

**American Fisheries Society * American Fly Fishing Trade Association
American Sportfishing Association * Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
BASS LLC * Berkley Conservation Institute
Delta Waterfowl * Izaak Walton League of America
National Marine Manufacturers Association * National Wildlife Federation
The Wildlife Society * Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Trout Unlimited * Wildlife Management Institute**

March 30, 2012

Dear Representative:

As sportsman-conservation organizations representing millions of hunters, boaters, and anglers nationwide, we ask you to oppose any legislation that would block the administration's very deliberate and vital action to clarify and restore long-standing Clean Water Act protections for streams and wetlands across the country. We reaffirm our support for Clean Water Act guidance currently being reviewed and finalized in an interagency process coordinated by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

Sportsmen rely on clean water to ensure the opportunity to enjoy hunting, angling, and other outdoor-based recreation (and business) in the great outdoors. When wetlands are drained and filled and streams are polluted, sportsmen are often the first to be directly impacted. Consequently, hunters, boaters, and anglers have consistently advocated for conserving our nation's waters.

Since 2001, U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *SWANCC* (2001) and *Rapanos* (2006), along with 2003 and 2008 agency guidance that is inconsistent with those decisions and the related science, have combined to erode long-standing Clean Water Act safeguards for headwater streams and critical wetlands.

Headwater and intermittently flowing streams comprise 59 percent of all stream miles in the continental United States, and are particularly vulnerable under the decisions and existing agency guidance. At-risk wetlands and tributaries provide clean water for iconic systems such as the Mississippi River Delta and the Chesapeake Bay. They recharge aquifers like the Ogallala, help retain floodwaters in areas such as the Prairie Pothole region and Missouri River Basin, and provide important fish and wildlife habitat throughout the nation. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), prairie pothole wetlands in the northern Great Plains, together with similar wetlands in southern Canada, produce 50 to 70 percent of all North American ducks. However, in its most recent report on the status of wetlands nationwide, the FWS found the rate of wetland loss jumped 140 percent between 2004 and 2009. As these waters are polluted and diminished, their ecological, public health, and recreational benefits are lost, as well.

As we all work to create jobs and support economic recovery, we should nurture rather than neglect the economic benefits of hunting, angling, and other outdoor recreation. Hunting, boating, and angling have a tremendously positive impact on the nation's economy, including in rural communities, and support millions of jobs across the country. Consider the following:

- Using data from the FWS, the American Sportfishing Association estimates angling generates \$125 billion in annual economic activity and supports more than 1 million jobs.
- Using similar information, the Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation estimates hunters contribute nearly \$25 billion to the economy, which supports 600,000 jobs.
- Data from the National Marine Manufacturers Association indicates that recreational boating contributes over \$41 billion and 337,000 jobs to the U.S. economy.
- The FWS reports duck hunting alone generates \$2.3 billion for the economy every year and supports 27,000 private sector jobs.

In order to effectively safeguard key components of our economy, the sports and traditions that millions of Americans enjoy, and the health and integrity of some of our most important fish and wildlife resources, it is essential to act now to restore lost Clean Water Act protections consistent with existing law and science.

The Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed new guidance last spring for determining Clean Water Act jurisdiction. The draft guidance is science-based and clearly respects the Supreme Court's decisions. Over the course of three months last summer, the agencies conducted an almost unprecedented public engagement process for a guidance document. More than 200,000 Americans commented and EPA has reported that the clear majority of those comments support the proposed guidance. During this process, more than 250 hunting, angling, and conservation groups from 28 states also weighed in backing the guidance and subsequent rulemaking.

To complete this process the guidance must be finalized as a first step in affirming long-standing clean water protections for many wetlands and streams. This guidance importantly maintains existing exemptions for normal agricultural activity. At the same time, it will provide increased clarity and consistency that is badly needed by land owners, developers, conservationists, and state and federal agencies alike. We urge you to support – and not oppose – this important first step.

As a follow-up to final guidance, we also support agency action to further clarify and strengthen the regulatory definition of “waters of the United States.” There is widespread agreement among groups across the spectrum about the inherent value of rulemaking to address critical aspects of this issue. In closing, we urge you to support – and not oppose – the important and careful steps being taken by the administration to clarify and affirm long-standing protections for wetlands and streams across the United States.

Respectfully,

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