

Group puts Trinity on endangered-rivers list

Road, flood-control plans cited; project official rejects concerns

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By RANDY LEE LOFTIS / The Dallas Morning News

Dallas' plans for the Trinity River make the beleaguered stream one of the country's 10 most endangered rivers, a national conservation group says.

American Rivers, based in Washington, D.C., put the Trinity at No. 10 on its annual list of endangered rivers because of plans to put a roadway along the river for nine miles and to make flood-control changes south of downtown. The list, which highlights rivers that the group says face immediate threats risk from pollution, dam-building or risks, is to be released Thursday.

"The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the city of Dallas are preparing to transform a surprisingly pristine portion of the Trinity River into a giant storm drain," said American Rivers president Rebecca R. Wodder. "Unless the public can persuade them to revise their vision for the city's riverfront, Dallas residents will lose a remarkable urban oasis."

Rebecca Dugger, director of the city's Trinity River Corridor Project, said that's not true. The plan balances flood-control and transportation needs with environmental concerns, she said.

"There's a lot of misconception," said Ms. Dugger. "We're not putting a giant culvert in."

Under a plan that the City Council adopted in 1997, the Trinity's bottomland along downtown Dallas would become a park, while a high-speed tollway would be built between the levees. Two new levees in South Dallas would be accompanied by the removal of thousands of trees and other vegetation.

Since the initial approval, planners have proposed trimming the eight-lane tollway down to six lanes from State Highway 183 to downtown, and to four toll-free lanes south from downtown to U.S. Highway 175. The City Council has not adopted those changes.

A federal judge has stopped construction and ordered more environmental studies at the request of Dallas environmental groups that oppose the plan. Those groups nominated the Trinity for the most-endangered list.

Dallas Historic Tree Coalition president Bill Seaman said the loss of trees along the Dallas Floodway Extension south of downtown is unacceptable. Floodway planners "should not ignore alternatives that would spare 34,000 air-filtering, mature trees," he said.

Ms. Dugger said the loss of existing trees is only half the story. The plan would create wetlands to help with flood control, plant many new trees and buy thousands of acres elsewhere for conservation to mitigate the project's impact, she said.

"There is a balance," she said.

The endangered-rivers list also includes the Big Sunflower in Mississippi; the Klamath in California and Oregon; the Ipswich in Massachusetts; the Gunnison in Colorado; the Rio Grande in Colorado, New Mexico and Texas; 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.

Staff writer Victoria Loe Hicks contributed to this report.

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