

Calif. river system is nation's most endangered

April 7 2009, By GARANCE BURKE , Associated Press Writer

(AP) -- California's two longest rivers have been named the country's most endangered waterways because of outdated water management and poor flood planning, according to an environmental advocacy group.

American [Rivers](#), a conservation group that compiles the annual list, chose the Sacramento and the San Joaquin rivers because their collapse could endanger the [water](#) supply of 25 million Californians, flood the state's capital and damage the delicate freshwater delta where the two rivers twine.

"The health of the delta depends directly on maintaining the health of these two rivers that feed it," said Steve Rothert, California director of the Washington-based nonprofit.

The organization chooses its most endangered rivers from nominations made by environmental groups and considers the value of each river to people and the environment, the level of the threat it faces and pending decisions that could affect it in the next year, Rothert said.

But Jerry Johns, deputy director at the Department of Water Resources, said the report did not give adequate consideration to statewide efforts to restore the health of the delta and its two chief tributaries.

Rivers from Pennsylvania to Alaska also made this year's list. Rounding out the top five were Georgia's Flint River, the Lower Snake River that courses through Idaho, Washington and Oregon, Mattawoman Creek in

Maryland and the North Fork of the Flathead River in Montana.

One recent political compromise will help restore a now-dry 60-mile stretch of the San Joaquin River.

Last week, President Barack Obama signed a wilderness bill that implements a 2006 legal settlement to bring water and Chinook salmon back to a portion of the state's second-longest river. It provides about \$390 million in federal and state funds, as well as fees from water users, over the next decade.

The lawsuit stemmed from the opening of Friant Dam in 1949, which transformed the San Joaquin Valley's main artery from a river thick with salmon into an irrigation source for more than a million acres of farm fields.

Under the 2006 settlement, irrigation districts that distribute river water to thousands of farms agreed to relinquish a set portion of their traditional water supplies to help restore the fish.

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