

Edisto River MER 2014 Action Alert

Headline: Protect Healthy Flows in America's Longest Blackwater River

The Edisto River is America's longest free-flowing blackwater river. The river is home to gamefish, endangered sturgeon, swallow-tailed kite, and other magnificent fish and wildlife. Families from across the state enjoy the river for fishing, boating, and its renowned scenic beauty. South Carolina's rivers, when clean and flowing, are worth billions of dollars to the state's economy.

However, the river is at risk due to unchecked water withdrawals from agriculture. Current regulations in South Carolina allow agricultural users to take up to 80 percent of the average river flow without any requirements to reduce their withdrawals— even during times of extreme drought. This puts wildlife habitat and water quality in danger and even causes problems for fishing and boating in the river.

Take Action: Governor Haley and the South Carolina General Assembly need to make agricultural water users play by the same rules as everyone else. Tell them to ensure healthy flows for the Edisto and all of South Carolina's rivers by requiring agricultural users to comply with the same rules as industrial and municipal users who must curtail their water use at critical times to ensure healthy river flows are protected.

Target Decision-Makers:

See below for full list.

Subject: Save the Edisto River!

Letter:

Dear [Decision-maker]:

The 2010 *Surface Water Withdrawal, Permitting, and Reporting Act* gave special privileges to agricultural water withdrawals treating them differently than industrial and municipal water users. Last year, the Department of Health and Environmental Control issued the first agricultural registration under the new law for a large withdrawal from the South Fork of the Edisto River that threatens the health of the river. This registration was allowed with no public notice and no meaningful protection of the public interest in navigation, recreation, wildlife habitat, or water quality. Under the 2010 law there is no requirement for agricultural users to curtail this water withdrawal even during extreme droughts.

In light of the threat that water withdrawals now pose to the health of the Edisto and other rivers, I join with American Rivers, Friends of the Edisto, and Conservation Voters of South Carolina to urge you to take two actions:

- Place a moratorium on any new agricultural water withdrawals over 3 million gallons per month from the Edisto River until new rules are put in place;

- Reform the 2010 *Surface Water Withdrawal, Permitting, and Reporting Act* to require agricultural withdrawals to be permitted under the same rules applied to industrial and municipal users in order to ensure healthy flows for the Edisto and all of South Carolina's rivers.

The Edisto River is America's longest free-flowing blackwater river. The Edisto includes the internationally-recognized Francis Beidler Forest and Four Holes Swamp, nourishes the Ashepoo, Combahee, and Edisto (ACE) Basin Estuarine Reserve where more than 130,000 acres of land have been protected through public/private partnerships, and provides drinking water to the City of Charleston. The river is home to gamefish like striped bass and harbors endangered sturgeon. The charismatic swallow-tailed kite and other wildlife flourish along its banks. Families from across the state enjoy the river for its renowned fishing, boating, and scenic beauty.

Concern about the potential impacts of this urgent threat to South Carolina's waterways has unfortunately gained national recognition, leading American Rivers to list the Edisto River as one of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2014.

The Edisto is an iconic, natural treasure dear to the hearts of South Carolinians. The state's rivers when clean and flowing are worth billions of dollars to the state's economy. We cannot afford to ignore the public trust in the health and viability of our public waters. Your action can establish equal treatment among all water users, and protect the Edisto and all of our greatly valued rivers.

Thank you for your leadership and for your careful consideration of my position.