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Lower Rio Grande Named one of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2018

Border Wall Would Destroy Habitat, Increase Flood Risk, Block River Access

Contacts:

Chris Williams, American Rivers, 202-347-7550

Scott Nichol, Sierra Club, 956-532-5983

Jen Pelz, Rio Grande Waterkeeper | WildEarth Guardians, 303-884-2702

www.AmericanRivers.org/RioGrande

Washington -- American Rivers today named the Lower Rio Grande among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2018, shining a national spotlight on the threat construction of an additional 30 or more miles of border wall poses to the health of the river and access for border communities.

“The America’s Most Endangered Rivers report is a call to action to save rivers that face a critical decision in the coming year,” said Chris Williams, Senior Vice President of Conservation at American Rivers. “The Rio Grande is so much more than a border. It is a life-giving source of water, a cultural crossroads, a pillar for local economies, a scenic treasure, and a unique freshwater ecosystem. Construction of a border wall, unhindered by any meaningful environmental review, disrupts and damages that ecosystem, impacting everything that depends on it.”

President Trump has proposed the construction of hundreds of miles of new border walls along the Rio Grande, and Congress has agreed to fund this first phase of construction. The first 30 miles of this new phase of wall building have already been mapped, and preparations are under way for construction in the Lower Rio Grande floodplain. Much of this new construction will be “levee-walls”—essentially a steel fence on top of a large levee—that will cut the Rio Grande off from its floodplain, potentially exacerbating flooding and erosion and blocking access to this life-giving resource for people and wildlife.

In the coming years, President Trump will likely push Congress to fund additional border wall construction. Trump has called the current \$1.57 billion appropriation a “down payment” on an eventual \$25 billion over ten years. American Rivers called on Congress to refuse to appropriate another penny for this damaging and wasteful project, thus preventing further harm to what little remains of Lower Rio Grande habitat.

“Having watched border walls go up along the Rio Grande and seen first-hand the damage that they inflict, the idea of more border walls fragmenting national wildlife refuges and disrupting the floodplain is horrifying,” said Scott Nichol, Borderlands Team Co-Chair with the Sierra Club. “Environmental laws have been brushed aside for existing border walls and will be ignored for future ones, setting up the Lower Rio Grande for environmental harm that would otherwise be a violation of the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act and other bedrock protections. It is crucial that this river, which is the lifeblood of so many communities and ecosystems, be protected from such destruction.”

“The Rio Grande is the heart and soul of the desert southwest,” said Jen Pelz, Rio Grande Waterkeeper and Wild Rivers Program Director at WildEarth Guardians. “Building a wall that divides its beauty, its communities, and its rich diversity will not only destroy and divide the region, but may be the last nail in the coffin of this imperiled icon and the life it supports.”

The ecologically rich Lower Rio Grande valley is one of the most diverse places in North America. Although threatened in the early part of the century due to development for cities and farms, vital habitat— in the Santa Ana and Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuges— is now protected to provide refuge for thousands of plants, 500 species of birds, 300 species of butterflies, and a broad array of wildlife, including the critically imperiled ocelot. Building a wall threatens these last refuges in the region.

New Rio Grande border walls will have multiple impacts: habitat corridors will be severed and endangered species will be pushed closer to extinction; natural inflows into the river will be disrupted; wetlands will be destroyed; floodwaters will be deflected, potentially moving the river channel; flooding in communities along the river will be worsened; and access to the river for residents and landowners will be disrupted.

“New walls would cost taxpayers billions, trigger a host of unintended consequences and cause irreversible harm,” said Williams. “It’s time to scrap the misguided push for additional border walls, and prioritize solutions that safeguard the river and the people and wildlife that depend on it.”

The annual *America’s Most Endangered Rivers®* report is a list of rivers at a crossroads, where key decisions in the coming months will determine the rivers’ fates. Over the years, the report has helped spur many successes including the removal of outdated dams, the protection of rivers with Wild and Scenic designations, and the prevention of harmful development and pollution.

Other rivers in the region listed as most endangered in past years include the Lower Colorado River (2017), Gila River (2014), and San Saba River (2013).

America’s Most Endangered Rivers® of 2018

- 1) Big Sunflower River, MS
Threat – Army Corps pumping project
At Risk – Critical wetlands and wildlife habitat
- 2) Rivers of Bristol Bay, AK
Threat – Mining
At risk – Clean water, salmon runs, indigenous culture
- 3) Boundary Waters, MN
Threat – Mining
At risk – Clean water, recreation economy
- 4) Lower Rio Grande, TX
Threat – Border wall
At risk – River access, public safety, wildlife habitat
- 5) South Fork Salmon River, ID

Threat – Mining
At risk – Clean water, salmon habitat

- 6) Mississippi River Gorge, MN
Threat – Dams
At risk – Habitat, recreation opportunities
- 7) Smith River, MT
Threat – Mining
At risk – Clean water, recreation
- 8) Colville River, AK
Threat – Oil and gas development
At risk – Clean water, wildlife
- 9) Middle Fork Vermilion River, IL
Threat – Coal ash pollution
At risk – Clean water, Wild and Scenic River values
- 10) Kinnickinnic River, WI
Threat – Dams
At risk – Blue-ribbon trout stream

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About American Rivers

American Rivers protects wild rivers, restores damaged rivers, and conserves clean water for people and nature. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected and restored more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and an annual America's Most Endangered Rivers® campaign. Headquartered in Washington, DC, American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 275,000 members, supporters, and volunteers.

Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Find your connections at AmericanRivers.org, [Facebook.com/AmericanRivers](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanRivers), and [Twitter.com/AmericanRivers](https://twitter.com/AmericanRivers).