FROM THE PRESIDENT

Heed the Call to Action

In the spring issue of American Rivers, I wrote in this space about the extraordinary opportunity that communities will have with the help of the American Heritage Rivers Initiative (AHRI) to restore their hometown rivers.

As you know, the American Heritage Rivers Initiative is a new community-based effort that will direct resources, information and expertise of federal agencies towards cities and towns for river restoration. It is the first approach of its kind to recognize that not only are healthy rivers important to fish and wildlife, they are at the heart of the economic health and well-being of our communities.

While rivers have historically played an important role in our industrial economic development — as, for example, sources of power, industrial and municipal sewers for waste removal, and "highways" for commerce and navigation — we are only now recognizing the substantial economic benefits that healthy, clean rivers provide to people and communities.

The 25-year-old Clean Water Act has been the linchpin. Rivers everywhere are cleaner, and fish and wildlife are returning. As a result, many areas are rediscovering that, rather than being eyesores and barriers, their hometown rivers are boons to their communities: they are community gathering places that improve quality of life and offer a wide variety of close-to-home recreation and choices. In the process, they bring needed dollars to local economies by attracting businesses and jobs, economic development opportunities, and local and national fishing and boating events.

As you will learn in our article on AHRI (page 3), cities from Hartford, Connecticut, to Portland, Oregon, are now reaping the rewards from their river revitalization efforts.

The fact that healthy natural resources provide long-term economic value is the basis of AHRI. This new initiative will give communities the tools to harness the economic potential of restored hometown rivers.

But now, just as the initiative is beginning to take shape, anti-environmental extremists have launched an assault against AHRI. Quite honestly, we're not sure why. No effort on this scale in recent memory has been such a win-win proposition for communities and rivers alike.

Whatever the reason, AHRI has become the most recent poster child of the anti-environmentalists who

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American Rivers

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American Rivers, founded in 1973, is North America's leading river-saving organization. Our mission is to protect and restore America's river systems and to foster a river stewardship ethic. *American Rivers* is published quarterly to inform and educate members, friends, and the general public about river conservation issues.

There are many ways to support American Rivers' conservation efforts. Membership begins at $20 for individuals ($15 for students and senior citizens) and includes a year of American Rivers' newsletter. Additional contributions —including stocks, property, and bequests—are gratefully accepted. Contributions are tax-deductible to the extent provided by law, with the exception of $3.00, which is allocated to the American Rivers newsletter.

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American Rivers Fights Attack on American Heritage Rivers Initiative

The American Heritage Rivers Initiative (AHRI) is generating a great deal of excitement all over the country. During its annual meeting in San Francisco in June, the U.S. Conference of Mayors unanimously approved a resolution supporting AHRI, stating that the objective of this initiative is to "enhance our citizens' enjoyment of the historic, cultural, recreational, economic and environmental value of our rivers and to protect the health of our communities."

Denver Mayor Wellington Webb introduced the resolution as an example of the benefits to be gained through local river restoration projects. He said, "Our efforts to clean up the South Platte River have given businesses and residents a clean-flowing river surrounded by parkland and open space that will ensure that Denver stays economically competitive and able to provide high-quality basic services to its residents for decades to come."

In addition, over the last several months, we have heard from state and local elected officials as well as many community and business leaders and grassroots river activists — all clamoring to find out how the initiative will work and how to tap into the resources it will offer. And the requests for information keep pouring in.

Anti-Environmental Attack

In recent weeks, however, anti-environmental extremists have launched a disinformation campaign to stop AHRI. These anti-environmentalists, part of a group known as the so-called "wise use movement," have been bombarding the White House, members of Congress, and the media with inaccurate, distorted information about AHRI through a highly orchestrated fax campaign.

In addition, Rep. Helen Chenoweth (R-ID) has introduced a bill in the House of Representatives, H.R. 1842, that would terminate further development and implementation of AHRI.

In the meantime, on July 15, the House Resources Committee held an oversight hearing on the initiative.

Growing Community Support

Despite this assault, nationwide support in cities and towns all over the country continues to grow.

Why are communities so enthusiastic about AHRI? Because AHRI is the first-ever community-based initiative to recognize that protecting our rivers not only protects the valuable natural resources of healthy river ecosystems, but also helps rebuild the economic base of the communities that have grown up beside these rivers. And after years of working to revitalize hometown rivers, for the most part on their own, communities understand the value of an initiative that will recognize and support their local efforts. Look at what a few communities have been able to accomplish.

- Hartford, Connecticut has turned its stretch of the Connecticut River into an economically important recreation destination point. Once separated from the city by an interstate highway and flood control wall, the river is now easily accessible through its riverfront parks, riverwalks, picnic areas, and boat launches. Today, the city attracts many national and regional river-based events, such as the Bassmaster Top 100 Tournament and the U.S. Rowing Association convention, which have brought $13.5 million to the local economy since 1990.
- Once seriously neglected, the South Platte River in Denver today is key to the area's economic re-

ACTION ALERT: What You Can Do

Let Congress and the White House Know that You Support the American Heritage Rivers Initiative!

- Write or call your local member in the House of Representatives and both of your senators and voice your support for the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. If you wish, use one of the form letters in this newsletter (inserted between pages 8 and 9).

- Contact the White House and let the President know that you support the American Heritage Rivers Initiative. Send comments to: Ms. Kathleen A. McGinty, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality, Old Executive Office Building, Room 360, Washington, DC 20501, Phone: (202) 395-7417; Fax: (202) 456-6546; or E-mail: AHRivers@epamail.epa.gov.

- Alert your mayor and members of your local river conservation organizations so that they can take advantage of the benefits AHRI has to offer. Urge them to contact Congress and the White House in support of AHRI.

To find contact information for your members of Congress, visit the American Rivers web site at www.amrivers.org and see the "Contact Your Members of Congress" in our new River Policy Update section, or call the U.S. Capital switchboard at (202) 224-3121. For updates on AHRI, visit the American Rivers home page: www.amrivers.org