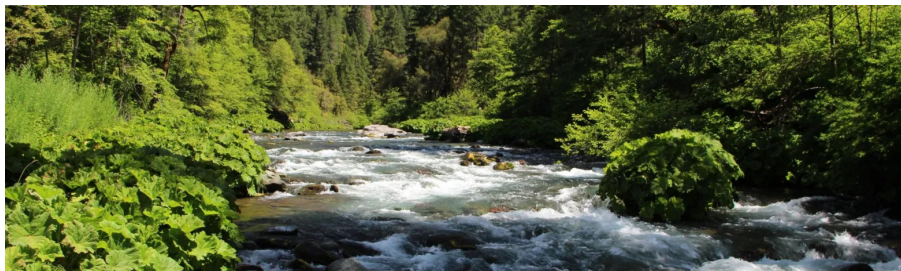


California's McCloud River Named One of America's Most Endangered Rivers

by *American Rivers*

April 13, 2021



Washington, D.C. April 13, 2021 – American Rivers today named Northern California's McCloud River among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2021 because of a Trump-era proposal to raise Shasta Dam. This proposal poses a grave threat to the river's health and to the culture, religion and identity of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe.

American Rivers and its partners are calling on the Biden administration to overturn the Trump administration's plan to raise Shasta Dam.

"The America's Most Endangered Rivers report is a call to action to save rivers facing urgent decisions," said Amy Merrill with American Rivers.

"Raising the height of Shasta Dam poses too great a threat to the river and the Winnemem Wintu Tribe's sacred sites. This is the year to kill this misguided proposal once and for all."

The McCloud River is located in Northern California. Over 77 miles long, it originates in the Cascade Range beneath Mount Shasta. It travels through Siskiyou County and Shasta County and is a tributary of the Pit River. The

Pit River in turn connects to the Sacramento River, which flows into Shasta Reservoir and meets Shasta Dam north of Redding.

During the Trump administration, then Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt advanced plans to increase the height of Shasta Dam by 18.5 feet and to expand Shasta Lake by more than 200 billion gallons. Bernhardt is a former lawyer and lobbyist for Westlands Water District in the Central Valley, which long advocated for raising the dam as a way to secure more water for big agricultural interests hundreds of miles south of the dam.

Increasing the height of the dam would cost taxpayers more than \$1 billion and would flood more than 5,000 acres of forest and riverside habitat, harming McCloud River's wild trout fishery and providing questionable benefits (if not harm) to the salmon that spawn downstream of the dam.

"Raising the height of Shasta Dam would decimate more of the McCloud River," said Ron Stork with Friends of the River. "It would destroy sacred tribal sites and harm the overall health of the river – and at a huge cost to taxpayers. Naming the McCloud one of America's Most Endangered Rivers shines a light on this threat and also illuminates that the Biden administration should take action to protect the river."

The McCloud River is home to the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, which has relied on and cared for the river since time immemorial. "Winnemem" means "middle water people," referring to the river's position between the Sacramento and Pit Rivers. The construction of Shasta Dam in 1945 devastated the Tribe's way of life, displaced tribal members and flooded ancestral lands, burial grounds and most of the tribe's sacred cultural sites. The giant dam stopped salmon from returning to their spawning grounds in the heart of Winnemem territory. An additional increase of Shasta Dam's height would severely impact the Tribe's ability to practice their culture and religion by either permanently or seasonally flooding approximately 39 sacred sites along the McCloud River.

"Winnemem are unique to the McCloud River," said Winnemem Chief Caleen Sisk. "We have a certain language that is related to those sacred sites, that is related to that river, to the things that make Winnemem people Winnemem. The McCloud is the only river that can make us that— and we've

already lost so much. To the tribe, Shasta Dam is a weapon of mass destruction.”

Chief Sisk further expounded on past events, saying, “In 1941, the U.S. government left us with NOTHING— no land, no homes, no salmon, no subsistence. Meanwhile, the county and state continue to get rich off taking our lands and water. We have no land on the river now. We are the undisputed indigenous people of this watershed, yet we have to continue to battle the discriminatory policies associated with being ‘unrecognized without rights of tribal status.’ We have to fight to have our ceremonies on the river. This will not only be a flooding of sacred places on the river; it is also another genocidal ordeal for the Winnemem Wintu Tribe to try to survive.”

On his first day in office, President Biden issued executive orders initiating reviews on Trump administration regulatory rollbacks. Included in this suite of reviews is the proposal to raise the height of Shasta Dam.

“American Rivers urges Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to complete a swift review of this project, give full consideration to its injustice and illegality, and kill the project for good by publishing a Record of Decision that clearly states this project is illegal in California under the California Wild and Scenic Rivers Act,” said Merrill.

Recognizing its rich fish and wildlife habitat, scenic beauty, and pristine waters, California listed the McCloud River under the state’s Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1989, protecting the river from a dam raise. Several rare and endangered wildlife and plant species live along the McCloud, including the Shasta snow-wreath, Shasta salamander, McCloud River redband trout and Pacific fisher. Raising Shasta Dam would override California state law and set a dangerous legal precedent for other protected rivers.

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’ fate. 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.

AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS® OF 2021

- **#1: Snake River (ID, WA, OR)**
Threat: Four federal dams on the lower Snake River
- **#2: Lower Missouri River (MO, IA, NE, KS)**
Threat: Outdated river management
- **#3: Boundary Waters (MN)**
Threat: Sulfide-ore copper mining
- **#4: South River (GA)**
Threat: Pollution due to lax enforcement
- **#5: Pecos River (NM)**
Threat: Pollution from proposed hardrock mining
- **#6: Tar Creek (OK)**
Threat: Pollution from Tar Creek Superfund Site
- **#7: McCloud River (CA)**
Threat: Raising of Shasta Dam
- **#8: Ipswich River (MA)**
Threat: Excessive water withdrawals
- **#9: Raccoon River (IA)**
Threat: Pollution from industrial agriculture and factory farming
- **#10: Turkey Creek (MS)**
Threat: Two major developments

Read the report, meet our partners, and take action to save the rivers on this year's list. [Learn more](#)

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