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## Buffalo National River



BUFFALO RIVER, ARKANSAS

**State:** Arkansas

**Threat:** Pollution from massive hog operation

**At Risk:** Clean water

### Summary

The Buffalo National River is one of the longest undammed rivers west of the Mississippi and a beautiful destination for more than one million visitors each year. But the river's clean water, recreation opportunities and fish and wildlife are threatened by a nearby Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) generating waste equivalent to that of 30,000 people. The CAFO owners are refusing to comply with the law and continuing to store waste in manure ponds that are leaking into groundwater. Arkansas Governor Hutchinson must act now to close the facility down and save the Buffalo National River and its clean water for future generations.

### The River

Winding its way through the forested Ozark Mountains of northwest Arkansas, the 153-mile-long Buffalo National River flows through soaring bluffs, deep pools and gravel bars that lure millions of visitors annually from all over the world. People come to camp, paddle, hike and enjoy the river's sparkling waters, vistas and clean air. In 2017, more than 1.47 million people visited the Buffalo National River, generating \$62 million in revenue and employing over 900 people in tourism related activities (e.g., cabins and hotels, restaurants, kayak/canoe rental).

The upper reach, flowing from the headwaters through the Upper Buffalo Wilderness to the boundary of Ozark National Forest, is protected as a Wild and Scenic River. From the National Forest boundary to its confluence with the White River, the Buffalo is designated as the first National River in the U.S. and is managed as a unit of the National Park Service. The Park Service's mandate is to, "preserve, conserve and interpret a clear, clean, free-flowing river and its Ozark Mountain setting of deep valleys, towering bluffs, wilderness and pastoral landscapes."

The Buffalo River supports more than 300 species of fish and wildlife, including beaver, elk, black bear, smallmouth bass and catfish. The federally-endangered gray bat, Indiana bat and Northern long-eared bat are found in the karst cave networks surrounding the river.

### The Threat

CAFOs are one of the largest sources of pollution to streams and waterways across the U.S., according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). In 2012, a 6,500-head hog CAFO was permitted and constructed by C&H Hog Farms, Inc. without public debate or input. The hog CAFO, including massive indoor feedlots and two manure filled ponds, sits on a hill along one of Buffalo National River's main tributaries, Big Creek, less than six miles from the mainstem of the river.

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### For More Information

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### Take Action:

[www.AmericanRivers.org/Buffer2019](http://www.AmericanRivers.org/Buffer2019)

Each year, millions of gallons of liquid hog waste are sprayed onto pastures and fields, some of which lie in a floodplain. This manure spreading is particularly harmful where topsoil is thin and the underlying geology is a porous limestone (karst) that is prone to fissures, sinkholes and rapid transmission of groundwater into the water table. In fact, dye tracing studies around the hog CAFO have shown that water can travel under mountains across 13 miles of the watershed. Consequently, contaminants in the manure fields and ponds are having far reaching effects, including polluting groundwater wells and threatening endangered species. In the past three years, unprecedented algal blooms have stretched over 70 miles downstream of the CAFO. In 2018, Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality (ADEQ) identified Big Creek and sections of the Buffalo River as impaired due to high *E. coli* bacterial concentrations and low dissolved oxygen.

Following the listing of the Buffalo as one of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2017, the state denied the permit for the CAFO's operations and ordered it to shut down. Rather than comply, the owners have decided to fight the issue in court. Depositions taken during these legal proceedings revealed that C&H did not provide a geological assessment, draft an emergency response plan or follow other legal requirements for waste management. Due to incorrect carrying capacity estimates, nutrient levels on original spray fields far exceed levels required to avoid water contamination. Excessive phosphorus is of particular concern because it binds with soil and will continue to enter the waterway during rain events and leach underground for many years to come, increasing the urgency to end this operation now.

### What Must Be Done

In an unprecedented move, lawyers for corporate industrial agriculture interests are questioning the right of ADEQ to do its job. As the state's designated arm of the Environmental Protection Agency, ADEQ is the sole regulator of permits designed to protect the waters of the state. ADEQ has denied the new permit for this facility.

Arkansas Governor Asa Hutchinson faces pressure from agricultural lobbyists who want to frame this as a 'right to farm' issue. The American Farm Bureau is a key player in this legal fight, and they must be called to account for defending an operation that should never have been established in such a sensitive and invaluable place.

Governor Hutchinson needs to know that he will be supported by public opinion if he stands up for the river. Science, not greed, should be the deciding factor. With ample scientific evidence of harm, it is time to close this operation and let the healing of America's first national river begin. The governor must demand the closure of this facility now. The Buffalo National River flows in Arkansas, but it belongs to every citizen of our country. Continued support from a well informed and concerned citizenry will be necessary to stop this power grab by a corporation that clearly does not care about the health and well-being of this national treasure.



PHOTO: TERESA TURK

ALGAE CONTAMINATION