

Trinity River named among America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2024

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Today, American Rivers named the Trinity River, the largest tributary of the Klamath River, among America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2024. Excessive water withdrawals and rising water temperatures threaten the river, and the people and salmon who depend on it.

With the removal of the Klamath River dams, a watershed-wide restoration effort has begun. The Trinity River—the main source of cold, clean water for the Lower Klamath River where over 65,000 adult salmon died in 2002—is critical to this effort.

“Rivers cannot be harvested for their parts and remain healthy, just like we can’t divert excessive volumes of blood from our body without experiencing systemic failure. We need to stop thinking of the Trinity as a piped tributary to the Sacramento River and recognize that its natural value to the Klamath far exceeds any single Central Valley user’s benefit,” said Ann Willis, California Regional Director, American Rivers.

The Trinity River is diverted into the Sacramento River for the Central Valley Water Project. Outdated water management has led to reservoir depletion, rising river temperatures, and other environmental impacts that put threatened coho salmon and Chinook salmon at risk. The Hoopa, Yurok and other Tribes are also dealing with some of the lowest salmon returns in history and toxic algae outbreaks, which impacts cultural use, food security, wellness, and livelihoods.

American Rivers and its partners called on the California State Water Board and the Department of the Interior to prioritize the health of the Trinity River in the Sites Reservoir and Delta Tunnel water right orders, Bay-Delta Planning phase 2, and the Central Valley Project Reinitiation of Consultation.

"Local people, especially the Hoopa and Yurok Tribal members, have been fighting for water to be released from the Trinity reservoirs for the Trinity and Klamath rivers for salmon generations," explained Regina Chichizola from Save California Salmon. "These fights led to real solutions like the Lower Klamath long term plan, which stopped large scale Klamath River fish kills, and Record of the Decision of the Trinity River, which restored some flows, but we still have no protections for our reservoir storage, or from new diversions on the Central Valley side or voluntary agreements. We need the Trinity River water to stay in the Trinity River if we are to restore the Klamath salmon and live up to the agreements to the Tribes."

The Trinity River of northwestern California is the largest tributary of the Klamath River. The river begins in the Trinity Alps and Scott Mountains, then flows 165 miles through the Klamath Mountains and Coast Ranges, until it finally meets the Klamath River where the Hoopa and Yurok Reservations intersect.

The Trinity River is the lifeblood of the Hoopa Tribe, the Yurok Tribe and Nor Rel Muk Wintu Nation. The Hoopa and Yurok tribes maintain fishing rights and rely on the river for their drinking water, ceremonies and their main food source—salmon. The Trinity is a designated Wild and Scenic River and known for its recreational opportunities, including fishing and whitewater rafting. The river is a source of clean, cold water for salmon and downstream communities, and the Trinity's cold water is used regularly to prevent repeat of the massive 2002 fish kill on the lower Klamath River. The river also produces hydroelectricity at four locations before it is diverted into the Sacramento River for agricultural purposes. Coastal commercial fishermen also rely on Trinity River salmon as the Klamath Basin's largest salmon spawning tributary.

"For the Hoopa Valley people, the river is a lifeline for us. We eat out of the river. Some people go to the store, we go to the river. It used to be one of the best fishing rivers in the West Coast," explained Hoopa Valley Tribal member and Klamath Justice Coalition organizer, Dania Rose Colegrove. "At some point we are going to have to cut off the diversion from Lewiston. This water is being used in the Central Valley for luxury food. It does not benefit us." 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 recent years include the Eel River (2023), McCloud River (2021), Bear River (2017) and San Joaquin River (2016) where dams and excessive diversions are

most often the greatest threat to clean water. American Rivers reviews nominations for America's Most Endangered Rivers® from local groups and individuals across the country, and selects rivers based on three criteria:

- 1) The river's significance to people and wildlife
- 2) The magnitude of the threat to the river and communities, especially in light of climate change and environmental injustice
- 3) A decision in the next 12 months that the public can influence

America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2024

#1: Rivers of New Mexico Threat: Loss of federal clean water protections

#2: Big Sunflower and Yazoo Rivers (MS) Threat: Yazoo Pumps project threatens wetlands

#3: Duck River (TN) Threat: Excessive water use

#4: Santa Cruz River (AZ, Mexico) Threat: Water scarcity, climate change

#5 Little Pee Dee River (NC, SC) Threat: Harmful development, highway construction

#6 Farmington River (CT, MA) Threat: Hydro dam

#7: Trinity River (CA) Threat: Outdated water management

#8: Kobuk River (AK) Threat: Road construction, mining

#9 Tijuana River (CA, Mexico) Threat: Pollution

#10: Blackwater River (WV) Threat: Highway development

About American Rivers

American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways. Healthy rivers provide people and nature with clean, abundant water and natural habitat. For 50 years, American Rivers staff, supporters, and partners have shared a common belief: Life Depends on RiversSM.

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