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Susquehanna named Most Endangered River in the Nation

Natural Gas Drilling Posing Unprecedented Threat

Washington, D.C. – For the second year in a row, the most endangered river in the United States is a victim of natural gas drilling and the environmental hazards associated with hydraulic fracturing, also known as “fracking,” according to *America’s Most Endangered RiversTM of 2011*.

The report, which was released today by American Rivers, is a wake-up call to policymakers as concerns mount that the process used to extract natural gas is contaminating drinking water and potentially threatening the health of millions.

American Rivers, which every year names the 10 most endangered rivers in the country, put the Susquehanna at the top of this year’s list, citing the rush to develop the enormous natural gas reserves in the region without considering the risk to clean water, rivers and human health. The most endangered river of 2010 was the Upper Delaware, which is similarly threatened by natural gas extraction.

The Susquehanna, one of the longest rivers in the nation, flows over the Marcellus Shale region, a rock formation underlying large swaths of New York, Pennsylvania and Maryland, and containing vast reserves of natural gas. As part of the fracking process used to extract natural gas, massive amounts of water are withdrawn from rivers and streams, mixed with sand and toxic chemicals and pumped underground to fracture the shale under extreme pressure. There are currently limited facilities for treating the highly toxic wastewater that results from the extraction process and few government regulations to prevent it from seeping into rivers like the Susquehanna, which provides drinking water for more than six million people.

“Natural gas drilling poses one of the greatest risks our nation’s rivers have faced in decades,” says Andrew Fahlund, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers. “Without strong regulations, public health and drinking water will be threatened by the toxic, cancer-causing pollution that results from hydraulic fracturing.”

“The Susquehanna is one of the most ancient rivers on Earth. In its current state, it is a far cry from the pristine and primeval watershed that existed only a few centuries ago. The threat posed by the natural gas industry and horizontal hydrofracturing will eclipse the environmental legacy of the lumber and coal-mining industries combined, and as a long-time advocate for the

protection of the Susquehanna, I believe we must call for an immediate moratorium on all water withdrawals and all natural gas drilling until the technology and legislation catches up with the desire and need to exploit these fossil-fuel resources," said Don Williams, Susquehanna River Sentinel.

"Recent problems caused by poorly-regulated gas drilling in Pennsylvania include: ground water pollution in Susquehanna County resulting in loss of a community's drinking water, a blowout in Bradford County that went uncontrolled, allowing toxic fracking chemicals to flow into the Susquehanna, deadly accidents at a gas well site as well as chemical spills, explosions and fires. We call on the Susquehanna River Basin Commission to immediately impose a moratorium on any new drilling in the Susquehanna River Basin, as was done by the Delaware River Basin Commission," said Jeff Schmidt, Director of the Sierra Club Pennsylvania Chapter. "Until Pennsylvania, the SRBC and the federal government adopt new laws and regulations to fully protect public health and the environment from the dangers of Marcellus Shale gas drilling, no new drilling should be allowed," Schmidt continued.

The number of natural gas wells in this country has nearly doubled in the past two decades to approximately 500,000, and is expected to continue to grow in the coming years posing an increasingly serious threat to the nation's rivers. In the Marcellus Shale region in Pennsylvania alone, drilling companies were issued approximately 3,300 gas-well permits in 2009 compared with 117 in 2007.

A recent report by House Democrats states that millions of gallons of potentially hazardous chemicals and known carcinogens were injected into wells from 2005-2009.

The America's Most Endangered Rivers report recommends several steps to ensure natural gas extraction doesn't further harm our nation's rivers and drinking water. These include:

- A moratorium on hydraulic fracturing along the Susquehanna until better protections are in place;
- Analysis by the Susquehanna River Basin Commission (SRBC) of impacts to clean water, and issuance and enforcement of proper regulations.
- Removal by Congress of loopholes that have helped the natural gas industry bypass major environmental regulations.
- Passage by Congress of the FRAC Act of 2011, which calls for regulation of fracking by the Environmental Protection Agency and requires disclosure of the chemicals used in the procedure. The legislation would also repeal a provision added to the Energy Policy Act of 2005 that exempts the natural gas industry from complying with the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Since last year's designation of the Upper Delaware as the county's most endangered river, the Delaware River Basin Commission has begun developing regulations that are comparatively stronger than others in the region, although those regulations have yet to be completed. While New York has issued a moratorium on natural gas drilling, and Pennsylvania, New York and Maryland have been working to improve clean water safeguards for natural gas development, those efforts fall short of adequately protecting the water supply for millions of Americans.

America's Most Endangered Rivers 2011

SPECIAL MENTION: Mississippi River

Threat: Outdated flood management

1) Susquehanna River (NY, PA, MD)

Threat: Natural gas extraction

2) Bristol Bay (AK)

Threat: Massive copper and gold mine

3) Roanoke River (VA, NC)

Threat: Uranium mining

4) Chicago River (IL)

Threat: Sewage pollution

5) Yuba River (CA)

Threat: Hydropower dams

6) Green River (WA)

Threat: Exploratory drilling and mine development

7) Hoback River (WY)

Threat: Natural gas extraction

8) Black Warrior River (AL)

Threat: Coal mining

9) St. Croix River (MN, WI)

Threat: Rollback of longstanding protections

10) Ozark National Scenic Riverways (MO)

Threat: Overuse and poor management

About America's Most Endangered Rivers

For 26 years, American Rivers has sounded the alarm on 360 rivers through our America's Most Endangered Rivers report. The report is not a list of the "worst" or most polluted rivers, but is a call to action for rivers at a crossroads, whose fates will be determined in the coming year. Over the years, the report has helped spur many successes including the removal of outdated dams, the protection of rivers with Wild and Scenic designations, and the prevention of harmful development and pollution.

American Rivers' staff and scientific advisors review nominations for the following criteria:

- A major decision that the public can help influence in the coming year
- The significance of the river to people and wildlife
- The magnitude of the threat, especially in light of climate change

For the third consecutive year, America's Most Endangered Rivers™ is sponsored by The Orvis Company, which donates 5% of their pre-tax profits annually to protect nature.

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