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RE: OP-ED

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## **The Susquehanna: A River Under Stress -- But Not The Nation's Most Endangered**

Given my position with the Susquehanna River Basin Commission, it comes as no surprise that people are asking me for my reaction to the recent American Rivers report declaring the Susquehanna River the nation's number one endangered river. Many people are concerned by American Rivers' characterization of the Susquehanna River as a cesspool, while others have embraced it without question. The Commission's position is one of balance, because we are relying on the facts to guide us.

Yes, there are localized and some regional water quality problems, but by-and-large, the water quality of the Susquehanna River is in good condition and continuing to improve. Our own monitoring data show reductions in nutrients and sediments in the river, which translates to reduced levels reaching the Chesapeake Bay.

Cathy Curran Myers, Pennsylvania's Alternate SRBC Commissioner, put it very well when she recently referred to the Susquehanna River as a "crown jewel under stress." She pointed out that less than 15 percent of it is included as impaired on EPA's dirty water list. "The Susquehanna sends the cleanest water of any tributary to the Chesapeake Bay, but it is not clean enough."

Much work remains to be done to further improve water quality. Nutrients, sediment and drainage from abandoned mine lands (AMD) are three of the primary sources of impairment. Based on 2000 estimates, the Pennsylvania portion of the Susquehanna basin has more than \$2.8 billion in AMD reclamation needs. Even more sobering are EPA's cost estimates for the overall bay restoration effort: \$27 billion in capital expenditures and an additional \$2.7 billion annually. There are tremendous infrastructure improvement needs for Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) systems. As of 2000, the estimated cost to solve this problem in Pennsylvania alone was \$4 billion.

The Susquehanna River is a tremendous resource, but it has some very real needs to ensure its long-term management and protection. That will require everyone's best effort.