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PRESS RELEASE

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Clearwater and Lochsa named to America's Most Endangered Rivers list

The Clearwater and Lochsa rivers of northern Idaho were named among the United States' most endangered rivers today, shining a national spotlight on the threat industrialization poses to these rivers' unique Wild and Scenic character.

The annual list of America's Most Endangered Rivers was released by the national conservation group American Rivers. It's a call to action to save rivers that are at critical tipping points.

"We've been fighting in court to protect these rivers from industrialization, but we've also been working channels of diplomacy with the Forest Service to encourage the agency to do more," said IRU Conservation Director Kevin Lewis. "We'd rather our rivers didn't make this list, but the threat is real, and we're hopeful that this national spotlight helps raise awareness."

The Middle Fork of the Clearwater and Lochsa rivers are threatened by the shipment of massive megaloads, mining equipment typically bound for the tar sands of Alberta, Canada. Since 2008, some of the world's largest corporations have been attempting to convert the Wild and Scenic Clearwater and Lochsa river canyon into a high-and-wide trucking route for this equipment.

Megaloads are hauled up rural Highway 12 along the rivers on truck beds and can be as large as 30 feet tall, 30 feet wide, 350 feet long and weigh nearly a million pounds. During the day, megaloads are parked in turnouts along these two Wild and Scenic rivers, creating a visual blight in an otherwise pristine area and blocking access to river recreation. At night, transport of megaloads creates a massive rolling roadblock that interferes with normal highway traffic, presents numerous safety hazards and degrades visitor experiences.

"Wild and Scenic protections were established by Congress to prevent this type of activity in America's revered river corridors," Lewis said. "If allowed to continue, this sets a dangerous precedent for Wild and Scenic rivers across the nation."

In February 2013 Idaho Rivers United won a court decision clarifying that the U.S. Forest Service has the authority to regulate megaloads in the Wild and Scenic canyon. In

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September 2013 IRU and the Nez Perce Tribe won an injunction blocking megaloads temporarily from the canyon while the Forest Service further studies the issue. The Forest Service has yet, however, to ban megaload shipments from these Wild and Scenic gems.

Flowing for roughly 100 miles through the Clearwater National Forest, the Middle Fork Clearwater and Lochsa rivers traverse the homeland of the Nez Perce people. In 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition crossed Lolo Pass and followed the Lochsa and Clearwater to the Columbia and on to the Pacific Ocean. These rivers are cherished by anglers and paddlers for their thriving cold-water fisheries, thrilling whitewater and spectacular scenery.

“Our customers come from across the country and around the world to experience the natural vitality and tranquility of the Clearwater and Lochsa river canyons,” said Peter Grubb, owner of Idaho-based ROW Adventures, an internationally-renowned adventure travel outfitter, and the Riverdance Lodge, a resort located along the Clearwater River Wild and Scenic corridor. “Megaloads pose a huge threat to the Wild and Scenic character of this magnificent place, and to my guests’ experiences and my business. People don’t travel here to see spaceship-size equipment parked by the river, or lumbering along the rural roadway. They travel here to experience Wild and Scenic rivers.”

Scott Bosse, Northern Rockies Director for American Rivers, said the America’s Most Endangered Rivers report is an important call to action for threatened rivers.

“If the Forest Service allows the shipment of megaloads along the Middle Fork Clearwater and Lochsa rivers, it will severely undermine the rivers’ scenic and recreational values and diminish the protections afforded by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act nationwide.”

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