



Saluda River on endangered rivers list

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The Saluda River is on a national endangered rivers list and a local advocacy group is urging residents to become involved in the situation.

American Rivers, a leading conservation organization, gave the river the number six spot in its report "America's Most Endangered Rivers: 2009 edition."

The Saluda River provides drinking water for more than 500,000 people but it is being threatened by excessive amounts of phosphorous, found in human waste, which can deplete a river's oxygen level, according to American Rivers officials.

The river runs just northwest of Greenville and flows southwest toward Pelzer before it joins Broad River at Columbia.

Chris Starker is the rural water project associate for Upstate Forever, a non-profit group advocating for many causes including clean air and water. American Rivers and Upstate Forever want the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (SCDHEC) to take measures to reduce phosphorus in the river by 25 to 50 percent.

“It’s not too late to save it,” Starker said. “We are at a critical point now.”

Starker said that Upstate Forever submitted the application for inclusion in the report from American Rivers. He wants residents to call lawmakers and the state health department to tell them they are concerned about water quality and they support phosphorous reduction.

Adam Myrick, a spokesperson for DHEC, said his department would consider requiring eight treatment plants up for permit renewal along the river to require a numerical standard for phosphorous amounts. He said that the report did spur this consideration.

“What we are doing now is we are going to take a closer look at this situation,” Myrick said.

He also said it is important to note that phosphorous does not come from just human waste but other “non-point sources” like animal waste.

The eight treatment plants must renew their discharge permits between May 31 and June 30, 2010, according to American Rivers officials.

He said that the Saluda-Reedy Watershed Consortium worked with the Strum Thurmond Institute on a study that showed development from 1990 to 2000 contributed to increased phosphorous in the river.

Starker said his organization supports asking officials from nearby counties to limit impervious pavement for the developments that they approve. Officials should also push for better management for wastewater discharge, he said.

A high amount of phosphorous in a river can contribute to the death of fish and other aquatic life, according to American Rivers officials. Those phosphorous levels can also make the river unsafe for recreation, including swimming.

“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, the president of American Rivers, in a statement. “This river provides drinking water and recreation for hundreds of thousands of people.”

Two treatment plants on Reedy River, a tributary to the Saluda River, have phosphorus discharges and sewage effluent which is treated to a higher standard, according to American Rivers officials. The organization advocates for DHEC to take similar measures to limit phosphorus along the entire Saluda River.



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