

Pearl River named among America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2023

Dam and development scheme would worsen Jackson's drinking water and flooding problems

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Washington -- American Rivers today named the Pearl River among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*®, citing the threat that a private real estate development scheme poses to one of the most biodiverse rivers in the U.S. and the primary drinking water source for Jackson, Mississippi. American Rivers and partners called on the Biden Administration to stop the project and invest in environmentally-sustainable flood relief for the predominantly Black community of Jackson while protecting the Pearl River and all the communities and economies that rely on it.

"The One Lake project is a wolf in sheep's clothing. No matter how promoters dress it up, this project would damage river health and worsen Jackson's flooding and drinking water crisis," said Olivia Dorothy with American Rivers. "Instead of lining the pockets of private real estate developers, our leaders must deliver real drinking water and flood protection solutions for the people of Jackson."

The Pearl River is threatened by a real estate development scheme masquerading as a flood control project. This "One Lake" project would dredge and dam the Pearl River to create new waterfront property, destroying vital fish and wildlife habitat, worsening Jackson's flooding and drinking water crisis, increasing toxic contamination, and reducing freshwater flows critical to the region's important seafood and tourism economies.

"Downstream communities and industries that depend on the Pearl River will pay the price if One Lake moves forward," said Martha Watts, Mayor of Monticello, MS. "The project would expose toxic pollution, threaten the integrity of municipal infrastructure, like bridges and drinking water supplies, and interfere with permitted businesses already working on the river."

The project would dredge 10-miles of the Pearl River, destroying 2,500 acres of mostly wetland habitat and disturbing eight highly contaminated toxic sites with no plan to protect public health. A new dam would be constructed to contain the dredged 1,900-acre impoundment, and the dredged material will be used to build new waterfront property for real estate development putting more people in harm's way of flooding.

The project would worsen Jackson's significant urban flash flooding and stormwater drainage problems, permanently elevating water levels in eight tributary creeks that flow through primarily low-income Black neighborhoods. One Lake would add to the city's drinking water and water quality problems, including the discharge of billions of gallons

of untreated and poorly treated sewage that has already closed the Pearl to public contact recreation in the Jackson area.

“The One Lake project will cause irrevocable damage to the Pearl River ecosystem in the project area and downstream,” said Abby Braman, Pearl Riverkeeper. “Dredging will destroy almost 2000 acres of wetlands, and damage habitat for two threatened species and the new dam will complicate existing flash flooding along Jackson’s urban creeks.”

While the Army Corps is currently reviewing the environmental documents developed by the private interests and has yet to decide whether the project merits moving forward, the agency has already committed \$221 million from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to construct the project. American Rivers and partners called on the Army Corps, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to reject the project, and instead prioritize natural infrastructure solutions to provide effective, environmentally-sustainable flood relief to Jackson while protecting the river’s unique ecology and wildlife.

The Pearl River is the only public drinking water source for the city of Jackson, which includes 150,000 residents, 83 percent of whom are Black. The city has struggled for decades to maintain basic water and sewer service and is currently under an Environmental Protection Administration consent decree to enforce established rules and regulations due to sewage discharge violations in the billions of gallons annually. In 2022 the city’s residents were left without clean drinking water for months when one of the City’s two drinking water treatment plants failed.

From its headwaters on native Choctaw lands, the Pearl River flows nearly 500-miles through Mississippi and Louisiana to the Gulf of Mexico. The Pearl River provides habitat for more than 300 species of birds, fish and wildlife, including the federally threatened Gulf sturgeon and ringed sawback turtle, and 125,000 acres of wetland and bottomland hardwood conservation lands. The Pearl supplies freshwater flows critical to the health of the Gulf of Mexico; the region’s oyster, crab, shrimp and tourism industries; and hundreds of industrial and municipal users.

The annual *America’s Most Endangered Rivers* report is a list of rivers at a crossroads, where key decisions in the coming months will determine the rivers’ fates. 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.

The Pearl River was listed among America’s Most Endangered Rivers in 2015 and 2008. Other rivers in the region listed as endangered in recent years include Turkey Creek (2012), Big Sunflower (2018, 2020), and Pascagoula (2009, 2016).

America’s Most Endangered Rivers® of 2023

1) Colorado River, Grand Canyon (Arizona):

THREAT: Climate change, outdated water management
AT RISK: Ecosystem health, reliable water delivery, regional economy

2) Ohio River (Pennsylvania, Ohio, West Virginia, Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois):

THREAT: Pollution, climate change
AT RISK: Clean water for 5 million people

3) Pearl River (Louisiana, Mississippi):

THREAT: Dredging and dam construction
AT RISK: Clean drinking water, local and downstream communities, fish and wildlife habitat

4) Snake River (Idaho, Oregon, Washington):

THREAT: Four federal dams
AT RISK: Tribal treaty rights and culture, endangered salmon runs, rural and local communities

5) Clark Fork River (Montana):

THREAT: Pulp mill pollution
AT RISK: Public health, fish and wildlife

6) Eel River (California):

THREAT: Dams
AT RISK: Fish and wildlife, tribal culture and sustenance

7) Lehigh River (Pennsylvania):

THREAT: Poorly planned development
AT RISK: Clean water, fish and wildlife habitat, rural and local communities, open space

8) Chilkat and Klehini rivers (Alaska):

THREAT: Mining
AT RISK: Bald eagle, fish, and wildlife habitat, tribal culture and sustenance

9) Rio Gallinas (New Mexico):

THREAT: Climate change, outdated forest and watershed management
AT RISK: Clean drinking water, farming, watershed functionality

10) Okefenokee Swamp (Georgia, Florida):

THREAT: Mining
AT RISK: Fish and wildlife habitat, wetlands, water quality and flow

About American Rivers

American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways. Healthy rivers provide people and nature with clean, abundant water and natural habitat. For 50 years, American

Rivers staff, supporters, and partners have shared a common belief: Life Depends on Rivers. For more information, please visit AmericanRivers.org