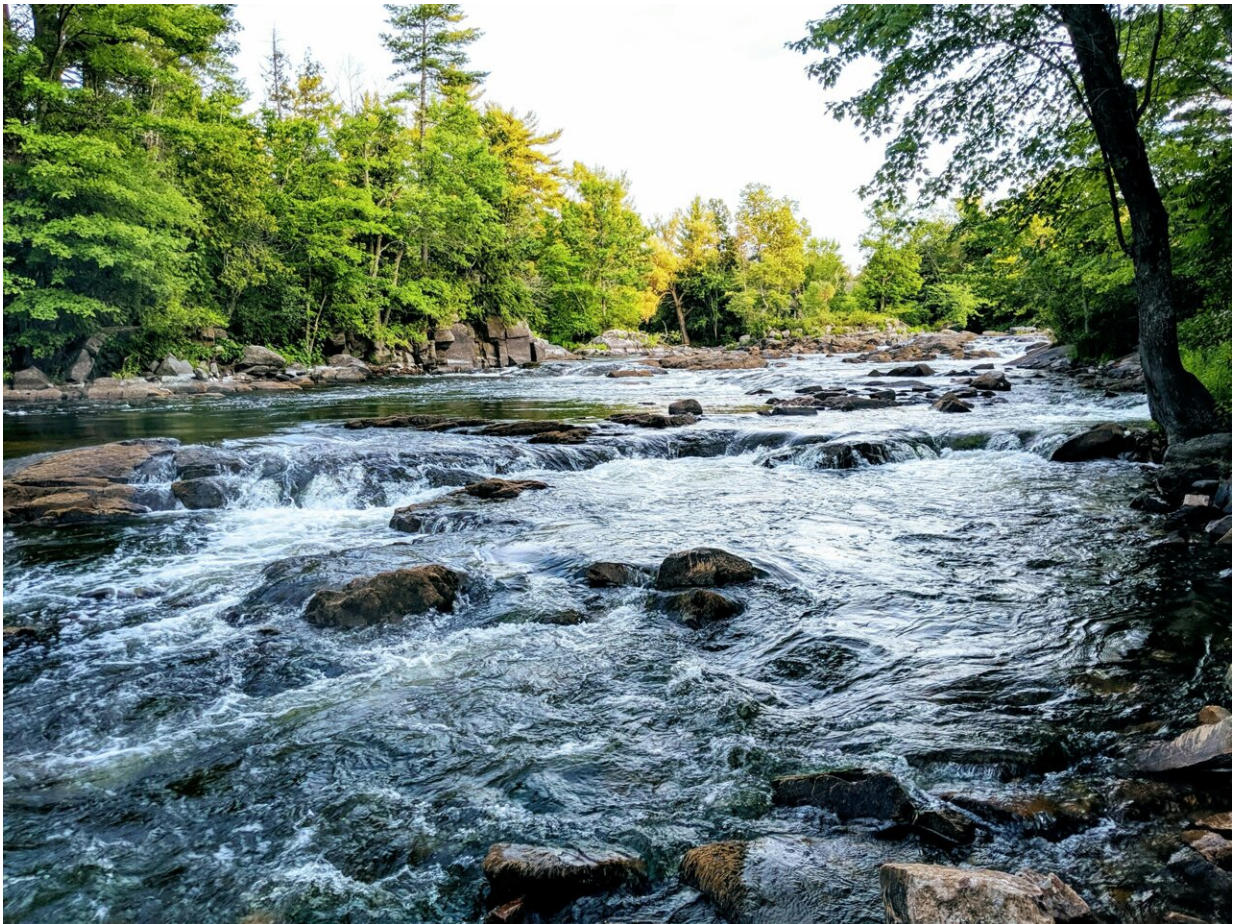


Why a Connecticut river is named one of 'most endangered' in US

April 17 2024, by Ed Stannard, Hartford Courant



Credit: Unsplash/CC0 Public Domain

The Farmington River, "the top priority watershed in the state,"

according to the state's environmental agency, has been named one of America's Most Endangered Rivers by the organization American Rivers.

The 47-mile river, which flows into the Connecticut River, "has the potential to be the biggest positive [environmental impact](#) to fish restoration," according to Paul Woodworth, senior ecological restoration project manager for Save the Sound.

The reason it's listed as endangered is the hydroelectric Rainbow Dam, which is only partially operating, Woodworth said. The dam is run by the Farmington River Power Co. in Windsor, which is owned by Stanley Black & Decker.

"The Farmington River supports diverse fish and wildlife, is a vital source of clean drinking water for the region, and provides boating and other recreation opportunities, but this dam is an ongoing threat," said Katie Schmidt of American Rivers, in a statement.

"What got us concerned about the situation there was the toxic algae blooms," said Aimee Petras, executive director of the Farmington River Watershed Association. The blue-green blooms, which can harm humans, dogs and wildlife, arrived in 2019, 2020 and 2022, she said.

"We started studying it and that's when it became clear to us that a little bit of this is getting exacerbated by the conditions of the dam and the way that the dam owner is running the facility," she said. "And that's really why FRWA nominated the river for Most Endangered Rivers."

Petras said company officials didn't respond until the association told them they would be part of Tuesday's announcement.

"The conditions at the facility really are concerning and Connecticut

(Department of Energy and Environmental Protection) shut down the fishway in March of 2023 and that also just made us feel a little bit more like something needs to happen here," Petras said.

"And the other reason we reached out to the company is that there's historical federal funding to fix the fish passage. And we just wanted them to come to the table and hear about that opportunity."

Debora Raymond, a spokeswoman for Stanley Black & Decker, issued a statement saying, "Farmington River Power has safely operated the Rainbow Dam for more than a century, providing sustainable hydropower for the local grid. We are committed to finding ways to make the Farmington River a vibrant and healthy river for fish, wildlife, and the community."

Woodworth said there are five [migratory fish](#) affected by the dam: American eel, sea lamprey, blueback herring, alewife and American shad.

"Now that DEEP has condemned this fishway, basically saying it's doing more harm than good to the migratory fish run, we now recognize this as being a major impediment to any restoration of migratory fish in the Farmington River," he said.

"So that, compounded with the water quality issues, make this a really negatively impactful hydropower dam than many other hydropower dams around," he said.

Woodworth maintained that the dam has been "neglected and hasn't been upgraded or repaired or well maintained since it was built about 100 years ago."

Petras said the fishway was condemned because it wasn't succeeding in

helping the fish swim upstream.

"It's a series of cubes that are built up on each other. ... It's almost like a game. They have to get through each of these steps. It's a 65-foot-high dam and they have to gather through each of those steps," she said.

"Those that do get up through it actually come out of it injured," Woodworth said. "They'll have scales missing or their fins will be damaged or something. So a lot of the fish come out so harmed that DEEP was concerned that it was actually injuring the fish too much for them to be successfully recolonizing the population."

He said the company hasn't installed a screen in front of the turbines for fish to be able to swim downstream safely. "And so the fish that were getting up into the watershed were not able to get back down without getting either killed in the turbines or just not making it at all," he said.

"The other important factor here for migratory fish is that the Farmington River is the best chance in the state to restore migratory fish," Petras said. "We have such pristine habitat upstream."

One reason is that other dam owners, such as Canton Hydro's Upper Collinsville Hydroelectric Project have rehabilitated dams upriver. But Stanley is grandfathered in without a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Petras said.

"There are no dams south of the confluence of the Farmington River and the Connecticut River," she said. "That's why we have this great opportunity for restoring fish migrations is because of the size of the river and the location in Connecticut and in the Long Island Sound and in the Connecticut River watershed."

She added, "It's a prized river because it's got two wild and scenic river

designations. It's got pristine habitat. It's known for fishing. It's one of the best fish rivers in the state. It's time for the company to take control of its facility and fix their problems."

Woodworth said the river was nominated now also to bring attention to "the magnitude of the opportunity we have to deal with it, with the availability of funding." Some of the money comes out of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law.

He said Save the Sound and other organizations that make up the River Restoration Network "would really want to partner with Stanley to find a permanent and complete solution, trying to tap into this funding that's available and we expect to expire or become unavailable in a year or two," Woodworth said.

"So it's a timing of opportunity right now for Stanley Black & Decker," he said.

2024 Hartford Courant. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Why a Connecticut river is named one of 'most endangered' in US (2024, April 17) retrieved 21 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-04-connecticut-river-endangered.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--