



Most Endangered Rivers

Upper Mississippi Joins Middle Fork on List

By Kim Knowles

For the second year in a row, one of Illinois' rivers is being designated "Most Endangered." This year, the Upper Mississippi, specifically the stretch from Burlington, Iowa to Grafton, Illinois, is receiving this annually bestowed "honor" due to a particularly troubling conflict that is placing the health of the river and the safety of certain communities at great risk.

Unlawful Levee Heights

The conflict concerns illegal activity by a number of agricultural and levee districts that have acted outside the law by raising the heights of their levees without the required governmental approvals. Government oversight and permitting is particularly important in these cases because raising levees often increases the risk that other communities will be flooded. Raising levees can also destroy important floodplain habitats.

In the

Upper Mississippi River, 80 miles of levees between Muscatine, Iowa, and Hamburg, Illinois have been illegally raised, perpetuating a century of habitat degradation and putting less fortunate communities that cannot afford to build up their levees at a grave disadvantage.

The threats posed by these unlawful changes are real and will likely intensify as climate change brings more intense storms and flooding. For instance, during the most extreme flood events, communities around Hannibal, Missouri are projected to experience an additional foot or more of floodwaters due to the unlawful actions of neighboring levee districts.

Most Endangered River Status

Each year grassroots river groups team up with American Rivers to use the Most Endangered Rivers status to help save local rivers through political action and policy advocacy. Most Endangered River status is granted by the nonprofit American Rivers to ten rivers based on the magnitude of the threat, the significance of the river, and the likelihood of achieving change. Advocates can use the

Most Endangered report to
engage the public to
take action
and

to convince decision makers to do the right thing for rivers and for the people and wildlife they support.

The Upper Mississippi River is an important part of our cultural, economic, and natural heritage. It has served as the life force of many cultures throughout this nation's history and as inspiration for a rich collection of American music, art, and literature. The Mississippi is also a globally significant flyway used by hundreds of species of birds and provides unique habitat for fish and other wildlife. This significant ecosystem supports commercial and recreational industries, which contribute \$24.6 billion to the region's economy and an estimated 421,000 jobs.

Your Donations Make a Difference

With financial support from our members, Prairie Rivers Network intends to use the Most Endangered Rivers report to spur state and federal agencies to take corrective action to stop levee districts from illegally increasing levee heights. These agencies must work with communities to develop a plan that balances the needs of all affected communities to effectively manage flood risk and deliver the flood and habitat protection we need for healthy communities, ecosystems, and the Upper Mississippi River. //

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