



February 1, 2010

Southern Environmental Law Center Announces South's Top 10 Endangered Areas

<http://www.appomattoxnews.com/2010/southern-environmental-law-center-announces-souths-top-10-endangered-areas.html>

The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC), the largest environmental advocacy organization dedicated solely to protecting the Southeast, today announced the top ten places in the South that face immediate, potentially irreparable threats in 2010.

Southeast region leads the country in contributing disproportionately to rising levels of carbon dioxide; South could suffer most from global warming, with low-lying coastal zone the hardest hit. Two endangered areas, in South Carolina and Alabama, gain needed protection and drop off list.

"The major environmental threats we face in this country are playing out in the Southeast," said Jeff Gleason, SELC's Deputy Director. "Our region is contributing disproportionately to global warming, and in fact, our six southeastern states, if viewed as a single country, would be the world's seventh largest source of heat-trapping carbon dioxide emissions."

Gleason pointed out that "Common themes on this year's list include uncontrolled growth, flawed energy policy, and lax environmental enforcement, particularly as it relates to our heavy reliance on coal to produce electricity. Specifically, this year's list shows that the South's waterways and wetlands — critical areas that protect and define the South — are experiencing some of the most negative impacts from these trends."

As the Senate gears up to tackle climate change legislation and the EPA moves to mitigate GHG emissions through enforcement of the Clean Air Act, Gleason points out that the South stands to suffer most from the resulting effects of global warming. "As ice melts and sea levels rise, it's the South's low-lying coastal zone that will be the hardest hit," he said. "We hope that our Top 10 list will serve as a wake-up call — a powerful reminder of what we stand to lose."

Top Ten Endangered Areas in the South for 2010

These endangered areas were chosen among hundreds that are impacted by SELC's law and policy work throughout the six states of Virginia, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and Alabama.

1. Right Whale Calving Waters, GA: The last 300 right whales left on Earth are threatened by a U.S. Navy plan for a 500 square-mile undersea training range.
2. Blackwater Streams (Washington County), GA: Air and water are threatened by conventional coal plant that would increase mercury pollution in two rivers and increase global warming emissions.
3. Chesapeake Bay, VA: The largest estuary in the U.S. is getting hit from all sides: air, land and water. A proposed conventional coal plant for nearby Surry County threatens to add even more mercury and nitrogen pollution to bay waters
4. Roanoke River Basin, VA: Drinking water supplies are threatened by uranium mining, and the possibility that Virginia's Piedmont countryside could open up to even more large-scale mining projects.

5. Southern Appalachian Mountains, VA/TN: Weak laws on mountaintop removal coal mining threaten headwater streams, wildlife, communities, and scenic beauty.
6. Black Warrior River, AL: Two proposed strip mines would dump polluted wastewater into the river, threatening drinking water supplies and aquatic life.
7. Cape Fear Wetlands, NC: 1,000 acres of wetlands are threatened by proposed Titan cement plant, which would also send toxic mercury into the already-polluted Cape Fear River.
8. Catawba-Wateree Basin, NC/SC: Threats include a low-flow scheme for hydroelectric dams that would restrict the flow of water essential to a healthy river system, and the lack of an overarching and coherent plan to protect the ecological integrity of the river from over allocation.
9. Freshwater Wetlands, SC: The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers wrongly determined that the Pine Hill tract northwest of Charleston falls outside the scope of Clean Water Act protection. If allowed to stand, this ruling would put thousands of acres of wetlands and hundreds of miles of streams in the state's coastal plain at risk of development or destruction.
10. Ocoee Region, TN: A string of unnecessary four-lane highways would devastate wildlife habitat, and bring traffic and polluted runoff to forests, recreation and wilderness areas.

"Two areas on our 2009 list fell off after resounding victories: The Great Pee Dee River in South Carolina, and Weeks Bay in Alabama," noted Gleason.

Victory #1: The Great Pee Dee River in South Carolina was saved when Santee Cooper suspended its plans for the 1,320-megawatt facility, an old-style, coal-fired plant which would have pumped out more than 10 million tons of heat-trapping carbon dioxide each year, as well as toxic mercury pollution and other harmful emissions. SELC and its partners had battled against this plant for many years.

Victory #2: By a unanimous vote in May 2009, the Town Council of Magnolia Springs adopted a runoff control ordinance SELC helped draft that is one of the strongest of its kind in Alabama, helping Weeks Bay. The new law promotes low-impact development design and requires effective measures to control erosion during and after construction activity, protecting the Magnolia River, which is one of two rivers that form Weeks Bay, a biologically rich estuary that has been designated an Outstanding Natural Resource Water.

For more detailed descriptions of each endangered area, photographs a list of the top threats by individual state, and video, visit http://www.southernenvironment.org/topten_2010

About the Southern Environmental Law Center The exclusive mission of the non-profit Southern Environmental Law Center is to protect the environment and health of the Southeast. For more than 20 years, SELC has worked successfully in all three branches of government, leveraging the power of the law to inform, implement, and enforce environmental safeguards. Their major programs range from global warming and air quality to forest protection, coast and wetland conservation, and preservation of countryside and community character. SELC has approximately 80 staff members and offices in Charlottesville (SELC's headquarters) and Richmond, Virginia; Chapel Hill and Asheville, North Carolina; Charleston, South Carolina; Atlanta, Georgia; and Washington, DC. Visit SELC online at www.SouthernEnvironment.org.