

Local river named one of nation's most endangered

UPSTATE — Ten wastewater treatment plants are discharging unregulated amounts of phosphorous into the Saluda River, threatening the river's health and making it one of the country's most endangered river systems.

According to American Rivers, the nation's leading river conservation organization, clean water and quality of life will be increasingly at risk unless sewage pollution in the Saluda River is reduced.

This threat recently landed the Saluda in the number six spot in America's Most Endangered Rivers: 2009 edition.

"This shines the light on just how impaired our rivers have become," said Dianne Anastos, president of Save Our Saluda (SOS), an Upstate organization whose mission is

to protect and restore the Saluda watershed through environmental awareness and citizen

action.

"Ten treatment plant permits are up for renewal, so now is the time to rescue the Saluda River by implementing stricter regulations governing phosphorus and nutrient levels

See SALUDA on page 5A

Saluda

From page 1A

from wastewater treatment plants in the watershed."

The Saluda River supplies drinking water for more than 500,000 people and provides outstanding boating and fishing opportunities in a variety of urban and rural landscapes, contributing to the overall quality of life for area residents.

American Rivers contends the river and its clean water are threatened by excess quantities of phosphorous, found in human waste, 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 have 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 phospho-

rous 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."

John Tyrnan of Upstate Forever agrees. "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."

Earlier this month DHEC agreed to "look more closely" at setting numerical standards for phosphorus as a condition for renewing permits for wastewater treatment discharge.

The Saluda River originates in the mountains of the Upstate and flows 200 miles southeast before joining the Broad River to form the Congaree in the Midlands.

The upper half of the river runs through the Piedmont region and comprises 1,400 miles streams and 14,000 acres of lakes. It runs through seven counties and 18 towns located within the watershed.

Save Our Saluda will hold its spring river clean up Saturday (April 25) from 9 am to 1 pm. Volunteers will meet at the Wildcat Falls wayside on Hwy 11, four miles west of Cleveland. They are asked to bring gloves and wear clothing to protect from contact with poison ivy.

The group will clean up litter from the bridge at Hwy 11 and 276 down river for two miles and will also clean up a short section on the Middle Saluda River just west of the bridge crossing at Cleveland. Volunteers south of Greenville are encouraged to pick up litter at the Timmerman landing upstream from the Pelzer dam and the Lyman Street landing south of the Hwy #8 bridge in Pelzer.

A cook-out for SOS volunteers will be held after the clean-up.

For more information about the clean up and other SOS activities, call 836-3860.

Pickens County
Courier

4/22/09