

NEWS RELEASE

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ROANOKE RIVER NAMED TO MOST ENDANGERED RIVER IN THE NATION LIST

ROANOKE, VA – The Roanoke River, stretching nearly 410 miles from Virginia’s Blue Ridge Mountains to North Carolina’s Albemarle Sound, was named among the “Top 10” Most Endangered Rivers in the United States by the nationwide advocacy group on the American Rivers Association today.

The designation was prompted by a threat posed by the proposal to lift Virginia’s 30-year ban on uranium mining with the first uranium mine and mill planned in the Roanoke River basin. The designation also comes after the City of Virginia Beach released a significant research study that showed any failure of an impoundment used to store radioactive waste generated by uranium mining and milling could result in the contamination of the city’s drinking water supply for up to two years.

“This is an alarming report about the future of the Roanoke River and the water resources it provides for nearly 1.4 million people and two states,” said Mr. Andrew Lester with the Roanoke River Basin Association, a bi-state organization that has served as the basin’s steward for nearly 66 years.

“This is a call to action for local and state leaders to protect the river basin’s economic and environmental assets,” said Mr. Lester.

“The Roanoke River Basin serves the living interests of farmers and fishermen. It serves the travel and tourism industry. It serves as a primary water source for a number of large cities and small communities in Virginia and North Carolina. The river and its fate faces an uncertain future and that’s going to impact us today and many generations into the future,” said Mr. Lester.

The main source of concern facing the Roanoke River is the possibility of uranium mining at Coles Hill in Pittsylvania County. The Virginia General Assembly passed a ban on uranium mining in 1982 but a 2007 request from Virginia Uranium, Inc. to lift the ban has renewed the debate.

“The potential health impacts of exposure to uranium and mining contaminants are well-documented in global studies of people working in mines and the general public living within a 50-mile radius of a mine, including lung cancer, bone cancer, leukemia, birth defects, weakened immune systems, hormone disruption, and damage to DNA, the kidney and liver,” said Mr. Lester.

“Our two states face a serious issue. Are we going to allow the possible contamination and destruction of the Roanoke River basin for the sake of uranium mining that will generate about 100 new jobs but jeopardize millions of people in how they get their drinking water, how they farm, how they recreate, how they live their daily lives? That’s the question and that’s the focus of this major declaration,” said Mr. Lester.

There are nearly 1.4 million people who depend on the Roanoke River Basin for their drinking water. “The Roanoke River Basin provides water resources for a number of large cities and small communities in Virginia and North Carolina. It is the backbone of water supply for 770,000 people in Hampton Roads, Virginia, said Mr. Lester.

“Then you have huge economic interests such as travel and tourism dollars generated on Smith Mountain Lake, Kerr Lake and Lake Gaston. Virginia farmers produced more than \$404 million in agricultural goods in the basin each year, in North Carolina agricultural officials estimate farm production at \$850 million per year in the Roanoke River basin. There are valid economic, environmental interests as well as the purity of our natural resources on the line,” said Mr. Lester.

“Virginia is unprepared to regulate a massive uranium industry. For context— Virginia spends less than 1% of general fund revenues on environmental programs. While permitting and enforcement costs continue to rise, environmental departments are compelled to slash budgets. A uranium mining operation would leave behind mountains of radioactive waste in the Roanoke River watershed for untold generations, with Virginia taxpayers paying the costs associated with waste monitoring, storage, maintenance, disaster prevention, and in the worst case scenario, post disaster clean-up,” added Mr. Lester

“The Roanoke River is facing a huge threat here. Keeping the ban on uranium mining, milling and waste disposal is imperative to maintain clean drinking water and healthy fisheries in the Roanoke watershed, and to sustain and grow the region’s existing economy and to attract new businesses. The change in status quo proposed by the uranium mining interests will bring a lot of unknown and create risks to our economic growth and way of life. Are we going to hear the call and take action to make sure we can protect our water supply?” questioned Mr. Lester.

EDITOR’S NOTE:

Mr. Lester is available for on-the-record interviews at (434) 250-1185.

Additional resources at www.amrivers.org and www.rrba.org