



# The LEADer



**“OUR” TAR CREEK**

**MADE  
the list:  
She is #6**

**MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS 2021**

## **Tar Creek named among America’s Most Endangered Rivers**

Washington, D.C. – American Rivers today named Tar Creek among *America’s Most Endangered Rivers®* of 2021, citing the serious threat that toxic pollution from one of the country’s biggest Superfund sites poses to public health. American Rivers and its partners called on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) and the State of Oklahoma to develop a cleanup plan that protects Tar Creek and the health of local Indigenous communities and other residents. Indigenous people from nine tribes make up more than 20 percent of the population in the county, with many individuals having ancestry in multiple tribes.

“The America’s Most Endangered Rivers report is a call to action to save rivers facing urgent decisions,” said Jessie Thomas-Blate with American Rivers. “We’re sounding the alarm because toxic wastewater has been threatening this creek and surrounding communities for too long. It is unacceptable. Action must be taken now to address this injustice.”

## TAR CREEK DEMANDS HER TURN

Tar Creek got invited, she snuck in at the last minute in the competition as one of the most Endangered Rivers in the country. True she isn't a river. But she does flow and she is endangered, and that designation might bring to light only too boldly that she needs some help, real help, the big kind, the inclusive and the all purpose fix she deserves.

Yes, she was invited and now we know she made the list. We have one of the most Endangered Rivers in America. Now let's see how we rally as a community, as a state and as individuals to ask for help.

Neither a creek or a river, can be owned. But we can claim them and we can stand up and speak out for ours and all other waters that flow to be protected and restored.

Endangered musters needs that must be addressed. Endangered must move us to action. This must move agencies to go to the drawing board, back to the staffs that create the site plans and take another look.

Endangered must push each of us to take another look. A stream once flowed through us and children played there and memories were made. We are a mess and we must believe our lives matter and the generations to come will matter.

Unless we demand our Endangered, our once Endearred Tar Creek be restored to flow clean water, believed me, you will not have it for your grandchildren's grandchildren.

American Rivers has given us the structure to rally the agencies to do this work. But the work is ours too. We have to begin to believe it can be better, and that we deserve it.

We need to understand that what flows through us goes on to the Neosho and on to Grand Lake 'o the Cherokees taking our metals, that then go to the next lake. We are the source, they flow through us and our lead is in species of fish that people you know may be feeding their children.

We have a responsibility to use all our effort to stop these metals from polluting others. There are times when silence has worked for you. But not now. We are ready to meet with any and all agencies with the power to make this different and demand it.

American Rivers is issuing a series of actions that will help us. But numbers will help. Your participation will help. You will be contacted by media from all over the country. They are going to want to know how you feel about this Endangered River, OUR TAR CREEK!

If you want it better, care about it, say so. Loudly. Clearly, we want a Tar Creek that children can play in, fish in and catch a fish they can proudly go home for dinner and it be safe.

We want a Tar Creek that will not leave toxic metals in your yard after a flood, or on the pasture cattle eat. Hold on to your hat. Take note of what you can do. Read and study. And then act.

*Your Tar Creekkeeper ~ Rebecca Jim*

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**JUSTICE WILL NOT BE SERVED UNTIL THOSE WHO ARE UNAFFECTED  
ARE AS OUTRAGED AS THOSE WHO ARE. Ben Franklin**



## America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2021

### #1: Snake River (ID, WA, OR)

Threat: Four federal dams on the lower Snake River

### #2: Lower Missouri River (MO, IA, NE, KS)

Threat: Outdated river management

### #3: Boundary Waters (MN)

Threat: Sulfide-ore copper mining

### #4: South River (GA)

Threat: Pollution due to lax enforcement

### #5: Pecos River (NM)

Threat: Pollution from proposed hardrock mining

### #6: Tar Creek (OK)

Threat: Pollution from Tar Creek Superfund Site

### #7: McCloud River (CA)

Threat: Raising of Shasta Dam

### #8: Ipswich River (MA)

Threat: Excessive water withdrawals

### #9: Raccoon River (IA)

Threat: Pollution from industrial agriculture and factory farming

### #10: Turkey Creek (MS)

Threat: Two major developments



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THOUSANDS HAVE LIVED WITHOUT LOVE,  
NOT ONE WITHOUT WATER. WH AUDEN





# America's Most Endangered Rivers of 2021

The annual *America's Most Endangered Rivers* report is a list of rivers at a crossroads, where key decisions in the coming months will determine the rivers' fates. Over the years, the report has helped spur many successes including the removal of outdated dams, the protection of rivers with Wild and Scenic designations, and the prevention of harmful development and pollution.

## WHAT MUST BE DONE

Tar Creek is poisoned with regional, watershed-wide pollution that requires a landscape-level solution. In conjunction with the relicensing of the Pensacola Dam, the EPA, FERC and State of Oklahoma must collaboratively address historic and ongoing contamination throughout the Grand Lake watershed. EPA, FERC, the State of Oklahoma, and tribes with land adjacent to Tar Creek must sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that requires all parties to commit to an integrated, landscape-level solution to address both the dam relicensing and EPA cleanup plans at Tar Creek. In addition, the lake level must not be raised as proposed because doing so will increase the watershed-wide redistribution of sediment-bound heavy metals during floods.

Furthermore, the new EPA Region 6 Administrator must order a new Remedial Investigation and Human Health Risk Assessment that is more protective of human health and the environment. The health of communities around Tar Creek can no longer be ignored and set aside as an accepted casualty of historic mining. Tar Creek must be addressed as a matter of environmental justice, a priority of the Biden Administration.

Lastly, Congress must reauthorize the Superfund Fee under the Comprehensive Environmental Response Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), which funds cleanup at Superfund sites across the country. Reauthorizing the Superfund 'polluter pays' provision will provide cleanup money so citizens do not have to pay for cleanup.

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*We must be ready to speak up now.  
This is our turn. Make this happen NOW !*

**WHISKEY IS FOR DRINKIN' WATER IS FOR *FIGHTIN'*  
— MARK TWAIN**

## Take Ten Minutes to Help Tar Creek

Tar Creek needs your help! She needs everyone to tell EPA, FERC, and Governor Stitt to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding to require the relicensing of the dam at Grand Lake to address Tar Creek contamination.

A **sample letter** is on the [opposite side](#) of this page. You may use it or modify it as you like. You can find an electronic version of this sample letter on our website [www.leadagency.org](http://www.leadagency.org).

**Please send a letter to all three of the officials listed below.**

If you prefer to send these letters electronically, we have included a web address for each where you can do so.

Gov. Kevin Stitt

Oklahoma State Capitol

2300 N Lincoln Blvd.

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma 73105

<https://bit.ly/3aJ99rQ>

Commissioner Richard Glick

Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

888 First Street, NE

Washington, DC 20426

<https://bit.ly/2S511M1> (using this link once will automatically send to Commissioner Glick and Administrator Regan)

Administrator Michael Regan

Environmental Protection Agency

Mailing Code 1101A

1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.

Washington, DC 20460

<https://bit.ly/2S511M1> (using this link once will automatically send to Commissioner Glick and Administrator Regan)



Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am writing to request that you enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the State of Oklahoma and any other applicable state, federal, tribal and/or local entities to require inter-agency analysis and decision-making between the Grand Lake Dam relicensing and the Tar Creek Superfund Site.

Contamination from the Tri-State Mining District impacts much of the Grand River watershed. Protecting human and environmental health throughout the watershed demands that agencies consider how their actions affect the distribution of contaminants across the watershed. Isolated decision-making is harmful to human health and will not solve our problems. An MOU is required to compel joint landscape-scale decision-making.

Heavy metals from Tar Creek are in Grand Lake fish. We know eating too many of these fish is dangerous to human health. High levels of toxic heavy metals (specifically lead, cadmium, arsenic and manganese) in water and fish cause irreversible neurocognitive impairments on humans, especially children. How can we make our fish safe to eat, or water clean to drink or recreate in, if FERC continues to ignore Tar Creek metals when making decisions about the Grand Lake Dam? These issues cannot be considered in isolation. I am concerned about human exposure to these metals in Grand Lake. I am also concerned that flood events distribute Tar Creek metals throughout the watershed, depositing them on the land as floodwaters recede. This situation creates a real risk of children becoming lead poisoned by playing in areas that flood.

Concern for these issues facing Tar Creek has led American Rivers to include it as one of America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2021.

No single agency can solve this problem. Everyone must work together to come up with a comprehensive landscape-scale solution to address pollution throughout the watershed before more people, fish and wildlife are impacted. An MOU compelling joint decision-making is essential to this task, and I urge you to develop and implement this MOU as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

*Sample letter*