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# Waterways under 'severe' threat

## Flood control, mining projects deemed risks

**Doyle Rice**  
USA TODAY

Environmental group American Rivers released its annual list of the USA's top 10 "most endangered" rivers Tuesday, and this year, the top "dishonor" goes to the Big Sunflower River, a tributary of the Mississippi River in the South.

The river is listed as most endangered, American Rivers said, because of the proposed U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Yazoo Pumps project that aims to curb flooding in Mississippi's delta region by draining thousands of acres of wetlands.

Calling it "one of the most environmentally damaging projects ever proposed by the Corps," American Rivers said the plan threatens the river and 200,000 acres of surrounding wetlands, home to more than 450 species of fish and wildlife.

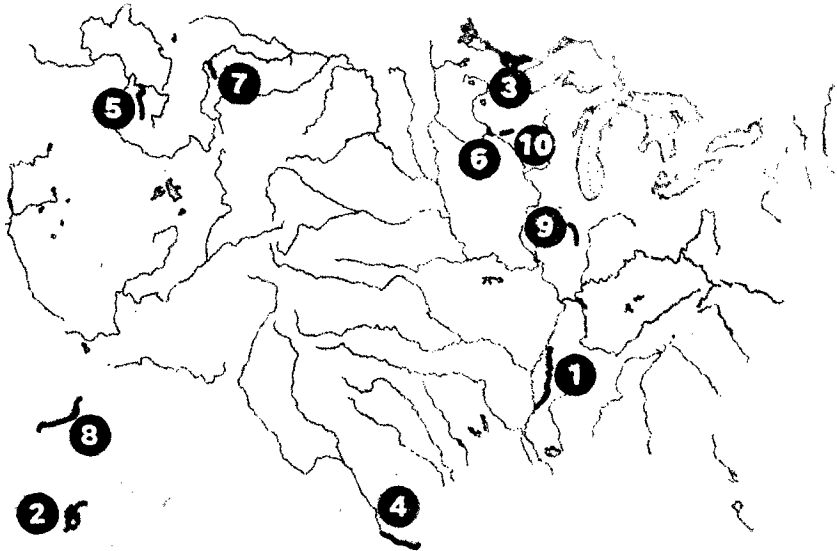
Sen. Thad Cochran, R-Miss., who retired this month, pushed the Yazoo Pumps project for years. Chris Gallegos, a Cochran spokesman, said the project would protect Mississippians in six counties and "save taxpayers in the long run."

"Flood control is costly, but it's not as expensive as floods and the damage they cause," he said.

American Rivers said the project would cost taxpayers \$300 million.

National Wildlife Federation CEO Collin O'Mara said, "The Yazoo Pumps are a boondoggle of the worst kind. Why would anyone want to spend hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to destroy an astonishing 200,000 acres of vital fish and

### America's most endangered rivers in 2018



- 1 Big Sunflower River, Miss.
- 2 Rivers of Bristol Bay, Alaska
- 3 Boundary Waters, Minn.
- 4 Lower Rio Grande, Texas
- 5 South Fork Salmon River, Idaho
- 6 Mississippi River Gorge, Minn.
- 7 Smith River, Mont.
- 8 Colville River, Alaska
- 9 Middle Fork Vermilion River, Ill.
- 10 Kinnickinnic River, Wis.

SOURCE American Rivers  
KARL GELLES/USA TODAY

wildlife habitat — just to benefit a few landowners? This project is pure folly that falls apart under the slightest scrutiny."

Other rivers are on the list because of proposed mining expansions, including the Nushagak and Kvichak Rivers of Bristol Bay, Alaska.

The Lower Rio Grande River in Texas, fourth on this year's list, is threatened by the construction of President Trump's border wall, which would cut

the Rio Grande off from its floodplain, potentially exacerbating flooding and erosion, according to American Rivers.

"In our many years of issuing the America's Most Endangered Rivers report, we've seldom seen a collection of threats this severe or an administration so bent on undermining and reversing protections for clean water, rivers and public health," said Bob Irvin, president of American Rivers.