior Director River Protection  
American Rivers  
503-307-1137  
[dmoryc@americanrivers.org](mailto:dmoryc@americanrivers.org)

### OLIVIA MILLER

Program Director  
West Virginia Highlands Conservancy  
304-704-2997  
[olivia.miller@wvhighlands.org](mailto:olivia.miller@wvhighlands.org)

### ANDREW YOUNG

Staff Attorney  
Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance  
434-202-4397  
[ayoung@abralliance.org](mailto:ayoung@abralliance.org)

### WILLIE DODSON

Coal Impacts Program Manager  
Appalachian Voices  
276-870-5843  
[willie@appvoices.org](mailto:willie@appvoices.org)

## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
GAULEYRIVER2025](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/GAULEYRIVER2025)

Regulators closed down the haul road in January 2025 in response to complaints, but hauling has now resumed, desecrating the national forest and imperiling the Gauley River headwaters.

Under the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act, coal mining is prohibited in the national forest, unless a mining company can demonstrate that it had valid existing rights, prior to the passage of the law in 1977, in order to extract coal within the forest boundary. The South Fork Coal Company never proved it had these rights and misrepresented their planned operations to the public, stating in the permit for its haul road that it would not enter federal land, even though the road traverses the Monongahela National Forest. At present, South Fork Coal Company is appealing to the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) to allow an exception and grant them rights that they never had in the first place. OSMRE's "valid existing rights" determination will not only determine the Gauley River's future, but also echo nationwide, setting a precedent for whether current safeguards for public lands remain, or whether these lands become more vulnerable to corporate exploitation and special interests.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Whether you are a West Virginian, a public lands advocate, or simply a concerned individual — you can take action by telling the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement to reject South Fork Coal Company's attempt to legitimize — after the fact — its ongoing operations within the Monongahela National Forest. By sending your comment, you can underscore the illegal use of our national forest lands and the mounting water pollution in the Gauley River watershed.

WEST VIRGINIA  
DEPARTMENT OF  
ENVIRONMENTAL  
PROTECTION



SUSITNA RIVER, ALASKA  
SARAH ANN LORETH



### About American Rivers

American Rivers is a national conservation organization working to make every river clean and healthy for people and wildlife. We combine evidence-based solutions with enduring partnerships to safeguard the 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams that are essential to our nation's clean drinking water, extraordinary wildlife, and strength of our communities. For more than 50 years, our staff, supporters, and partners have been driven by a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. [AMERICANRIVERS.ORG](https://www.americanrivers.org)



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