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Saluda River among America's Most Endangered Rivers

Insufficient sewage treatment threatens clean water

Washington— Clean water and quality of life in one of the nation's five fastest-growing areas will be increasingly at risk unless sewage pollution in the Saluda River is reduced. This threat landed the Saluda in the number six spot in *America's Most Endangered Rivers: 2009 edition*.

The Saluda provides drinking water for over 500,000 people, is a hotspot for recreation, and contributes to the overall quality of life for residents. The river and its clean water are threatened by excess quantities of phosphorous, a byproduct of the sewage treatment process that can choke a river by depleting oxygen levels. Too much phosphorous contributes to the rampant growth of algae and the death of fish and other aquatic life. It also can make the river unsafe for swimming and other recreation. American Rivers and its partners called on the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) to improve sewage treatment standards and ensure the river reaches the 25 to 50 percent reduction in phosphorous that is needed to maintain river health.

"We want to ensure the Saluda River remains the lifeblood of these communities and doesn't become a liability that hurts the economy and quality of life," said Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers. "This river provides drinking water and recreation for hundreds of thousands of people. Clean water needs to be a top priority."

"Unless lake phosphorous levels decline significantly, widespread loss of recreational opportunities, declines in lakeshore and riverfront property values, and increased occurrences of fish kills can be expected," said John Tynan of Upstate Forever.

Lake Greenwood, a reservoir located approximately at the Saluda River's halfway point and the first major impoundment on the Saluda River downstream of the wastewater treatment plant discharge sites, serves as an indicator for the overall health of the Saluda watershed. It is here that phosphorus-charged sediment gathers, causing the chain reaction of increased algae growth, followed by severely depleted dissolved oxygen levels, which subsequently causes large fish kills.

The fate of the Saluda and Lake Greenwood lies in the hands of DHEC. The DHEC has limited phosphorous from area wastewater treatment plants before. Two plants on the Reedy River, a major tributary to the Saluda, have limits on total phosphorus discharges and, as a result, treat sewage effluent to a higher standard than the Saluda plants. It is crucial that the regulating authority, DHEC, require the Saluda wastewater treatment plants implement appropriate technology or techniques in order to lower phosphorus inputs into the river and the lake.

This year provides a critical opportunity as five major wastewater treatment plants and three smaller plants north of Lake Greenwood (representing more than two-thirds of all wastewater discharges to this portion of the Saluda) must renew their five-year discharge permits between May 31, 2009 and June 30, 2010.

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.

Interviews

American Rivers President Rebecca Wodder and Associate Director of Southeast Conservation Matt Rice (Columbia, SC) are available for interviews, both pre and post embargo. Please contact Angela Dicianno (202) 243-7077 for booking.

Reporters wishing to direct readers to the report online may use the following link*: <http://www.AmericanRivers.org/EndangeredRivers>

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