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Mississippi River named one of America's Most Endangered Rivers

Record flooding earns river "special mention" on annual list

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Washington, DC – As floodwaters swelled the Mississippi River to historic levels and overwhelmed communities in 10 states, American Rivers gave a 'special mention' to the river today in its list of America's Most Endangered Rivers™ of 2011.

American Rivers made the last minute addition to the list due to the unprecedented nature of the flooding, and the opportunity to improve flood management for public safety and river health.

"Healthy rivers are great assets and give communities so many benefits, including clean water and natural flood protection," said Andrew Fahlund, senior vice president of conservation at American Rivers. "This year's list of America's Most Endangered Rivers is a clear reminder that if we don't protect and restore the Mississippi and all of our rivers, then public safety, the economy, and the environment will suffer grave consequences."

In listing the Mississippi as a "special mention," American Rivers pointed to outdated flood management strategies and over-reliance on levees that have contributed to the record flood damage. While levees and floodwalls make sense in heavily populated areas, their overuse causes flood levels to rise as the river channel is narrowed and water has nowhere to go but up – making flooding worse for communities downstream. Levees should be our last line of defense, not our only line of defense.

"Our hearts go out to all those affected by these floods," said Jennifer Browning, manager of the Mississippi River Network. "Whether they are flooded because of a blown levee or because of the sheer volume of water, the devastation is heartbreaking."

American Rivers called for a strategy that combines structural flood protection solutions like levees with natural defenses like healthy wetlands and floodplains that absorb floodwaters. Towns across the country from Nashville, TN to Tulsa, OK to Napa, CA are embracing innovative flood protection solutions and should be models for other communities.

On May 4, the Obama Administration laid out a vision to protect and restore our nation's clean water and healthy rivers and wetlands. American Rivers applauded that action and urged the Administration to improve flood management and policies that ensure public safety and river health. American Rivers also called on Congress to use the upcoming Farm Bill as an opportunity to expand programs that would restore wetlands and floodplains along the Mississippi. Congress and the Department of Agriculture should replicate model initiatives like the Iowa River Corridor Project, which gives landowners and farmers incentives to restore wetlands in exchange for payment, and to experiment with land uses besides traditional row crops.

“We need to give the river more room to move,” said Fahlund. “Unless we restore our natural defenses, we will burden future generations with increasingly disastrous floods.”

The Mississippi has been on the America’s Most Endangered Rivers list a total of eight times, with threats ranging from flood control to pollution.

American Rivers is a member of the Mississippi River Network, a coalition of organizations working to protect the land, water and people of the Mississippi River. The Network works with an-ever growing number of River Citizens through its *1 Mississippi* program. River Citizens are dedicated to learning more about their River and taking action to protect it.

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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American Rivers is the nation's leading voice fighting for clean water and healthy rivers. For almost 40 years we have protected and restored rivers, scoring victories for communities, fish and wildlife, and future generations. American Rivers has offices in Washington, DC and nationwide, and more than 100,000 supporters and volunteers. Visit www.americanrivers.org, www.facebook.com/americanrivers and www.twitter.com/americanrivers.