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PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:

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TENNESSEE RIVER ON THE MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS LIST

KNOXVILLE – On April 14, 2004, American Rivers, a national environmental organization will announce the listing of the Tennessee River on the Most Endangered Rivers List for sanitary sewer overflows and sewage blending.

“This is a sad day for Tennessee,” says Renée Hoyos, Executive Director of the Tennessee Clean Water Network. “Of all rivers in the nation, the Tennessee is considered one of the most polluted rivers for sewage. That’s quite a distinction and nothing to be proud of.”

Sewage infrastructure has not kept up with population growth along the Tennessee River for decades, and the result is that millions of gallons of raw or partially treated sewage are discharged into the river each year. In most cases, the sewage spills occur when it rains – when stormwater rushing into the sewer pushes the excrement out through manholes before it reaches the treatment facilities. These problems occur all along the river but are most pronounced in Knoxville, TN. Within the past three years, the Knoxville Utility Board has violated Clean Water Act sewage regulations some 1,000 times, dumping more than 1 billion gallons of raw or partially treated sewage into the river and streams in Knoxville.

“This report puts Tennessee and Knoxville on the map for the worst sewage pollution in the Southeast. This report has been released nationally. The whole country is going to know our dirty laundry. We have encouraged the KUB to clean up its act and they have not responded. As a last resort, we had to file suit.” Says Ms. Hoyos

The Tennessee Clean Water Network filed a suit against the KUB for violating their National Pollution Discharge Elimination System permits in September 2003. In January 2004, the US Department of Justice, The US EPA, and the State of Tennessee joined in the lawsuit. Soon thereafter, the City of Knoxville filed an intervention on behalf of TCWN.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that exposure to sewage-laced water makes as many as 3.5 million Americans sick each year. Germs found in sewage cause minor gastrointestinal illness and respiratory infections as well as potentially life threatening illnesses like hepatitis and dysentery.

Conservationists warned that two recent initiatives from Bush administration threaten to exacerbate this chronic problem. In November 2003, the Bush administration's EPA proposed to legalize the wastewater utility practice of "blending" partially and fully treated sewage and dumping the mix into rivers when rain or melting snow stresses their capacity. A final decision could come at any time. Diluting sewage before dumping it is not an acceptable approach to protecting public health – germs breed in water.

For fiscal year 2005, the White House has again proposed to slash the amount of money in the "State Revolving Loan Funds" that EPA provides to local communities to improve their sewage and drinking water treatment plants. The White House asked Congress to appropriate only \$850 million, which is a reduction of almost half a billion dollars from current spending levels and far short of the full \$3.2 billion that is authorized by law.

"Basically, the White House is not going to assist utility operators in maintaining their sewage systems and will give them legal breaks to continue polluting. This is not good stewardship of water. This is in complete defiance of the Clean Water Act. This is not what the public wants. The public wants clean water. The public does not want to worry about the quality of their water. They want to swim in the Tennessee River, enjoy its tributaries and not worry about contracting a water borne disease.' Concludes Ms. Hoyos.