

Yangtze River Economic Belt

'Liquor river' protection hailed

Joint efforts aim to keep a major tributary clean

By LIU XIANGRUI and YANG JUN in Renhuai, Guizhou

Authorities in southern China say joint efforts and integrated measures have helped protect the ecology and environment along the Chishui River, a major tributary of the Yangtze River.

The Chishui is known as the "liquor river", as thousands of Chinese liquor factories line its banks, including top brands such as Kweichow Moutai.

It is estimated that the combined output value of factories in the river basin runs to hundreds of billions of yuan, forming an important manufacturing cluster along the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

As the only tributary of the Yangtze unaffected by dams or industrial development, the Chishui is a key protected area for biodiversity and is seen as a crucial ecological screen for the upper reaches of the Yangtze.

Originating in Yunnan province, the trunk of the Chishui stretches 436 kilometers, with the vast majority flowing through Guizhou province. It joins the Yangtze in Sichuan province.

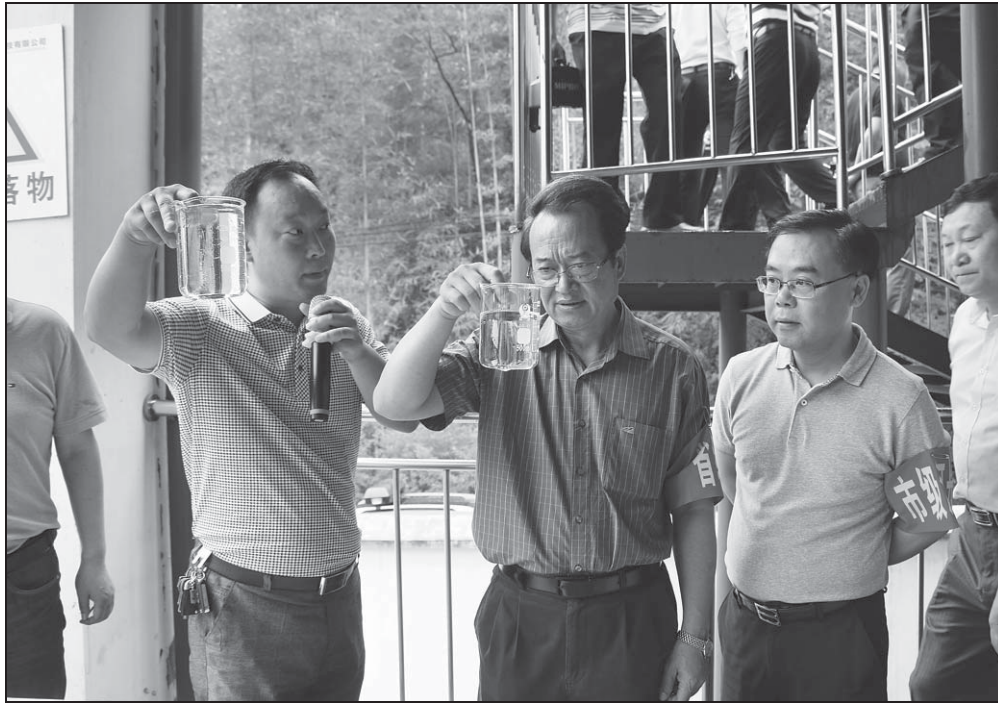
In 2014, the area was listed as a national experimental river basin for the building of an ecological civilization.

Since then, authorities have established a pioneering protection system based on local conditions, introducing measures such as ecological compensation, ecological red lines, an environmental protection judiciary and cross-province coordination.

The acceleration of ecological and environmental management along the Chishui has effectively improved its water quality and ecology, said Jiang Jianqiang, director of the general office of Guizhou's Environmental Protection Department.

Data from the provincial Water Resources Bureau show the surface water quality along the waterway is Grade III or higher, based on China's five-level quality standards, and that overall water quality has remained stable since 2013.

Guizhou's leaders have repeatedly visited the basin to direct protection work. They have introduced several strategies to enhance protection of the river since 2011.



Meng Qiliang, vice-chairman of the Guizhou Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (center), and Tan Hai, mayor of Chishui, Guizhou province (right), check the water quality of the Chishui River. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“Moutai wouldn't have existed without the healthy ecosystem along the Chishui.”

Li Baofang, chairman and general manager of Kweichow Moutai Group

Among those was the 5.6 billion yuan (\$822 million) Comprehensive Plan to Protect the Chishui River Basin, which set a target to carry out 501 projects in nine categories between 2013 and 2020 to tackle problems such as urban sewage, garbage and industrial pollution treatment and control.

The plan divided the river basin into three parts, with protection measures designed to meet their respective goals.

According to official data, since 2015, the province has spent about 50 million yuan a year to protect the river.

In addition, Guizhou has strengthened cooperation with various authorities along the river — including setting up a joint compensation fund for ecological protection of the



Egrets rest in a tree near the Chishui River in Renhuai, Guizhou province. CHEN YONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chishui River basin with Yunnan and Sichuan — and helped establish a joint prevention and control mechanism for ecological and environment problems along the upper portions of the Yangtze.

“Local governments along the river can't just hoe their own potatoes. Protecting the Chishui River requires the combined efforts of all three provinces,” said Sun Zhongfa in Guizhou's Environmental Inspection Bureau.

This year, Guizhou, Yunnan and Sichuan signed a horizontal ecological compensation deal, agreeing to invest 200 million yuan a year into environmental treatment along the Chishui.

Contributions will vary based on each province's economic benefits from the river.

It is the first river basin to be covered by such a compensation mechanism.

Enterprises including Kweichow Moutai, the world's most valuable liquor maker, are also helping to protect the river's ecology.

“Moutai wouldn't have existed without the healthy ecosystem along the Chishui,” said Li Baofang, chairman and general manager of Kweichow Moutai Group, which uses water directly from the river to make its liquor. “The river is Moutai's life.”

Chishui means “red water” in Chinese — the name was inspired by the river's red sediment.

The water only becomes clear during certain seasons, Li said, adding that microorganisms in the water are believed to be key to the flavor

of local liquors.

In recent years, Kweichow Moutai has invested 468 million yuan to build five sewage-processing plants with a combined annual capacity of more than 2 million metric tons, and has donated about 500 million yuan since 2014 to the ecological compensation fund, Li said.

According to Luo Xiaoyong, deputy director of the Yangtze River Water Resources Commission, part of the Ministry of Water Resources, the Chishui is one of the most representative tributaries in the Yangtze basin.

It is home to more than one-third of the fish species native to the upper reaches of the Yangtze, and guarding it is crucial for the protection of those species, he said.

“The importance of the Chishui was made clear a long time ago,” Luo said. “The decision to not build any hydroelectric projects along the main stream, in line with the comprehensive plan for the whole Yangtze basin, laid a solid foundation for the protection of the Chishui.”

He added that the protection efforts provide a good example for other regions.

Li Hanyi contributed to this story.

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Cleaning boats rid waterways of trash

By TAN YINGZI in Wanzhou, Chongqing tanyingzi@chinadaily.com.cn

Lately, Yangtze River cleaner Liu Bo, 29, has been starting work at 6:30 am on the water and only gets home around 8 pm.

He joined the cleaning team in 2014 after graduating from Jiangsu Maritime Vocational Institute with a degree in marine engineering. Now he manages one of the mechanized cleaning boats.

“I grew up by the river and I love it very much,” he said. “I want it as clean and beautiful as it was in my childhood.”

Summer is the busiest time for Liu and his colleagues, as floodwaters flush detritus and plants into the 6,300-kilometer river, the third-longest river in the world and the Mother River of the Chinese people.

In grueling heat, usually over 40 C, floating rubbish must be collected quickly, otherwise it will start to stink.

About 80.3 km of the river runs through Chongqing's Wanzhou district. Authorities have divided the section into seven parts, each with at least two cleaning boats. Mechanized cleaning boats work on the main river surface around the port, while dozens of smaller boats clean the river's small branches.

This month, the team has collected over 3,500 metric tons of trash.

Wanzhou, in northeast Chongqing, is on the upper reaches of the Yangtze and Three Gorges. With 1.76 million people and a strong economy, it is a major component of the Yangtze River Economic Belt and boasts one of the 10 largest ports on the river.

Since the Three Gorges Dam was built, the river's water level rises in winter and falls in summer, opposite the natural river. As the Yangtze flows slower than before, garbage from residents along the river or littering tourists, along with the detritus and plants of seasonal storms and floods, accu-

mulates on the surface, creating an unpleasant scene and hindering the navigation of ships. The garbage can even affect the production of electricity at the dam.

“In the first year after the dam was built, the accumulated garbage near the dam was so thick that a car could drive on it,” said Chen Yu, who is in charge of river cleaning at the city's sanitation department. “It was very dangerous for boats, too.”

Wanzhou started its river-cleaning project in 2003, one of the first cities along the river to tackle the problem. The team has 25 full-time cleaners, five mechanized cleaning boats and five small boats. It also hires fishermen to help clean the river during flood seasons.

The district government spends around 5 million yuan (\$735,000) a year on cleanup activities.

Every month, supervisors from China Three Gorges Corp, which built and runs the dam, inspect the cleaning work of every city along the river, Chen said.

“They've also hired a full-time independent supervisor in Wanzhou to follow our daily work,” he added. “They are very serious about it.”

But there is still not enough help, Chen said. “We can't totally rely on machines. We need more people to collect the garbage in the river's branches. Now there are fewer fishermen than before, and it's not easy to hire extra hands.”

In recent years, the total amount of garbage collected on the upper reaches of the Yangtze has been about 180,000 tons a year, according to Sun Xiaonan, director of Chongqing's research center for contaminated site remediation.

“In the past, there were piles of trash in the river and it smelled bad,” said Wang Xiaoning, a resident who lives near the river. “The water is clean now, and many people like to walk here,” he said.



Liu Bo collects debris from the Yangtze River. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Protect sharks and say no to shark fin soup

When the buying stops, the killing can too



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