

- * Mine spoils -- vast heaps of crushed rock that remain from mining operations -- can contaminate river water for decades, centuries, or even millennia.
- * Rivers choke on polluted run-off -- farm and lawn chemicals, road salts and oils, feedlot and solid wastes -- from land use practices in both our rural areas and our cities.

How can Americans allow such destruction on the rivers that have given our country so much? For in the story of America, there's a river on every page.

I always advise travelers in search of the authentic America to seek out the little river that runs under the bridge at Concord. To pay respects to the Suwannee, the Shenandoah, the Appomattox. To walk in the grass beside the Little Bighorn and think about what happened there. To spend an afternoon waist-deep in the Henrys Fork with a fly rod in hand, in the fall when the trumpeter swans fly low over the river. Or to walk down the banks of the Missouri, which used to change its course so often that farmers along it complained they never knew whether their crop was going to be corn or catfish.

Some of us, like Thoreau more than 150 years ago, still imagine rivers as our national bloodstream. Our hearts beat faster when we see a river ... we can feel our breath catch at the sight of one "meandering forever."

We're the ones who like to spend our time beside, or on, or in rivers. We know we could not survive without the chance to visit a river now and then.

So we're members of American Rivers.

As the nation's leading river conservation organization, American Rivers protects wild rivers and restores urban ones. We conserve endangered species and scarce western water. We stop construction of unnecessary dams and improve operations of existing ones.

We're building a grassroots network of citizens who will stand up for rivers. Our annual Most Endangered Rivers Report opens Americans' eyes to the plight of our rivers. American Rivers assisted in the passage of the Grand Canyon Protection Act, which protects the Colorado River through the Grand Canyon from unnatural flows caused by the Glen Canyon Dam. And more recently, we have participated in experimental water releases that mimic natural floods and restore wildlife habitat within the Grand Canyon.

On the Columbia River (where salmon runs have decreased to 1-2% of their historical numbers), we're working hard to protect and restore salmon habitat. And other recent successful efforts include our Urban Rivers Symposium and co-sponsorship of National River Clean-Up Week.

Today American Rivers urgently needs your help! 90% of our nation's waterways have been altered by humankind and almost 1/3 of North American freshwater fish are at risk!

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