

Mother Jones

See Them Now Before They Disappear Forever: America's 10 Most Endangered Rivers

ENVIRONMENT

A new report shows the effects of the environmental assault on our waterways.

By: **PIPER MCDANIEL**

APRIL 13, 2021



A warning sign on the South River near DeKalb, Georgia.

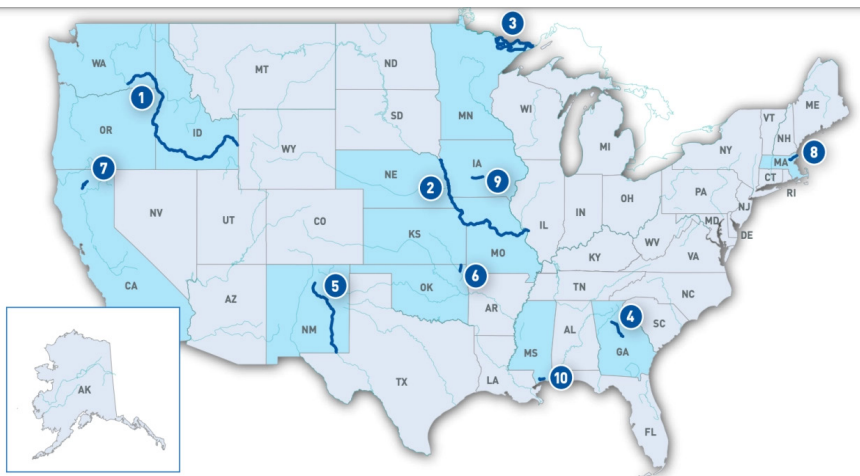
Alan Cressler/American Rivers

The Boundary Waters—an area including more than 1000 pristine lakes and 1200 miles of rivers and streams in northern Minnesota—are being threatened. Twin Metals, a subsidiary of the Chilean mining company Antofagasta, has proposed opening a copper mine there that environmental advocates say will do irrevocable damage to the overall health of waterways in

the area. The mine threatens to jeopardize wildlife and will also compromise the robust tourist industry that relies on the Boundary Waters wilderness for survival.

Or consider the proposed hard rock mine along the Pecos River in New Mexico. It's likely to harm more than 5,000 acres of wildlife habitat while polluting the 926-mile long river that extends from New Mexico to the Rio Grande in Texas. In Georgia, decades-long pollution from sewage and stormwater runoff threatens the South River, which flows through predominantly black, and low to moderate income communities in Atlanta and DeKalb county. Years of consistent pollution there have raised concerns about the health of the wilderness, the safety of fish consumed from the river, and whether or not residents should even swim in it. These are only three of ten rivers that are now considered to be the most endangered of the many in the US that are in environmental peril.

On Tuesday, American Rivers, a river conservation group, unveiled its 36th list of America's Most Endangered Rivers. Past reports have been catalysts for action. In some instances leading to protection of natural resources, as with the Gila River in New Mexico, or an effective response to pervasive environmental injustice, as with Washington's White River in 2014. Meant as a call to action, this year's list was winnowed down from more than 30 rivers nominated by national and regional American Rivers staff and partners on the basis of three criteria: How close they are to their "tipping point," or to suffering damage that may be irreparable; what's at stake in communities, in natural and cultural resources, and with wildlife that will be casualties of man-made decisions; and can something be done within the next year to intervene and avoid even greater despoliation.



- **1. SNAKE RIVER, ID, WA, OR**
- **2. LOWER MISSOURI RIVER, IA, KS, MO, NE**
- **3. BOUNDARY WATERS, MN**
- **4. SOUTH RIVER, GA**

- **5. PECOS RIVER, NM**
- **6. TAR CREEK, OK**
- **7. MCCLOUD RIVER, CA**
- **8. IPSWICH RIVER, MA**
- **9. RACCOON RIVER, IA**
- **10. TURKEY CREEK, MS**

“There are many, many, many other rivers throughout this country that are very endangered and need support,” Tom Kiernan, President and CEO of American Rivers tells *Mother Jones*.

Most of the ten rivers on the list face risks that were either created or exacerbated by the Trump Administration, which weakened environmental regulations, hobbled the EPA, made it easier for oil companies to drill in National Parks, and generally pursued policies that encouraged natural resource extraction at the expense of environmental considerations. For example, the Twin Metals copper mine poised to operate in Boundary Waters was greenlit in 2019. The contested mine has prompted a state legal review of mining regulations, and environmental advocates have squared off against the mining industry in protest of anticipated environmental damage. A coalition of environmental groups filed a lawsuit against regulators in 2020 alleging that the environmental review of the proposed mines didn’t comply with legal requirements. The lawsuit was paused in 2021 pending a review of the decision to grant the mining permits by the Biden Administration.



The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. *Steve Piragis/American Rivers*

“Copper mining can lead to acid mine drainage,” Amanda Kimsey, campaign manager for the Wilderness Society, says. “There’s plenty of examples of copper mines that have failed and have spilled into surrounding areas that have completely wiped out water based ecosystems.”

The Pecos River in New Mexico also faces the looming possibility of resource extraction, after the mining company Comexico LLC secured 20 mining claims in Tererro, New Mexico, some located within the borders of the Sante Fe National Forest. The Pecos River is a hot spot of biodiversity providing a vital habitat for the imperiled native Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Its watersheds are the habitat for the endangered Mexican spotted owl, among other birds.

Bio: [Piper Mcdaniel](#)

Copyright © 2021 Mother Jones and the Foundation for National Progress. All Rights Reserved.

https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2021/04/see-them-now-before-they-disappear-forever-americas-10-most-endangered-rivers/?utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=naytev&utm_medium=social