



**SIERRA
CLUB**
FOUNDED 1892

MEDIA RELEASE

Northern Plains Region – Field Office
231 South Phillips Avenue #365, Sioux Falls, SD 57104
TEL: [605] 331-6001 * FAX: [605] 331-0613 * www.sierraclub.org

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Thursday, September 22, 2005**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:
Deanna White, (605)331-6001**

SIERRA CLUB MARKS WORLD RIVER DAY WITH REPORT ON RIVERS EXPLORED BY LEWIS AND CLARK

Sierra Club today released a report on the threats to the two main rivers navigated by Lewis and Clark two hundred years ago—the Columbia and the Missouri. The report comes out as people around the globe are preparing to celebrate World River Day on September 25 to increase public awareness of the common values and increasing threats to our waterways and to encourage good stewardship of our water resources.

The Sierra Club report highlights the drastic changes these two rivers have seen over the course of the last hundred years. According to Jim Redmond, Co-Chair of Sierra Club's Lewis and Clark Wild America Campaign, "The wild and natural qualities of these rivers, documented so vividly in Lewis and Clark's journals, are at risk of being lost forever if we do not begin today to restore and protect them."

Few waterways were as dynamic as the Missouri and the Columbia when Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery made their journey from St. Louis to the Pacific Ocean. Two hundred years later, most sections of these two powerful rivers would barely be recognizable by Lewis and Clark.

The twentieth century saw a push to turn interior "river cities" into ports. This required straightening and dredging the rivers in order to make them navigable for barge traffic. The rivers were also "tamed" by numerous dams.

When the Mandan and Hidatsa Indians welcomed the Lewis and Clark Expedition in the fall of 1804, the Missouri was a wild, restless river. Numerous braided channels meandered across a vast flood plain creating sandbars and wetlands. The river and the surrounding area teamed with wildlife. Now much of its natural beauty has been lost forever. Today in many sections of the river, most of the fish and other wildlife that inhabited the river and surrounding areas are either gone or present in very low numbers.

In the Columbia River basin salmon numbers have also plummeted to near extinction since a series of dams were installed on the Snake River. The four dams offer no flood control and supply only five percent of the region's electricity. These salmon runs are the basis of local Native American culture today, just as they were in Lewis and Clark's day. Coho Salmon are already extinct on the Snake River and several other salmon and steelhead runs are continuing to dwindle towards extinction as evidenced by their continued listing under the Endangered Species Act since the early 1990's. Eight billion dollars have been wasted on salmon recovery efforts that do nothing to address the impact of the dams themselves.

"The 8,000 mile journey of Lewis and Clark helps define who we are as Americans," said John Osborn, a physician and Co-Chair of Sierra Club's Lewis and Clark Wild America Campaign, "Just 200 years ago the explorers walked forest trails and canoed pristine waters. Now the rivers are dammed and polluted and the forests clearcut. World River Day -- coupled with the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial -- is a national call for action to restore both the Missouri and the Columbia Rivers."

Sierra Club's report can be seen at:

http://www.sierraclub.org/lewisandclark/onthetrail/rivers_forests_prairies.asp

###