**Big Sunflower River named among America’s Most Endangered Rivers of 2020**

*Region needs flood protection solutions that prioritize safety, river health*

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Washington, D.C. – For the second time in three years, American Rivers named the Big Sunflower River among *America’s Most Endangered Rivers®*, citing the Trump administration’s effort to revive a project that could drain 200,000 acres of nationally significant wetlands. American Rivers and its partners called on Congress to defend the integrity of the Clean Water Act by upholding the 2008 EPA veto of the destructive Yazoo Pumps, and instead focus on advancing immediate, affordable, effective solutions that will reduce flood risk and provide economic security to South Delta residents and farmers.

“The Yazoo Pumps will not reduce flood risk for residents of the southern Delta,” said Olivia Dorothy of American Rivers. “Instead of reviving this extraordinarily expensive boondoggle, local leaders and Congress should invest in more affordable and effective flood risk reduction measures to protect communities in the South Delta.”

The Big Sunflower River is threatened by an effort to resurrect the destructive Yazoo Backwater Pumps — a project that would drain and damage as much as 200,000 acres of wetlands. After finding it was too environmentally damaging, George W. Bush’s administration stopped the project in 2008 by issuing a rare veto through the Clean Water Act. In their analysis of the project, the Bush Administration also found that the Corps did not consider numerous flood relief options that had the potential to be more effective and cheaper than the proposed Yazoo Pumps.

Despite this reality, the Trump Administration has made the unprecedented move to reconsider the 2008 veto in the wake of four consecutive years of climate change-fueled Mississippi River floods. In reality, very few homes and families would truly benefit from the 100% federally taxpayer-funded $440 million construction project that would cost $2 million a year to operate.

"The Corps found that under the best-case scenario, 68% of the backwater area that flooded in 2019 - 347,000 acres – would still be under water even with the Pumps in place,” said Louie Miller of the Mississippi Sierra Club. “This reinforces what the Corps made clear in 2007; the project is not designed to protect communities from flooding. Instead, 80% of project benefits would be for agriculture by draining tens of thousands of acres of wetlands to intensify farming. The Yazoo Pumps are a cruel hoax on the citizens of the Mississippi Delta, sold as a panacea for flooding when in fact it will only enrich a select few who will benefit from lucrative contracts from the estimated $440M in taxpayer funding."

“The Big Sunflower River supports some of the most important bird and wildlife habitat on the Lower Mississippi River,” said Andrew Whitehurst of Healthy Gulf. “The South Delta’s economy benefits from the leasing of private land to duck and deer hunters and from people using state and federal wildlife management areas like the Delta National Forest. The ducks and the annual revenue from hunting and outdoor activities are tied to the area’s wetlands – that can’t be overlooked.”

Federally funded programs are already available to provide relief and cost-effective protections for people’s lives, property and livelihoods. These programs include the Federal Emergency Management Agency’s National Flood Insurance and Flood Mitigation Assistance Grant Programs, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s post-disaster programs, and U.S. Department of Agriculture’s voluntary conservation programs.

“The COVID-19 pandemic is shining a grim light on the vulnerabilities of relying on flood control infrastructure, like the proposed Yazoo Pumps, that are resource intensive to operate and maintain. Floods don’t stop because people are sick and money is stretched thin,” said Dorothy. “It is critical that the public speak out to defend this ecologically significant place from destruction and demand local leaders work to make flood risk reduction options available to residents. It is also vitally important that the public demand that Congress defend the integrity of the Clean Water Act and its critical veto authority.”

In the heart of the Mississippi Delta, the Big Sunflower River begins in Coahoma County, Mississippi, and flows for 250 miles until it reaches the Yazoo River, a tributary of the Mississippi River. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Big Sunflower supports some of the nation’s “richest wetland and aquatic resources,” and is an important stop for migrating birds along the Mississippi River Flyway. Hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation fuel the state’s nature tourism industry, generating $8 billion per year according to the Outdoor Industry Association.

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 Mobile Bay Rivers (2017), Pascagoula River (2016) and Pearl River (2015).

**AMERICA’S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS® OF 2020**

**#1 Upper Mississippi River (**Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin)

**Threat:** Climate change, poor flood management

**#2 Lower Missouri River (**Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas)

**Threat:** Climate change, poor flood management

**#3 Big Sunflower River (**Mississippi)

**Threat:** Yazoo pumps project

**#4: Puyallup River (**Washington)

**Threat:** Electron Dam

**#5: South Fork Salmon River (**Idaho)

**Threat:** Gold mine

**#6: Menominee River (**Michigan, Wisconsin)

**Threat:** Open pit sulfide mining

**#7: Rapid Creek (**South Dakota)

**Threat:** Gold mining

**#8: Okefenokee Swamp (**Georgia, Florida)

**Threat:** Titanium mining

**#9: Ocklawaha River (**Florida)

**Threat:** Rodman Dam

**#10: Lower Youghiogheny River (**Pennsylvania)

**Threat:** Natural gas development

**River of the Year: Delaware River (**Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Maryland)

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