

Rio Grande is fifth on endangered list

'It's all about learning to use the river more wisely,' group says

04/10/2003

Associated Press

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. - The Rio Grande was named Thursday as one of the nation's most endangered rivers by American Rivers, a national conservation group.

The nearly 2,000-mile-long waterway, which cuts through the middle of New Mexico on its way from Colorado to the Gulf of Mexico, was listed as the fifth-most endangered river in the nation. It was the fourth time the river made the list since 1995.

American Rivers said it singled out the Rio Grande because of the prospect of Albuquerque and Brownsville taking water from it and the determination of federal dam operators to deliver irrigation water despite drying up stretches of the river each year.

"It's all about learning to use the river more wisely, not just for animals but for humans, too. ... It has to be sustainable," said Serena McClain of American Rivers' headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Municipal and agricultural uses already claim nearly 95 percent of the Rio Grande's average annual flow, and parts of the river have run dry in four of the last five years.

"For two summers in a row, the Rio Grande has failed to reach the sea," Rebecca R. Wodder, president of American Rivers, said in remarks prepared for a news conference in Washington. "If the cities succeed in securing more river water and federal agencies stick with status quo irrigation deliveries, the Rio Grande may have seen the last of the Gulf of Mexico."

Steve Harris, director of Albuquerque-based Rio Grande Restoration, said less than a tenth of the water from the Rio Grande's upper watersheds survives below El Paso.

"And that's the good news. The bad news is that we're busily developing the last 10 percent," he said.

The endangered-rivers list also includes the Trinity, which runs through the Dallas-Fort Worth area; the Big Sunflower in Mississippi; the Klamath in California and Oregon; the Ipswich in Massachusetts; the Gunnison in Colorado; the Mattaponi in Virginia; the Platte in Wyoming, Colorado and Nebraska; the Snake in Idaho, Washington and Oregon; and the Tallapoosa in Alabama and Georgia.

Online at: <http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dallas/tsw/stories/041003dntextswfiller.c481.html>