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Clean Water Act Protections Languish at White House for One Year *Sportsmen Groups Call for Presidential Leadership*

Washington, DC – One year ago today, the White House received a final policy that would help protect America’s streams, wetlands, and other critical waters. However, that policy has languished at the White House for a full year awaiting approval. Now more than 20 million acres of wetlands and 2 million miles of streams are at risk of being drained or polluted. The nation’s leading sportsmen groups call for President Obama to take action to conserve these natural resources, which are important to fish and wildlife and crucial to sustaining America’s hunting and angling traditions.

Last February, the Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) took the most meaningful action in a decade to begin restoring lost Clean Water Act protections. The agencies submitted to the White House the final draft of a policy firmly grounded in science and hydrology. This policy would replace existing guidelines that are inconsistent with the intent of the Clean Water Act.

Yet despite a public review process and widespread public support for this final draft, the White House has failed so far to do its duty in approving the EPA and Corps guidelines.

“Americans who hunt, fish and enjoy the outdoors have been waiting for a year for the White House to approve clean water policy,” says Scott Kovarovics, Executive Director of the Izaak Walton League of America. “As waters important to hunting and fishing, our economy, and public health face growing threats from tile drainage and nutrient runoff, President Obama needs to take action and issue the Clean Water Act policy.”

“This common-sense strategy will mean our children and grandchildren will have clean water to drink and safe streams to fish in,” says Jan Goldman-Carter, Senior Manager, Wetlands and Water Resources, for the National Wildlife Federation. “It’s time for the administration to take a stand for clean water and wildlife by making this policy a reality.”

The most recent report from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service shows that small gains in wetland conservation have been reversed ([“Status and Trends of Wetlands in the Conterminous United States 2004 to 2009”](#)). Between 2004 and 2009, net wetland acres dropped by 62,300 nationwide – a 140-percent increase in the rate of wetland loss compared with the 1998-2004 timeframe. Forested wetlands declined by 633,000 acres, representing the “largest losses since the 1974 to 1985 time period.” And the full extent of natural wetland loss is masked by the growth of man-made retention and other

ponds that are of limited value for fish and wildlife. The Fish and Wildlife Service report highlights two Supreme Court decisions as likely contributors to wetland losses (see “Background” section below).

“Each day that the administration delays finalizing Clean Water Act guidance means real losses in wetlands and streams,” says Steve Kline, Director of the Center for Agricultural & Private Lands, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership. “While it is true that a year has passed since the guidance was submitted for final review, a decade has passed since Clean Water Act protections for some of our most important waters were thrown into disarray. In the absence of a strong Clean Water Act, wetlands are being drained at an alarming rate. Waiting has ceased to be a viable option.”

"The bottom line is you can't have trout or salmon without clean water, so the Obama Administration needs to get this policy established soon," says Steve Moyer, Vice President of Government Affairs for Trout Unlimited. "Without more effective protections provided by the Clean Water Act guidance for headwater streams, entire watersheds could suffer – and America's anglers will pay the price."

While the White House hesitates to act, clean, safe drinking water; critical wildlife habitat; outdoor sports enjoyed by tens of millions of America; and an annual economic contribution of \$145 billion by hunting, angling, and wildlife watching hang in the balance. To slow the rate of wetland loss and negative impacts to drinking water and flood control, the Obama Administration should promptly finalize clean water guidance. Doing so is a critical step toward restoring lasting protections to at-risk wetlands, lakes, and streams and putting us back on the path to clean, healthy waters and wetlands for all Americans.

Background

The strength and effectiveness of the Clean Water Act have been undermined by two ambiguous U.S. Supreme Court decisions (*SWANCC* and *Rapanos*). Damaging policy guidance issued by the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers in 2003 and 2008 added confusion about the scope of Clean Water Act protections.

Families, communities, farmers, and businesses large and small depend on clean, healthy waters for their health, jobs, and prosperity. The Clean Water Act is essential to keeping our drinking water safe; providing millions of acres of fish and wildlife habitat across the country; ensuring abundant clean water for irrigating crops; and bolstering the robust fishery, tourism, and outdoor recreation industries. Millions of jobs and billions of dollars in economic activity, as well as our hunting and angling traditions, are all at risk if Clean Water Act protections are not restored by the Obama Administration.

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