



**AMERICAN  
RIVERS**  
Life Depends on Rivers™

# America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2026

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



# America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2026

“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: POTOMAC RIVER, ALAN LEHMAN  
BOUNDARY WATERS, MINNESOTA / MASON CUMMINGS

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:

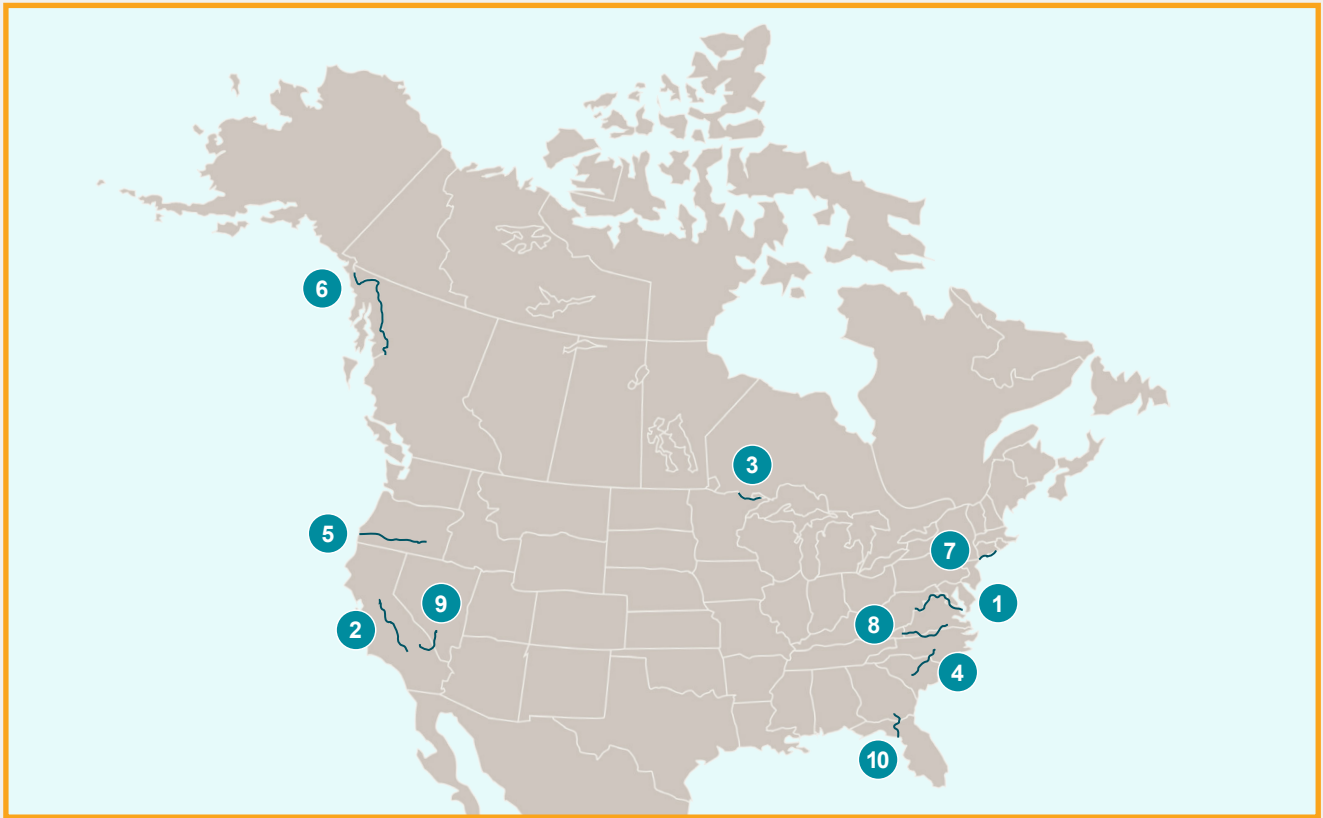
- Eighty percent of our nation’s rivers lack adequate protection, according to the National Protected Rivers Assessment.
- Half of rivers in the U.S. contain unsafe levels of pollution.

- Freshwater species are going extinct faster than ocean or land species.

Rivers are among the most at risk ecosystems on the planet.

America’s Most Endangered Rivers® of 2026 is a call to action for the clean water and healthy rivers we all depend on. We are proud to work with our local partners advocating for the future these 10 rivers, and the 4.4 million miles of rivers that are the lifeblood of our nation.

Rivers are among the most at risk ecosystems on the planet.



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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 4.4 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)



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# POTOMAC RIVER

**THREAT: Sewage pollution; data center development**

**STATES:** Virginia, Maryland, Washington, D.C.

## SUMMARY

The Potomac River is the economic lifeline and cultural heart of our nation's capital. But earlier this year, the largest sewage spill in U.S. history fouled the Nation's River, raising alarms for public health and aging water infrastructure. Congress must invest to strengthen water infrastructure. Moreover, rapid development of data centers in the watershed poses an expanding threat to river health and the resilience of drinking water supplies. State leaders must urgently establish common-sense safeguards on all data centers and evaluate cumulative impacts on water resources.

## THE RIVER

The Potomac River Basin is home to more than 7 million people across Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C., and serves as the primary source of drinking water for the nation's capital and many other cities and towns. Flowing over 380 miles from the Appalachian Highlands to the Chesapeake Bay, the Potomac's tributaries include the Shenandoah, Monocacy, Anacostia, North Branch, and South Branch rivers. The river supports internationally renowned recreational trout fisheries in its headwaters and some of the East Coast's most significant oyster, blue crab, and striped bass commercial fisheries.

Residents and visitors in D.C. and across the watershed value the river for its recreation opportunities, including fishing, boating, swimming, hiking, and wildlife watching.

The Potomac River Basin is home and ancestral territory to numerous indigenous communities and sovereign Tribal nations, including the Monacan, Rappahannock, Patawomeck, and Piscataway, among others that hold relationships to the land since time immemorial and continue to serve as guardians and caretakers.

## THE THREAT

Earlier this year, in the largest sewage spill in U.S. history, a major wastewater pipe failed, sending 200 to 300 million gallons of untreated sewage into the Potomac River and nearby C&O Canal. The January failure of the Potomac Interceptor sewage line in Montgomery County, Maryland, closed a stretch of river upstream of Washington, D.C. to all public access.

The main drinking water collection point for Washington, D.C. is upstream of the spill and was not affected. But a smaller, secondary collection point downstream of the spill was shut down and out of service.

ADOBE/LAWRENCE

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# POTOMAC RIVER

Continued



ALAN LEHMAN

Many of the region's wastewater pipes, particularly in and around Washington, D.C., are approaching or have passed their 50-year service life. The Potomac Interceptor sewage pipe is over 60 years old. Untreated sewage poses a major public health threat. Bacteria levels in the Potomac River near the site of the spill were over 4,000 times higher than the safe recreational limit. Failure to address aging wastewater infrastructure on the Potomac puts the river at risk of ongoing contamination and threatens public health, local businesses, and wildlife.

In addition, the Potomac River

watershed faces an unprecedented surge in data center development, particularly in northern Virginia and portions of Maryland. The region currently has over 300 data centers and is on track to have a total of about 1,000 centers occupying roughly 200 million square feet of buildings — enough to cover 3,472 football fields — on an estimated 20,000 acres of land. These facilities pose a significant and growing threat to both water quality and water quantity, yet are being approved without meaningful transparency, regulatory review, and assessment of cumulative impacts.

Data centers require enormous volumes of water for cooling and energy production, placing new pressure on drinking water supplies already stressed by increasingly extreme weather, population growth, and toxic contamination. Many proposed and approved facilities are located on or near contaminated sites, upstream of drinking water intakes that serve millions of residents. Data centers themselves are potential sources of toxic contaminants. Hundreds of millions of computers and their components treated with toxic PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, known as “forever chemicals”) may end up in local landfills, and back-up generation at these facilities requires the delivery and storage of millions of gallons of diesel fuel. Without comprehensive planning, these developments increase the risk of pollutants entering the river during and post construction.

The scale and pace of data center expansion is particularly concerning. Projects are often reviewed individually, rather than as part of a watershed-wide analysis, masking their combined impacts on stormwater runoff, chemical spill response, management of hazardous materials, groundwater withdrawals, and flood risk. In many cases, there is little to no requirement for advanced stormwater treatment, long-term remediation planning, or disclosure of water use and discharge data. This lack of oversight creates dangerous gaps in understanding how these facilities affect downstream communities, ecosystems, and drinking water treatment costs.

In addition to these challenges with new data centers, many of the region's wastewater pipes, particularly within and around Washington, D.C. proper, are approaching or have passed their 50-year service life. The Potomac Interceptor sewage pipe, which is where the January overflow stemmed from, is over 60 years old. The combination of new water pollution from data centers and a quickly aging wastewater system that can result in unexpected spikes of pollution will cumulatively put a strain on the Potomac that is completely unavoidable.

Underscoring the importance of the Potomac River and its water supplies, the Interstate Commission on the Potomac River Basin found that a significant disruption from threats like infrastructure failures or natural disasters in D.C.'s water supply could result in a loss of \$15 billion in gross regional product (GRP) and hundreds of millions of dollars in tax losses.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

To protect the Potomac River and its water supplies – and to ensure communities nationwide have strong water infrastructure – Congress must reauthorize critical water infrastructure funding bills. The current State Revolving Fund bill – the main source of federal water infrastructure funding – will expire on Sept. 30, 2026. Failure to act will create significant funding challenges not just for states responsible for the Potomac, but all states across the country. Furthermore, a secondary source of water

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# POTOMAC RIVER

Continued

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POTOMACRIVER2026](https://www.americanrivers.org/potomacriver2026)

ALAN LEHMAN

infrastructure funding — the Sewer Overflow and Stormwater Grant program — also expires in September. Without reauthorization, communities won't have funds for urgent sewer and stormwater upgrades.

In addition, state leaders and regulators in Virginia and Maryland must ensure that the pace of data center development does not outstrip the region's ability to protect water supplies and river health.

They must require full disclosure of water withdrawals, discharges, and stormwater management plans for all data center projects, with information made publicly accessible. Second, states

should conduct a comprehensive environmental assessment of cumulative watershed-level impacts, including effects on water quality, water availability, ecosystems, fisheries, recreation, and downstream treatment costs. Case-by-case project reviews are insufficient given the scale of development underway.

Leaders should urgently establish safeguards for clean and sustainable water resources before approving new data center development. Furthermore, jurisdictions must evaluate the cumulative impacts that data centers and their supporting infrastructure have on the Potomac watershed. Strengthened stormwater and wastewater discharge standards, facility siting, solid waste management, contaminated site remediation requirements, chemical spill prevention and response, and long-term monitoring must be part of any future approvals.

By prioritizing transparency, coordinated planning, and public engagement, decision-makers can ensure that economic development does not come at the expense of clean drinking water and the health of the region's rivers and communities.



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# SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

**THREAT: Gravel mining**

**STATES:** California

## SUMMARY

The San Joaquin River, the primary water source for over 30 million Californians and nearly half of California's \$61 billion agricultural economy, and a lifeline for endangered salmon, is threatened by a massive gravel mine. If approved, this project would stall completion of the San Joaquin River Parkway, undercutting millions of dollars in investment in restoration and public recreation access. The Fresno County Board of Supervisors and the county planning commission must reject the mining proposal to protect the San Joaquin River for all who depend on it.

DANIEL NYLEN

## THE RIVER

Originating in the Sierra Nevada, the San Joaquin River historically sustained tule elk, bald eagles, grizzly bears, and countless chinook salmon. While urbanization and agriculture have drastically diminished the river, it remains the primary source of water for communities, farms, and endangered ecosystems for 285 miles, from Bakersfield to the Bay Area.

The Yokuts, Mono, Miwok, and Ohlone Nations have cared for and held the river sacred since time immemorial. Historically and to this day, California has the largest Native American population in the country, and in the Central Valley, the San Joaquin River has enabled such large communities to live in abundance. Their lives, and the lives of millions of Californians that now reside here, depend on the sustenance the river provides.

The San Joaquin River Parkway and Conservation Trust, a nonprofit land trust established in 1988 to create a 33-mile greenway along the San Joaquin River, leads the current effort to protect the river. To date, the Trust has permanently protected over 4,100 acres of the planned 6,500 acres of the Parkway. Once completed, the Parkway will feature a 22-mile multiuse trail, ecological reserves, a restored riparian corridor, and equitable public access.

Over the past 35 years, more than \$125 million of public and private funds have been invested in the Parkway through land acquisition, habitat restoration, trails, and other public-use projects. In 1992, the state of California enacted the San Joaquin River Conservancy Act, committing the state to preserving the river "for the enjoyment of [...] present and future generations." In 2006, a coalition of environmental organizations, the Friant Water Users Authority, and the Bureau of Reclamation created the San Joaquin River Restoration Program, an effort to restore Chinook salmon populations while ensuring intact water supply. The return of 448 salmon in 2025 ranks among the program's many successes.

# SAN JOAQUIN RIVER

Continued

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SANJOAQUINRIVER2026](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/SANJOAQUINRIVER2026)

DAVID HUNTER

## THE THREAT

CEMEX, a global gravel mining company, is pursuing a 100-year permit for a 600-foot-deep blast mine along the San Joaquin River, near the city of Fresno and the San Joaquin River Parkway, threatening river health, the region's drinking water quality, and several endangered species. Of particular concern is the project's potentially drastic impacts on struggling salmon and steelhead trout runs.

To build the mine, CEMEX proposes to divert water from the San Joaquin River to the quarry site, exposing the water to hazardous materials. The U.S.

Bureau of Reclamation points out that CEMEX has no right to this water, and it has no plan for treating the polluted water before returning it to the river. The depth of the mine and the need to continuously dewater the pit for excavation may have devastating impacts on drainage patterns, river flow, and groundwater recharge – not to mention impacts to recreational use and nature access. Fresno's majority working-class residents of color stand to suffer most from these impacts.

The San Joaquin River has been severely exploited for its gravel and water resources over the past century, to the point that it runs dry for miles in most years. What's more, the Fresno metro area already has nearly 200% more gravel than what is needed for the next 50 years from existing local mines, according to the California Geological Survey. CEMEX's long record of environmental and safety violations demonstrates that the company cannot be relied upon to meet or maintain even the inadequate mitigation measures it has proposed.

If approved, CEMEX's project would forestall the decades-long effort to complete the Parkway by 100 years, as many of the mitigation measures for the project cannot be completed until the end of CEMEX's proposed 100-year permit.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors must reject CEMEX's proposal to expand its operating permit to create a 600-foot-deep blast mine. The Board of Supervisors holds final decision-making power over CEMEX's proposal; however, the Fresno County Planning Commission also plays a key role in approving or rejecting the project. The next opportunity for public input on this decision will be the release of the final Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the project in Spring 2026, including responses to hundreds of comments made by residents during the Draft EIR comment period. At this point, a public hearing will be held before the Fresno County Planning Commission. This will be a crucial chance to make additional comments and advocate against approval of this project. If the project is not stopped in this phase, it will go before the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, which will be the last opportunity to convince the Board to reject the project.



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# BOUNDARY WATERS (SOUTH KAWISHIWI RIVER)

**THREAT:** Sulfide-ore copper-nickel mining

**STATES:** Minnesota

## SUMMARY

The South Kawishiwi River is essential to the lifeblood of the internationally renowned Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. However, the Boundary Waters and its pristine water, incredible hunting and fishing habitat, and economically important outdoor recreation are threatened by proposed sulfide-ore copper-nickel mining on public lands in the headwaters just outside of the wilderness area's boundary. The Trump administration and Congress must reject copper-nickel mining near the Boundary Waters and instead support measures that would protect these wildlands and waters forever.

SAVE THE  
BOUNDARY WATERS

## THE RIVER

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness encompasses 1,200 miles of rivers and streams and more than 1,000 lakes. It is a vast boreal forest ecosystem of interconnected waterways with exceptionally clean water. The Minnesota state water quality agency has described the water quality as "immaculate," and in fact, many people recreating in the area drink water from the lakes untreated. The Kawishiwi (which in the Ojibwe language means "river of many beavers' houses") River is an important canoe route through the heart of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Superior National Forest. Its waters flow out of the wilderness through Birch Lake, re-enter the Boundary Waters through Fall and Basswood Lakes, and then flow into Ontario's Quetico Provincial Park and Minnesota's Voyageurs National Park.

The clean water of the Boundary Waters supports healthy and abundant fish and wildlife, including walleye, northern pike, lake trout, smallmouth bass, wolves, lynx, moose, bear, loons, river otters, bald eagles, and osprey.

As the most visited wilderness area in America, the Boundary Waters is a major driver of the local economy. Its rivers, streams, and lakes draw more than 155,000 overnight wilderness visitors annually and help power the recreation economy that supports more than 17,000 jobs in the region and generates more than \$1 billion in sales annually.

## THE THREAT

The Boundary Waters and the Kawishiwi River are threatened by a massive sulfide-ore copper mine proposed on the banks of the South Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake. Over two dozen scientific studies over the past decade have indicated that pollution to these waters is probable if not inevitable if mining is allowed. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has flagged hard-rock mining as the most toxic

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# BOUNDARY WATERS (SOUTH KAWISHIWI RIVER)

Continued

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## TAKE ACTION:

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BOUNDARYWATERS2026](https://www.americanrivers.org/boundarywaters2026)



industry in America. Sulfide-ore copper mine contamination harms water, aquatic and terrestrial species, forests and soils, and poses a serious risk to human health.

Mining and associated acid mine drainage, loss of habitat, forest fragmentation, invasive species, and air, noise, and light pollution would devastate the fragile ecosystem of the Boundary Waters and its unique values.

Intensification and increased frequency of extreme rains and droughts would exacerbate the negative impacts of a mining operation. Drought-induced low water flows would concentrate pollutants. Subsequent heavy

rains could cause floods and the overflow of pollutants into groundwater and streams. Stress on aquatic ecosystems caused by extreme weather would add to the degradation caused by the impacts of mining. Conversely, an ecologically healthy Boundary Waters is part of the solution: Boreal forests provide for carbon sequestration and play a key role in the adaptation and resilience of species.

Studies show that sulfide-ore copper mining along lakes and streams that flow into the Boundary Waters would risk premier fishing, hunting, and other recreation on Superior National Forest lands, as well as northeastern Minnesota's economy. Economic analysis shows that sulfide-ore copper mining on Superior National Forest lands in the watershed of the Wilderness could lead to the loss of nearly 5,000 jobs in tourism and up to 22,000 jobs in the rest of the economy, along with a \$1.6 billion loss in annual income, and a \$509 million reduction in private-property values.

In January 2023, then-U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland protected the Kawishiwi River and the Boundary Waters watershed from the devastation and pollution that inevitably accompany copper mining, but Congress and the current administration are seeking to revoke these protections, including through the controversial use of the Congressional Review Act, and greenlight mining in the area.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Congress should protect the Boundary Waters forever. Representatives and senators must reject efforts to allow sulfide-ore copper mining near the Boundary Waters, such as rolling back existing protections using the Congressional Review Act.

Let your voice be heard. Stand up to protect this national treasure and ask your elected officials to permanently protect the Boundary Waters.

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# LUMBER (LUMBEE) RIVER

**THREAT: Pollution from industrial agriculture and forever chemicals**

**STATES:** North Carolina,  
South Carolina

## SUMMARY

The Wild and Scenic Lumber River provides drinking water to local communities and is a refuge for fish and wildlife. But “forever chemicals,” or PFAS, as well as industrial agriculture, are polluting the river and making drinking water supplies unsafe. The state of North Carolina must direct funding to safeguard drinking water sources and ensure any permits for industrial agriculture include adequate protections for the river and public health.

## THE RIVER

The Lumber River — also known as the Lumbee River — flows through southeastern North Carolina into South Carolina, shaping wetlands, bottomland forests, and rural communities along its course. A distinctive blackwater river, known for its dark, tea-colored waters, it supports diverse plant and animal life, provides natural flood storage, and supplies drinking water, fishing, and recreation for the city of Lumberton and other communities throughout the basin.

The river is the ancestral homeland of the Lumbee People, who often call themselves the “people of the dark water.” For generations, the Lumber River has been central to Lumbee identity, survival, and cultural continuity. Today, the river remains a vital source of life and connection, particularly for Indigenous and rural communities who rely on it for food, water, and livelihoods.

The Lumber River is also nationally significant as the first blackwater river designated as a National Wild and Scenic River, and is the only blackwater river in North Carolina’s Natural and Scenic River System.

## THE THREAT

The Lumber River is facing escalating industrial pollution from large-scale industrial facilities. “Forever chemicals,” or PFAS (per and polyfluoroalkyl substances), contamination poses an especially severe and persistent threat. PFAS are a large group of man-made chemicals used in many industries, including textiles and food packaging, to make products resistant to water, grease, stains, and heat. Industrial waste containing “forever chemicals” has been disposed of at landfills and sent to wastewater treatment plants in the Lumber River Basin, even though these facilities are not designed to remove or contain these chemicals. Sampling conducted by the

JULIA RENDLEMAN

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# LUMBER (LUMBEE) RIVER

Continued

## WARNING

Largemouth bass and bowfin (or blackfish) in the Lumber River Basin contain higher than normal levels of mercury. Consumption of bass and blackfish should be limited to no more than two meals per person per month. Women of childbearing age and children should eat no bass or blackfish taken from this area until further notice.

STATE HEALTH DIRECTOR

JULIA RENDLEMAN

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LUMBERRIVER2026](https://www.americanrivers.org/lumberriver2026)

County indicates that the Robeson County Landfill — which accepted PFAS-containing waste for decades — is discharging forever chemicals into Big Marsh Swamp, a tributary of the Lumber River.

The county-owned Rocco Water Treatment Plant draws drinking water from wells located within 4,500 feet of the landfill. Testing has shown that finished water leaving this plant contains the highest PFAS levels of any drinking water treatment plant in North Carolina and the highest concentration of GenX — a toxic forever chemical — of any groundwater-based water system in the United States. The

Robeson County Water System serves more than 66,000 people in a county that consistently ranks among the lowest in North Carolina for health outcomes.

This pollution has led South Carolina to issue a fish consumption advisory for the Lumber River, threatening subsistence fishing and food security for families who rely on the river. These impacts fall disproportionately on Indigenous, rural, and low-income communities.

Pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), slaughterhouses, and meatpacking facilities also generates significant waste that can enter waterways through runoff, spills, or inadequate controls. These pollutants degrade water quality, cause toxic algae outbreaks, lower oxygen levels, contribute to fish kills, and introduce bacteria that can make the river unsafe for recreation.

### WHAT MUST BE DONE

Protecting the Lumber River requires decisive action from both state and federal agencies. State and federal legislators, along with North Carolina Governor Josh Stein, can support communities that rely on the Lumber River by directing funding toward drinking water treatment upgrades, replacement water supplies, and long-term cleanup, and by closing regulatory gaps that allow forever chemicals and industrial animal agriculture pollution to threaten river health and drinking water supplies.

Additionally, this year, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality will decide whether to issue permits that authorize industrial waste disposal at landfills, wastewater treatment plants, CAFOs, and slaughterhouses in the Lumber River Basin. These decisions include permits governing the disposal and management of PFAS-contaminated waste at landfills and wastewater treatment plants, as well as a new CAFO general permit that will govern most hog operations in the watershed. The Department must deny permits that would worsen pollution and strengthen protections to prevent contamination at the source.



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# ROGUE RIVER

**THREAT:** Logging, mining, and road building that will increase wildfire risk

**STATES:** Oregon

## SUMMARY

The Rogue River is a beloved destination for anglers, hunters, and boaters, an engine for the local economy, and vital habitat for salmon and wildlife. But this wild treasure is threatened by logging and mining, which would pollute tributary streams, destroy wildlife habitat, and increase wildfire risk. The U.S. Department of Agriculture must uphold existing protections under the Roadless Rule that help prevent harmful logging, mining, and road building so that the Rogue remains protected for today's communities and future generations.

BOB WICK

## THE RIVER

The Rogue River flows 215 miles through volcanic rock in the Cascade Range then weaves through the Klamath and Siskiyou Mountains before reaching the Pacific Ocean. At over 5,100 square miles, the Rogue River watershed drains an area roughly the size of the state of Connecticut. The Rogue is internationally known as one of the most outstanding rivers in the United States and was designated as one of the first Wild and Scenic Rivers in 1968. It is home to the second largest salmon run (100,000 annually) in the contiguous United States, only behind the Columbia River that has a watershed 50 times its size. Salmon fishing, hunting, rafting, and other outdoor recreation contribute over \$30 million annually to local communities in southwest Oregon. The wildlands and waters of the Rogue River, and its main tributary the Illinois River, are at the heart of the most ecologically important unprotected landscapes in the American West.

## THE THREAT

The Rogue and Illinois rivers are threatened by unsustainable timber harvesting, mining, road-building, and increased fire risk. Proposed nickel strip mining by a foreign-owned company is a persistent threat. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has announced its intention to remove existing river protections provided by the federal Roadless Rule, which for over two decades has prohibited the construction of new roads and commercial logging in "roadless areas" in national forests in 39 states including Oregon, putting clean water and freshwater habitat at serious risk. One of Oregon's largest Roadless Areas — the North and South Kalmiopsis — is located in the Illinois/Rogue watershed.

This rollback could remove protection for at least 200,000 acres of wild, road-free habitat and sources of clean water in the Rogue and Illinois River watersheds.

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# ROGUE RIVER

Continued



Removal of these protections will increase the likelihood of harmful logging and mining, including proposed industrial nickel strip mining long opposed by local communities.

Removal of protections under the Roadless Rule could have significant direct effect on the clean water of the Rogue River watershed, degrading habitat and increasing water temperatures. This would increase wildfire risk, as wildfires are four times as likely to start in areas with roads than in roadless forest tracks. Across the country, over 90% of all wildfires occurred within a half mile of a road.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is required to consider public input on its process to review the environmental impacts of its proposal as a part of its Draft Environmental Impact Statement expected to be issued in the spring of 2026. The public must urge the agency to uphold existing protections under the Roadless Rule that help prevent harmful logging, mining, and road-building that will increase catastrophic wildfire risk.

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ROGUERIVER2026](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/ROGUERIVER2026)



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# CHILKAT RIVER

**THREAT:** Mining, development

**STATES:** Alaska

## SUMMARY

The Chilkat River is the lifeblood of Alaska Native communities and supports an abundance of salmon, bears, and other wildlife, including the largest congregation of bald eagles in the world. But the river is threatened by a large copper and zinc mine that jeopardizes clean water, habitat, and the local way of life. The state of Alaska must reject future hard-rock mining permits to safeguard the irreplaceable natural wealth of the Chilkat.

COLIN ARISMAN

## THE RIVER

The Chilkat River (Jilkáat Héeni) flows approximately 52 miles from the Chilkat Glacier in British Columbia, across the border into Alaska, past the Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan), to the Chilkat Inlet near Haines, Alaska. With its major tributary, the Klehini River, it supports one of the most vibrant, biodiverse, and productive ecosystems in North America. The river is crucial to the Alaska Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve and is critical habitat for the largest congregation of bald eagles in the world, five species of wild salmon, and a large brown bear population.

The Chilkat River is vital to the Village of Klukwan (Tlákwan Aan) — which means “Eternal Village” in Lingít, and is one of the oldest continuously occupied communities in North America — as well as to the town of Haines, known in Lingít as Deishu (“end of the trail”). The Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan), a U.S. federally recognized Tribe, are the stewards of the watershed, and have been since time immemorial.

## THE THREAT

A Canadian mining company is proposing a large-scale copper and zinc mine, known as the Palmer Project, above the Klehini River. The project includes drilling into thousands of acres of acid-generating rock in an area with extremely high levels of rainfall, snowfall, and seismic activity. Acid mine drainage — acidic, metal-laden wastewater produced by drilling and other mining activities — along with hydrocarbons and other pollutants, may reach the Klehini River and other tributaries. This pollution threatens the entire Chilkat River Watershed, local ecosystems, food security, and traditional ways of life.

Vizsla Copper Corp., a Canadian company, is exploring and developing land in the Chilkat watershed for a mine. That land is currently controlled by the state of Alaska

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# CHILKAT RIVER

Continued

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## TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/  
CHILKATRIVER2026](https://AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/CHILKATRIVER2026)

and the U.S. government, but it is unceded traditional territory of the Chilkat Indian Village (Klukwan).

The Chilkat Indian Village actively opposes large-scale, hard-rock mining in the Chilkat Valley, as it risks sustainable wild salmon runs, pristine water, hunting and fishing practices, food security, sustainable economies, and traditional ways of life. In Klukwan, Chilkat Indian Village Tribal members view these lands and waters as vital and sacred. Protecting the Chilkat River Watershed for future generations is an inherent duty.

ADOBE/ LINDAPHOTOGRAPHY

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Alaska Gov. Mike Dunleavy has pledged state support for the mine, and Vizsla Copper Corp. continues exploration and development in the watershed. We need increased public involvement to demonstrate to the governor and the corresponding state and federal agencies that this damaging project does not have widespread support. State leaders must reject all future permits and state funding for hard-rock mining infrastructure in the Chilkat Valley Watershed.



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# NISSEQUOGUE RIVER

**THREAT:** Dams

**STATES:** New York

## SUMMARY

The Nissequogue River is a unique natural treasure on Long Island, offering important habitat for birds, fish, and wildlife. The failure of Stump Pond Dam in 2024 freed a stretch of the Nissequogue, allowing the river to restore itself and come back to life, with benefits for both people and nature. Now, a proposal to rebuild the dam threatens this progress. County and state agencies must consider alternatives to rebuilding the dam, and support a long-term vision for a healthy, free-flowing Nissequogue River.

STEPHEN BORGHARDT

## THE RIVER

The Nissequogue River is one of the most ecologically and recreationally significant waterways on Long Island, flowing from its headwaters to Long Island Sound. It is designated as a “Scenic and Recreational River” by the state of New York, and Significant Coastal Fish and Wildlife Habitat by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Named for the Indigenous people who lived in the area, this groundwater-fed river provides a home for rare Atlantic cedar and native brook trout, and is an important habitat for nesting and migratory birds just 50 miles from Manhattan.

The New Mill Pond Dam — commonly known as the Stump Pond Dam — was constructed in 1798 to power a grist mill. This dam, in Blydenburgh County Park, breached in a major storm in August 2024.

## THE THREAT

When the Stump Pond Dam failed, it drained the impoundment overnight. The breach rapidly transformed a 118-acre pond into more than two miles of free-flowing stream, and reconnected the river to its natural floodplain.

Since the dam breach, the Nissequogue has been restoring itself. In just one growing season, the newly exposed floodplain revegetated from the native seedbank, and more than 120 plant species have been documented — including seven species listed by New York state as Species of Greatest Conservation Need. The Cornell Lab of Ornithology’s eBird database also shows increased bird diversity and abundance in the area. Water temperatures have been significantly cooler, reducing stress on the trout population. The 100 acres of open floodplain habitat now helps slow, store, and absorb floodwaters — reducing flooding risk both upstream and downstream during increasingly intense storms. Upstream residents have reported noticeably drier basements.

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# NISSEQUOGUE RIVER

Continued

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STEPHEN BORGHARDT

Now, Suffolk County is advancing a proposal to construct a new dam at the Stump Pond site, at significant expense to taxpayers. The project is expected to exceed \$10 million in construction costs, with additional long-term maintenance obligations.

Rebuilding the dam would reverse recent gains for the river and communities by disrupting fish passage, degrading water quality, trapping sediment, warming the river, eliminating valuable floodplain, and reducing the floodplain's capacity to manage stormwater.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

County and state agencies must conduct a comprehensive environmental review and consider alternatives to rebuilding the Stump Pond Dam. Suffolk County can demonstrate leadership by taking the time to evaluate costs, risks, and feasible alternatives through a transparent public process — including the option of keeping this reach of the river free-flowing.

This is an opportunity to plan for today's conditions and tomorrow's storms. A free-flowing Nissequogue River can provide meaningful public-safety and economic benefits: reduced flood risk, lower long-term maintenance liabilities, improved water quality, and healthier habitat for fish and wildlife.

The county can build on the Nissequogue's recovery since the breach and support a long-term vision for the river as a renewed, vibrant natural destination—one that offers accessible hiking, fishing, and wildlife viewing

while helping protect nearby homes and infrastructure during increasingly intense storm events.

# DAN RIVER

**THREAT:** Two major gas pipeline projects

**STATES:** North Carolina, Virginia

## SUMMARY

The Dan River supplies clean drinking water to roughly 1 million people and is a vital lifeline for an abundance of wildlife. But the construction of two major gas pipelines threatens drinking water sources and wildlife habitat. The governors of Virginia and North Carolina must ensure that pipeline construction meets all Clean Water Act safeguards to ensure the health of the river and its communities.

## THE RIVER

The Dan River originates in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and meanders east for 214 miles, crossing into North Carolina, where it joins the Roanoke River at Kerr Reservoir. The Dan River is full of wildlife including freshwater mussels, otters, and migratory fish, and is home to many endangered species like the James spiny mussel and the Roanoke logperch — all of which are essential to the river's dynamic ecosystem. The Dan River is also a critical water source, supplying drinking water to nearly 1 million people along the North Carolina-Virginia border.

Long before state boundaries or reservoirs existed, the Dan River was — and remains — a living relative to Indigenous peoples of the region. The river has sustained the Occaneechi Band of the Saponi Nation, the Saura, and related Siouan-speaking peoples for countless generations. The river's banks hold ancestral village sites, burial places, fishing grounds, and ceremonial landscapes that continue to shape Indigenous cultural identity and responsibility today. For Indigenous nations, the Dan is not merely a water source or wildlife corridor; it is a living system in which reciprocal responsibilities exist.

## THE THREAT

The greatest threat to the Dan River is the convergence of two major gas pipeline projects — Transco's Southeast Supply Enhancement Project (SSEP) and Mountain Valley Pipeline's Southgate Project (MVP Southgate). These pipelines will put clean drinking water for hundreds of thousands of residents at risk, disrupt critical wildlife habitat, and desecrate Indigenous cultural sites. Threats to the Dan River include ongoing cleanup efforts from Duke Energy's 2014 coal ash spill, real estate development, proposed data center development, and existing industrial sources along the river, including Duke Energy's Belews Creek coal-fired power plant.

MARMADUKE PERCY

# DAN RIVER

Continued

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The communities and ecosystems of the Dan River are already experiencing harm and face escalating risks if pipeline projects move forward. Local communities that rely on the Dan for drinking water, farming, and cultural practices are in harm's way. Construction of these pipelines could make access to clean drinking water uncertain for these communities due to the buildup of mud, sediment, and chemicals, while blasting and trenching along the pipeline's route could destabilize riverbanks and increase the risk of flooding.

In 2014, the Duke Energy coal ash spill released toxins that

settled into the riverbed and infiltrated the river's food chain, creating long-term uncertainty about drinking water and fish safety. The Dan River and surrounding communities cannot afford to have another preventable tragedy like this happen again.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The permits for SSEP and MVP Southgate have already been issued. We are urging Gov. Spanberger of Virginia and Gov. Stein of North Carolina to ensure their state agencies enforce Clean Water Act requirements during the construction of these pipelines and hold the pipeline companies to the highest standards for protecting the Dan River and the clean water that communities need. We also urge state agencies to meet with Indigenous leadership from State and Federal Tribal Nations to understand the potential risks and impacts of pipeline construction for Native communities.

The Clean Water Act requires states to ensure that the construction of major interstate pipelines like these will comply with state water quality standards. State agencies must enforce these standards to ensure local communities have access to clean drinking water, Indigenous land is honored, and wildlife habitats remain intact.

RODERICO YOOL DIAZ

# AMARGOSA RIVER

**THREAT:** Mining

**STATES:** California, Nevada

## SUMMARY

The Amargosa River is a desert treasure, delivering life-giving water to local communities and the plants and animals that thrive along its banks. But proposed claystone mining threatens to pollute the river and impact the groundwater essential to the river's flows. The Department of the Interior must approve a mineral withdrawal for the Amargosa River to prevent mining and safeguard the river. At the same time, Congress should designate the Ash Meadows Conservation Area to permanently protect Ash Meadows, Amargosa Valley, and the sovereign lands and sacred waters of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, ensuring long-term stewardship of groundwater, biodiversity, and communities across the Amargosa River Basin.

## THE RIVER

The Amargosa River is a ribbon of life flowing through one of the hottest and driest places in North America. From its headwaters in the Oasis Valley of Nevada, the river continues south through California's Mojave Desert, curves north into Death Valley National Park, and ultimately terminates in Badwater Basin. Though it flows mostly underground, the river provides critical water and habitat for a variety of plants and animals, many of which can't be found anywhere else on earth. Federally endangered species such as the Devils Hole pupfish, Amargosa vole, and Amargosa niterwort all depend on the Amargosa River and the connected groundwater and springs. Without its water, this fragile web of life collapses.

The Amargosa River is a living part of the ancestral homelands of the Timbisha Shoshone, Southern Paiute, Pahrump Paiute, and Chemehuevi Tribes. The Timbisha Shoshone retain sovereign lands in this region, and their communities continue to rely on the Amargosa River for drinking water, food, medicine, and cultural practices.

Low-income and rural communities in both Nevada and California rely on the Amargosa River's groundwater as a primary drinking source and to support the local tourism economy.

## THE THREAT

Proposed mining near the headwaters of the Amargosa River and along the borders of Ash Meadows threatens the groundwater that sustains the Amargosa River, putting local communities and already endangered species at risk. St. Cloud Mining's Ash Meadows Mine project and Lhoist North America's Amargosa Valley Mine are proposing to expand claystone mining operations. There are also hundreds of active mining claims for lithium on the border of Ash Meadows. These

# AMARGOSA RIVER

Continued

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projects involve large-scale extraction of claystones used for a variety of industrial and commercial purposes due to their absorptive qualities. Current proposals involve exploratory drilling and mining of these minerals to or below the water table and may entail pumping of groundwater out of an open pit to access the ore. The best available science has shown clearly that dewatering of open pits may put groundwater-fed springs in Ash Meadows and Death Valley National Park at risk of destabilization or drying, which would be catastrophic for the river's fragile wildlife.

Mining activity also threatens the

land, water, and wildlife sacred to the area's Tribal Nations. What's more, many local residents already face domestic well failures from historic groundwater depletion. Scientific studies suggest that new mining activity has the potential to worsen these inequities and may ultimately lead to displacement of these communities.

Public pressure in 2023 halted an initial exploratory drilling threat near Ash Meadows until a full review under the National Environmental Policy Act could occur. In 2025, a bipartisan coalition of Tribes, nonprofits, local governments, and thousands of residents called for a mineral withdrawal for approximately 309,000 acres of Bureau of Land Management land surrounding Ash Meadows, protecting the region from new mining for up to 20 years.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Department of the Interior (DOI) must approve the mineral withdrawal in the next 12 months before temporary protection expires. This action has been formally supported by the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe, Nye County, the townships of Amargosa Valley and Beatty, most of Nevada's congressional delegation — Senators Catherine Cortez Masto and Jacky Rosen, Representatives Steven Horsford, Susie Lee, and Dina Titus — and more than 25 non-profit organizations. It is imperative that the DOI follow through on this opportunity to put in place temporary but essential protections of precious groundwater resources from the harms of new mining on the Amargosa River.

In addition, Congress should take the next necessary step by designating the Ash Meadows National Conservation Area to permanently protect Ash Meadows, Amargosa Valley, and the sovereign lands and sacred waters of the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe. Establishing a National Conservation Area is urgently necessary to ensure durable protection and sustainable management of groundwater resources, biodiversity, and the rural and Tribal communities that depend on this extraordinary landscape.

MASON VOEHL

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# SUWANNEE RIVER

**THREAT:** Excessive groundwater withdrawals; agricultural and sewage pollution

**STATES:** Florida, Georgia

## SUMMARY

The Suwannee River is famous for its springs, which ensure a consistent flow of clear, clean water. The river's flow nurtures fish and wildlife and provides world-class recreation opportunities. But pollution and excessive water withdrawals are contaminating the river and causing vital springs to dry up. The Florida legislature and the state's Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP) must allocate funds to protect the springs and enforce pollution limits.

## THE RIVER

The Suwannee River meanders from its headwaters in the Okefenokee Swamp in Georgia south through Florida, eventually emptying into the ocean. It is free flowing for all of its nearly 250 miles and drains a watershed of more than 11,000 square miles. For thousands of years, people have been drawn to the river to enjoy its waters and reap the abundance of its fisheries. The primary source of the river's flow is more than 300 freshwater springs, delivering groundwater from the Floridian Aquifer. There are seven springs along the Suwannee River that have been designated by the state of Florida as Outstanding Florida Springs due to their importance to the ecosystem. The watershed around the river supports numerous communities, including Live Oak, Chiefland, and Fanning Springs. The Suwannee River Basin supports multiple industries, including agriculture, phosphate mining, bottled water, and tourism. State and federal protected areas include the Lower Suwannee Wildlife Refuge, Suwannee River State Park, Manatee Springs State Park, and the Suwannee River Wilderness Trail. Recreational opportunities include world-class cave diving sites.

## THE THREAT

The Suwannee River is designated as an Outstanding Florida Water, and seven springs that supply fresh groundwater to the Suwannee are designated Outstanding Florida Springs. These designations mean that the Suwannee River and these springs have the highest levels of protection in Florida. Ongoing monitoring and research on the health of the river and its springs indicate substantial impairments that are intended to be prevented by these safeguards. This includes excessive levels of nitrate pollution that not only create toxic algae outbreaks, but also increase the risks of cancer and birth defects. Pollution is also creating low dissolved oxygen that suffocates fish and other aquatic organisms. In addition,

JOHN MORAN

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# SUWANNEE RIVER

Continued



excessive groundwater withdrawals have caused critical springs to go dry. The FDEP set limits for the Minimum Flows and Levels in 2008, and a Total Maximum Daily Load with a Basin Management Action Plan in 2018 to meet the requirements of the 2016 Florida Springs and Aquifer Protection Act. But without enforcement, the problems persist: The Suwannee and its tributaries continue to suffer from regular algal outbreaks due to rising pollution. And unmanaged groundwater pumping through the watershed is causing springs to fail, impacting the river's flow and overall health.

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The biggest sources of pollution in the Suwannee River Basin are fertilizer and livestock waste. Recent research has shown that dairy farms near the river system add 2.1 million pounds of nitrogen pollution per year. In addition, poorly maintained and managed sewer systems in communities on the Suwannee and its tributaries are regularly failing, dumping raw sewage into the river. These levels of pollution are above the limit of .35 mg/L nitrate-nitrogen that the FDEP set to protect springs and the integrity of the river. Springs within state parks along the Suwannee River are currently measuring 5.0-6.0 mg/L. These pollution problems are exacerbated by groundwater pumping, pushing this river system to its limit.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

The Suwannee River can still be the asset to communities in Florida and Georgia that everyone needs it to be. There are two key actions that must be taken to improve the Suwannee:

First, the state of Florida has a responsibility to ensure that there is clean water for the Suwannee River and springs. The restoration and protection of the springs and their rivers have been overlooked by the state, which has only invested the absolute minimum. The leadership of Florida must allocate \$250 million in the 2027-28 state budget for the Springs and Watershed Restoration Program in the Florida Department of Environmental Protection.

Second, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection must enforce the Suwannee River Basin Management Action Plan to comply with the state's nitrogen pollution load reduction target. This includes holding the responsible entities for nitrogen pollution accountable, including agricultural operations, concentrated animal feeding operations, and counties and cities, for their wastewater treatment plans. The state can no longer turn a blind eye to the pollution going into the waters of the state.



SAN JOAQUIN RIVER, CALIFORNIA  
DAVID HUNTER



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