

Tijuana River among most endangered in America due to sewage crisis

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The Tijuana River, with frequent flows of sewage and chemical-tainted waters, is among America's top endangered rivers, according to a report that spotlights threats to clean water nationwide.

American Rivers, a nonprofit focused on protecting the health of rivers in the U.S., compiled a list of the 10 most threatened waterways and listed the binational Tijuana River in ninth place.

"The river joins the Pacific Ocean at beautiful beaches that were once frequented by families, swimmers, and surfers but are now choked with pollution, limiting coastal access and causing serious threats to [public health](#)," the report reads.

Elected officials and [environmental groups](#) said that the designation reaffirms what affected communities have been advocating for over the years: working wastewater infrastructure on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and clean air and water.

And they hope the listing "will be a turning point (in the) effort to get the funding and resources we so desperately need to ensure a clean and accessible Tijuana River Valley," Zack Plopper, environmental director for the nonprofit Surfrider Foundation, said during a news conference from the Tijuana Estuary announcing the report.

The American Rivers report included the rivers of New Mexico, the state of Mississippi's Big Sunflower and Yazoo rivers, and Tennessee's Duck River as the top three most endangered waterways. Those on the list were selected based on their significance to people and wildlife and the magnitude of the threat.

Their report also comes months after the Mexican government recognized Tijuana as having some of the most sewage-contaminated beaches in the country.

The Tijuana River travels more than 100 miles through northwest Baja California and the Tijuana Estuary—a vital breeding and stopover ground for 370 species of birds—in San Diego before it reaches the Pacific Ocean.

But years of neglect and underinvestment in [treatment plants](#) in Mexico and the U.S. have led to Clean Water Act violations and beach closures

as billions of gallons of partially treated wastewater from Mexico have flowed through the Tijuana River into San Diego. Residents on both sides of the border are bearing the health and economic costs.

Despite recent steps taken to alleviate the crisis, including Mexico's groundbreaking of a treatment plant rehabilitation and Congress greenlighting funds to fix a plant in south San Diego, the report said "roadblocks continue to stand in the way."

Elected officials continue to call on President Joe Biden to declare the sewage crisis an emergency and for Congress to allocate more money to expand the South County treatment plant. Most recently, Imperial Beach Mayor Paloma Aguirre returned to Washington, D.C., to urge the federal government to expedite solutions.

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