

## **Menominee River named among America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2020**

*Mining threatens cities' water supplies and Menominee Tribe sacred sites*

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Washington, D.C. – For the second time in four years, American Rivers named the Menominee River among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*®, citing the threat of a proposed metallic sulfide mine to drinking water supplies and sacred tribal sites. American Rivers and its partners called on Michigan's Environment, Great Lakes and Energy (MEGLE) agency to deny the permit for this mining project and protect local communities and the cultural significance of the Menominee River.

“America's Most Endangered Rivers is a call to action. This mine poses an unacceptable risk to the Menominee River and Lake Michigan,” said Shanyn Viars with American Rivers. “We cannot allow mine tailings to demolish Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin's sacred sites or send toxic waste into drinking water supplies, potentially risking millions of people.”

A Canadian exploration company, Aquila Resources, Inc., seeks permits for a metallic sulfide mine on the banks of the Menominee River, near Stephenson, Michigan. Known as the Back Forty project, the proposed mine and tailings dam would encompass 1,087 acres — the size of 1,435 football fields. If toxic acid mine drainage spilled out of the Back Forty tailings dam, it would send heavy metals linked to cancer, respiratory failure, and diseases of the nervous system, brain, heart, lungs, liver and kidneys into ancient tribal ceremonial sites, the Menominee River and ultimately Lake Michigan. Currently, it is unclear if a contingency plan has been defined by MEGLE.

The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, the Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River, Inc., along with communities and other organizations in Wisconsin and Michigan, are fighting for their right to a clean river, joined in opposition to the

exploration company, Aquila Resources, Inc. American Rivers also called on Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers and Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer to oppose this harmful project.

“After many years of metallic sulfide mining, with every mine proven to have polluted nearby water and contaminated the environment, we should recognize these ingredients as a recipe for disaster,” said Dale Burie, President, Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River, Inc.

“The potential for a catastrophic failure of Aquila’s proposed tailings dam threatens the Menominee River, the largest watershed in the Upper Peninsula, downstream Lake Michigan and decades of clean water efforts. In addition, the sacred sites of Native Americans should be ‘no-go-areas’, protected from destructive mining projects,” said Al Gedicks, Executive Secretary, Wisconsin Resources Protection Council.

“The risks to our waters are too high for this project to go forward. It's not a matter of if pollution will occur, it is a question of when it will occur. Long-term protection of drinking water, cultural resources, fisheries, and economies are far more important than this short-term project,” said Allison Werner, Policy and Advocacy Director, River Alliance of Wisconsin.

A world-class smallmouth bass fishery, the Menominee River supplies drinking water for 24,000 people in Marinette, Wisconsin, and Menominee, Michigan. Winding through sacred tribal lands, the river is especially meaningful to the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, whose 10,000 years of history, culture and heritage began where the river spills into Lake Michigan. Today, the tribe plays an active role in land management and river stewardship.

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 past years include the Boundary Waters (2018), Mississippi River (2020, 2019), Kinnickinic River (2018), and the St. Louis River (2016).

## **AMERICA’S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS® OF 2020**

**#1 Upper Mississippi River** (Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Minnesota, Wisconsin)

**Threat:** Climate change, poor flood management

**#2 Lower Missouri River** (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas)

**Threat:** Climate change, poor flood management

**#3 Big Sunflower River (Mississippi)**

**Threat:** Yazoo pumps project

**#4: Puyallup River (Washington)**

**Threat:** Electron Dam

**#5: South Fork Salmon River (Idaho)**

**Threat:** Gold mine

**#6: Menominee River (Michigan, Wisconsin)**

**Threat:** Open pit sulfide mining

**#7: Rapid Creek (South Dakota)**

**Threat:** Gold mining

**#8: Okefenokee Swamp (Georgia, Florida)**

**Threat:** Titanium mining

**#9: Ocklawaha River (Florida)**

**Threat:** Rodman Dam

**#10: Lower Youghiogeny River (Pennsylvania)**

**Threat:** Natural gas development

**River of the Year: Delaware River (Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, Maryland)**

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## **ABOUT AMERICAN RIVERS**

American Rivers believes every community in our country should have clean water and a healthy river. Since 1973, we have been protecting wild rivers, restoring damaged rivers and conserving clean water for people and nature. With headquarters in Washington, D.C., and offices across the country, we are the most effective river conservation organization in the United States, delivering solutions that will last for generations to come. Find your connections at [AmericanRivers.org](http://AmericanRivers.org).