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Iowa River Among America's Most Endangered

State Far Behind Rest of U.S. on Clean Water Protection

Washington— Iowans are proud of their state's high rankings for education and livability compared to other states, but on a crucial aspect of the Clean Water Act the state lags far behind the rest of the nation. Iowa has failed to adopt adequate clean water rules – thirty years after passage of the Act – that set a baseline and keep water quality from getting worse. If this baseline isn't enforced, the state will continue to issue permits that allow increased pollution in the Iowa and other rivers. Faced with a growing load of sewage from both humans and livestock, it is no wonder that the Iowa River is one of the Most Endangered Rivers in America for 2007.

“Iowans love their namesake river for boating, fishing and swimming. They deserve better than to see it treated like a sewer,” says Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers. “It's time for Iowa to catch up to the rest of the country in protecting clean water.”

It's hard to imagine that residents of Iowa City would drink from or swim in the Iowa River if they had any choice in the matter. A host of polluters that include large concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), municipal and industrial wastewater treatment facilities, and small rural communities without public sewers, inundate the river with toxins, nitrates, phosphorous and untreated sewage containing viruses, bacteria and other pathogens.

“We can do a whole lot better than this,” says Susan Heathcote, water program director for the Iowa Environmental Council. “It's not just an embarrassment to be this far behind the rest of the country, it's a real threat to people's health, to an entire recreational economy, and to the wallets of taxpayers who have to pay to clean up this mess before it comes out of the tap.”

Although it would seem like common sense to at least maintain current water quality levels when considering new or expanded pollution sources, Iowa has fallen far behind in enforcing a key provision of the Clean Water Act that triggers such a review. As a result, state agencies routinely issue permits allowing new or increased pollution loads to be discharged into rivers without the required review of the impacts on river water quality.

Nearby communities enjoy recreation on the Iowa River, including power boating, paddle sports, fishing, hunting and swimming. Vacation cabins and state parks are found up and down the river. Roughly 180,000 people in Cedar Rapids and Iowa City depend upon the Iowa and its major tributary, the Cedar River, for drinking water.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has repeatedly delayed updating rules that would prevent the state from issuing permits that make pollution worse. The current year is a crucial turning point, with the state once again considering changes that would bring Iowa in line with the rest of the nation. American Rivers and the Iowa Environmental Council called on the DNR not to delay this process, and to immediately begin issuing only permits that require cities to cut pollution in the Iowa River, instead of allowing increased sewage in the state's namesake river.

“When a person is injured, step one is to stop the bleeding before any healing can begin. With the Iowa River, things won't get better until the state stops sanctioning more and more sewage and pollution in the river,” says Wodder.

About America's Most Endangered Rivers

Each year, American Rivers solicits nominations from thousands of river groups, environmental organizations, outdoor clubs, local governments, and taxpayer watchdogs for the America's Most Endangered Rivers report. The report highlights the rivers facing the most uncertain futures rather than those suffering from the worst chronic problems. The report presents alternatives to proposals that would damage rivers, identifies those who make the crucial decisions, and points out opportunities for the public to take action on behalf of each listed river.

This year community leaders from all across the country have joined with us, in the fight to help both their rivers, and their communities thrive. This year's endangered rivers are: Santa Fe River (NM), San Mateo Creek (CA), Iowa River (IA), Upper Delaware River (NY), White Salmon River (WA), Kinnickinnic River (WI), Neuse River (NC), Lee Creek (AR, OK), Chuitna River (AK)

Interviews

**Rebecca Wodder is available for interview, both pre and post embargo.
Please contact either Garrett Russo (202) 423-9494 or Brad DeVries (202)**



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243-7023 for booking. A full copy of the report is available at
<http://www.americanrivers.org/MERPressroom>

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American Rivers is the only national organization standing up for healthy rivers so our communities can thrive. Through national advocacy, innovative solutions and our growing network of strategic partners, we protect and promote our rivers as valuable community assets that are vital to our health, safety and quality of life. Founded in 1973, American Rivers has more than 65,000 members and online supporters nationwide, with offices in Washington, DC and the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, California and Northwest regions. www.AmericanRivers.org