**Rapid Creek named among America’s Most Endangered Rivers of 2020**

*Mining threatens clean water, sacred sites*

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Washington, D.C. – American Rivers today named Rapid Creek in the Black Hills among *America’s Most Endangered Rivers®*. The report cites the threat that mining poses to clean water and sacred sites. American Rivers and its partners called on the U.S. Forest Service to complete thorough Environmental Impact Statements on proposed mining projects, including formal consultation with sixteen tribal nations.

“America’s Most Endangered Rivers is a call to action,” said Chris Williams, senior vice president for conservation at American Rivers. “Mining could devastate Rapid Creek’s clean water, fish and wildlife and sacred cultural sites. The Forest Service must seriously consider these risks and listen to the tribal nations who have cared for the Black Hills since time immemorial.”

Today, large-scale gold mining must be stopped from moving south into the Rapid Creek watershed, where it would threaten the Oceti Sakowin (The Great Sioux Nation) homelands, treaty territory and present-day reservation lands and rural and ranching communities.

Four companies are applying to explore for gold in the central Black Hills, at least two of which are in the Rapid Creek watershed— Mineral Mountain Resources and F3 Gold. Mineral Mountain Resources has mining claims on over 7,500 acres and is drilling on private land near Pe’ Sla, a major cultural site of the Lakota people. The site is so important that the Lakota and Dakota tribes purchased a portion of Pe’ Sla in order to protect it, without regard to the fact that it was land under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. F3 Gold has 2,485 mining claims and wants to explore above the inlet to Pactola Reservoir; its claims extend into the lake.

A mining spill (including cyanide, arsenic, or other heavy metals) could pollute Rapid Creek and its related aquifer. The area’s major population center, tourism and a large Air Force Base that rely on clean drinking water supplies, could suffer serious consequences. American Rivers and its partners called on the Forest Service to conduct thorough Environmental Impact Statements on the proposed mining projects, including formal consultation with sixteen tribal nations.

“Water is Life. Mining for gold poses a serious threat to our sacred water from Rapid Creek. Our drinking water, our environment, our land and the health of hundreds of people are at stake. Instead of polluting Rapid Creek, which connects to the Cheyenne River and the Missouri River, the longest river in America, we should be cleaning up our waters. We simply cannot allow greed and the quest for gold to endanger our water and our lives,” said A. Gay Kingman, Executive Director, Great Plains Tribal Chairman’s Association, Inc.

“Water is our first medicine and we need to recognize freshwater, such as Rapid Creek, as the living entity that she is. We must protect her like our life, and the lives of future generations, of all species, depend on it - because it does,” said Carla Rae Marshall, Lakota Grandmother Earth Advocate.

Gold mining has a difficult history in the Black Hills. After the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty had reserved the area to the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota peoples in perpetuity, non-indigenous people proceeded to enter the area to explore for gold. The Black Hills, known to the Lakota (Teton Sioux) as, “The Heart of Everything that Is,” have been sacred to Indigenous peoples since time immemorial. For over 150 years, the U.S. Government has tried to get legal title to the Black Hills. The Lakota have rejected the offer of a settlement. In the meantime, billions of dollars of gold were mined from the northern Black Hills, without compensation to the Great Sioux Nation. Mining operations have harmed the land, wildlife and water, and a former gold mine is now a Superfund site.

Rapid Creek (in Lakota it is called Mniluzuhan – Mni for “water” and Luzuhan for “fast) is approximately 86 miles long and originates in the ecologically rich Black Hills. It winds east into Pactola Reservoir, a recreation area and drinking water source, flows through Rapid City, the second largest city in South Dakota, and then joins the Cheyenne River, a tributary of the Missouri River. The creek’s watershed includes rural and tribal communities, Ellsworth Air Force Base and Box Elder (collective populations of 89,408) – which all rely on Rapid Creek water.

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 South Fork of the Salmon River (2018, 2019), Middle Fork Flathead River (2017), Smith River (2015, 2016, 2018), and the Clearwater and Lochsa rivers (2014).

**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)

Honored as a national success story for restoration and a model for equitable and innovative clean water solutions.

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