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Black Warrior River Among America's Most Endangered Rivers

Coal Mine Poses Direct Threat to Birmingham Drinking Water Source

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Washington, D.C.- American Rivers named Alabama's Black Warrior River among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2013 today, shining a national spotlight on a proposed coal mine that would threaten clean drinking water as well as river health, wildlife, and private property.

"The *America's Most Endangered Rivers* report is a call to action to save rivers that are facing a critical tipping point," said Rebecca Haynes of American Rivers. "We all need healthy rivers. They provide our drinking water, support the economies of our communities, and promote public health and quality of life. We hope citizens will take action to ensure a healthy Black Warrior River for generations to come."

The Black Warrior River is threatened by a proposed strip coal mine at Shepherd Bend on the Black Warrior River's Mulberry Fork in Walker County. The 1,773-acre Shepherd Bend Mine would discharge wastewater at 29 points, including one that is 800 feet across the river from a Birmingham Water Works Board drinking water intake facility for 200,000 people. Mine discharges would introduce toxic pollutants and sediment into the drinking water source, elevating health risks and increasing water treatment costs for families and businesses in the greater Birmingham area.

American Rivers and its partners called on the University of Alabama (UA) System Trustees to prevent the lease or sale of UA's land and mineral rights to Shepherd Bend, LLC. That company is run by Garry Neil Drummond, a Trustee Emeritus of the UA System. A large and growing coalition of businesses, organizations, students, scientists, drinking water consumers, and other concerned citizens are urging the UA Trustees to take a strong stance against the mine, helping ensure that this valuable water source is protected for future generations.

“Shepherd Bend Mine is a major threat to the river, Birmingham-area drinking water, and the University of Alabama System’s reputation,” said Charles Scribner, Executive Director of Black Warrior Riverkeeper. “Under the national spotlight, UA leaders should pledge to oppose any current or future mining proposal at this uniquely inappropriate location.”

“Students throughout the UA System and the state of Alabama oppose the construction of the Shepherd Bend Mine,” said Caitlin McClusky, statewide co-coordinator for the Coalition of Alabama Students for the Environment. “We believe the UA System has a responsibility to prioritize the protection of the public health of Alabama citizens over short-term profit.”

“Like many of the families in Cordova, my dad raised four boys on a coal miner’s wage, and I appreciate that,” said Randy Palmer of the Citizens Opposed to Strip Mining on the Black Warrior River. “Cordova was devastated by tornadoes on April 27, 2011. Cordova’s 20 miles of riverfront presents our best opportunity for redevelopment. Mining this riverfront would destroy that economic opportunity, not to mention quality of life.”

The Black Warrior River flows through a 6,276 square mile basin, providing drinking water to many of the watershed’s one million residents. The Black Warrior and its headwater streams, one of which carries a national Wild and Scenic River designation, are home to a great diversity of wildlife including 127 species of fish and 36 species of mussels. This river and its tributaries are a popular destination for fishing, paddling, swimming, and other forms of recreation.

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.

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American Rivers is the leading organization working to protect and restore the nation’s rivers and streams. Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Since 1973, American Rivers has fought to preserve these connections, helping protect and restore more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and the annual release of America’s Most Endangered Rivers®.

Headquartered in Washington, DC, American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 100,000 supporters, members, and volunteers nationwide. Visit www.americanrivers.org, www.facebook.com/americanrivers and www.twitter.com/americanrivers.