

*President William Jefferson Clinton Designates
America's Heritage Rivers*

In just a few moments I will sign a proclamation making all this official, awarding our nation's first American Heritage Rivers designations to the New River, the Blackstone, and Woonasquatucket, the Connecticut, the Cuyahoga, the Detroit, the Hanalei, the Hudson, the Upper and Lower Mississippi, the Potomac, the Rio Grande, the St. Johns, the Upper Susquehanna and Lackawanna, and the Willamette. (Applause.) Those places tell you an awful lot about America. They span our history; they span our country; they capture our imagination.

I want to congratulate the communities that participated in all these—all these—designations, and also those who worked so hard who didn't quite make it this time. It was an amazing process.

Well, I want to ask you to manifest the bipartisan or nonpartisan commitment I see in this crowd today to the environment in your voices in Washington, because some folks in Congress are no longer committed to bipartisan progress on the environment. They really do see, I believe honestly, polluted streams and fields or noxious air as overstated problems that can be put off for another day.

We can only deal with this if we have progress, not partisanship, because here are the facts: today 40 percent of our waters are still too polluted for fishing and swimming. That's why I launched the Clean Water Action Plan to help communities finish the job that the Vice President mentioned. So far, Congress has refused to fully fund this initiative. I ask them to reconsider. I think every child in America ought to have the same chance your children do to fish or swim or float on a river that's clean and pure.

We need progress, not partisanship, to protect our land. Last February, several months ago, I submitted a list of 100 new sites we can add to our nation's endowment of protected lands, including a beautiful site here in the southern Appalachians along the trout-rich Thompson River. While Congress has appropriated the money to preserve these natural and historic treasures, under the law the leadership must approve the release of the funds. And so far they haven't done it. So today I ask again, let's work together to protect these wonders. The money is in the bank, the sites have been identified, they're not going anywhere, but we need to preserve them for everyone for all time.