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Monongahela River among America's Most Endangered Rivers

Natural gas extraction threatens clean drinking water

Washington— The drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people is at risk from toxic pollution created by natural gas extraction in the Monongahela River Basin. This threat landed the Monongahela in the number nine spot in *America's Most Endangered Rivers: 2010 edition*, produced by American Rivers.

“We must put the brakes on the rampant gas drilling that is already threatening the safety of drinking water for hundreds of thousands of people,” said Rebecca Wodder, president of American Rivers. “We simply can’t let energy companies rake in the profits while putting our precious clean water at risk.”

American Rivers and its partners called on the federal government and the states of West Virginia and Pennsylvania to act now to prevent further pollution associated with Marcellus Shale natural gas exploration and protect the already highly-vulnerable water quality of the Monongahela River Basin.

“Residents, landscapes, and waterways of the Monongahela River Basin and nearby areas are already suffering community disintegration and environmental destruction at the hands of longwall coal mining and other under-regulated fossil fuel industry practices. The futures of these regions may be grimmer still if our legislators and government agencies don’t take immediate action to implement better environmental protections for Marcellus Shale development,” said Emily Bloom with the Center for Coalfield Justice.

“The scale of this gas drilling boom has caught regulators by surprise, and the environmental problems associated with it are affecting millions of people. State and federal governments must move quickly to put regulatory safeguards in place that protect our resources for the benefit of all,” said Shanda Minney with the West Virginia Rivers Coalition.

“Just as mountaintop removal coal mining is rightfully known as '*strip mining on steroids*', horizontal drilling and hydrofracing deep in the Marcellus Shale is surely '*gas drilling on steroids*'. Enforceable standards are needed to control fresh water withdrawals, the use and disposal of chemically laced frac and flowback water, and

the treatment and disposal of the brine and naturally occurring radioactive material in the produced water,” said Cindy Rank with the West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

The Mon Basin is located within the region of the Marcellus Shale, a geological formation that lies between 5,000 and 8,000 feet below the earth’s surface. Energy companies have already begun to extract the natural gas in the shale through a process known as hydraulic fracturing. In this process, millions of gallons of water, often taken from streams, lakes, and rivers, are mixed with chemicals and injected deep into the shale to release the gas. Furthermore, diminished flows caused by excessive water withdrawals can impair wildlife, recreation, and decrease a water body’s ability to dilute and assimilate pollutants from wastewater discharges.

The potential for disastrous cumulative impacts from industries in this region was exemplified in September 2009 when Dunkard Creek suffered a historic, massive kill of fish, mussels, and other organisms. This calamity was caused by a toxic golden algae bloom that was able to flourish in large part due to the composition and high concentration of total dissolved solids in the creek, mainly originating from a mine pool discharge and possibly coalbed methane gas wastewater. Dunkard Creek is a tributary of the Monongahela River, which hundreds of thousands of people depend upon for drinking water.

Running north from West Virginia’s Monongahela National Forest, the Monongahela River is home to thirteen proposed Wild and Scenic River segments, a diverse array of fish and wildlife, and some of the best fishing and whitewater boating in the eastern United States.

About America’s Most Endangered Rivers

Each year, American Rivers reviews nominations for the *America’s Most Endangered Rivers*[™] report from river groups and concerned citizens across the country. Rivers are selected based upon the following criteria:

- A major decision (that the public can help influence) in the coming year on the proposed action
- The significance of the threat to human and natural communities
- The degree to which the proposed action would exacerbate or alleviate stresses caused by climate change

The report is a call to action and emphasizes solutions for the rivers and their communities. By shining the spotlight on key decisions that will impact the rivers, and by providing clear actions the public can take on their behalf, the report is a powerful tool for saving these important rivers.

Interviews

American Rivers Senior Vice President for Conservation Andrew Fahlund is available for interviews, both pre and post embargo. Please contact Amy Kober, 206-898-3864 for booking.

Reporters wishing to direct readers to the report online may use the following link:
www.AmericanRivers.org/EndangeredRivers

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