

TO: National Wildlife Federation

FROM: Lori Weigel, Public Opinion Strategies
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RE: Key Findings from National Survey of Hunters and Anglers Regarding Clean Water Act

DATE: July 9, 2015

A new bipartisan survey of sportsmen across the nation demonstrates broad support among these voters for applying the same rules and standards of the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands. Hunters and anglers perceive applying the Clean Water Act to smaller streams as a safeguard, rather than burdensome regulation that will hurt business. Those who support this policy believe that it is necessary to address water quality issues in these headwaters in order to ensure the quality in the downstream bodies of water. They also frequently express how these smaller streams are critically important to wildlife and fish. Support is broad-based and wide-spread, cutting across partisan and ideological divisions. It also endures after hearing arguments from both proponents and opponents of this policy.

Finally, this issue is one that has the potential to positively affect views of policy makers who support the application of Clean Water Act rules and standards to streams and wetlands. In fact, water quality and fish and wildlife habitat issues are ones that a majority of sportsmen tell us are of importance to their vote decisions, with nearly half (47 percent) saying it is of primary importance in their decision-making.

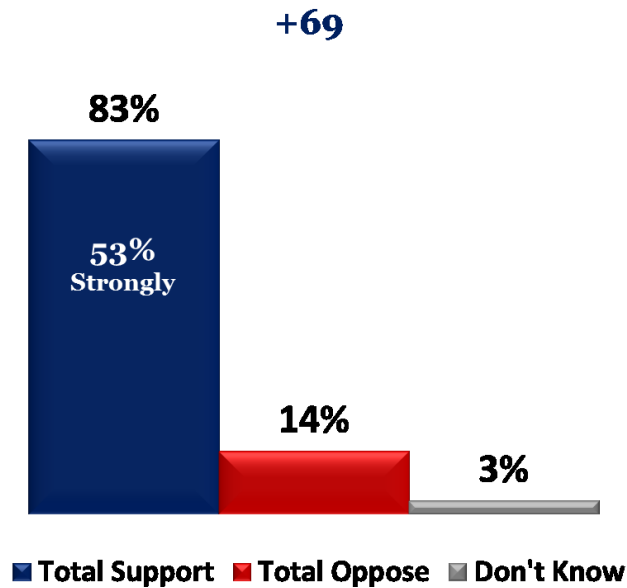
Among the key findings from the survey are the following:

- **Hunters and anglers support applying the rules and standards of the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands.** Survey respondents were provided with a brief, neutral explanation of the policy as follows:

“Last month, the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers said that smaller streams and wetlands that flow into larger rivers, lakes and eventually the ocean are protected under the Clean Water Act – a point that had been unclear after a number of recent court decisions. Do you support or oppose applying the same rules and standards from the Clean Water Act to these smaller, headwater streams and wetlands?”

More than four-in-five (83 percent) indicate support for this application of the Clean Water Act, with a majority of 53 percent indicating strong support. A mere 14 percent indicate opposition – a 69 point margin - as illustrated in the following graph.

Support for Applying Clean Water Act to Smaller Streams and Wetlands



Support for this policy is both broad-based and wide-spread among hunters and anglers, including...

- Republicans (77 percent), Independents (79 percent), and Democrats (97 percent);
 - Self-described Tea Party supporters (77 percent);
 - Hunters and anglers in the Northeast (86 percent), Midwest (85 percent), South (81 percent), and West (79 percent);
 - Women anglers and hunters (87 percent) and men (81 percent); and
 - More than three-quarters in every type of community, including 77 percent of rural sportsmen.
- **Hunters and anglers believe this is a common-sense application of existing law, which will benefit fish and wildlife, as well as water quality.** We provided respondents with the opportunity to explain their support and opposition to the policy. Those who support this policy believe that it is necessary to address water quality issues in these headwaters in order to ensure the quality in the downstream bodies of water. They also frequently express how these smaller streams are critically important to wildlife and fish as seen here:

“Our waters lead into one another. If one is bad, both are. Also, people need to be respectful. If it is a law with consequences, (they are) more likely to follow (it).” – **Republican Woman Hunter & Angler from Wisconsin**

“Because the smaller streams lead into bigger rivers and etc. The population of fish may increase. I believe this should've been in the original Clean Water Act.” -- **Democratic Man Hunter & Angler from Virginia**

“They drain into larger bodies of water. All natural water should be treated equally.” – **Independent Woman Angler from Colorado**

“These bodies of water are intimately connected, so are we to ignore them due to some technicality or red tape associated with language of a bill from forty years ago? The

intention was then and should now be considered the same no matter the bill's wording, making this issue a non-issue.” – Democratic Man Angler from Washington

“All water flows to one area at some point in time. Ignoring the smaller streams and wetlands would be detrimental to our major water sources. Over time it would destroy the plant life, fish, and wildlife.” – Republican Man Angler from Kentucky

“The water all runs into the bigger water. If the little ones get screwed up, then so will the big ones. The deer and elk and the rest of the wildlife drink from the little streams as well as the big ones.” – Independent Man Hunter & Angler from Colorado

- **The strong support may also be grounded in the fact that sportsmen view water quality protections as compatible with economic prosperity.** As the following graph illustrates, hunters and anglers do not consider protections for water and habitat as incompatible with economic prosperity.

We can protect our water quality and have a strong economy with good jobs for Americans at the same time, without having to choose one over the other.

82%

Sometimes protections for our water and a strong economy with good jobs are in conflict and we must choose one over the other.

15%

- **Likewise, support may also be due to the fact that sportsmen overwhelmingly say that the Clean Water Act has been a positive for the nation.** Fully 89 percent say that the Act has been more of a good thing for the country, with majorities of every single demographic sub-group echoing this sentiment.

- **Sportsmen view applying the Act to smaller streams and wetlands as a safeguard for water, rather than burdensome regulation.** When provided with two viewpoints, sportsmen respondents are more than three times as likely to think of this policy as a safeguard than a burden, as illustrated here:

Important safeguards to protect drinking water supplies, fish and wildlife habitat, public health, private property owners, small business owners, and taxpayers from water pollution and costly clean-ups

75%

Burdensome regulation that will tie up agriculture, developers and other businesses in red tape, hurt them too much financially, and cost jobs

22%

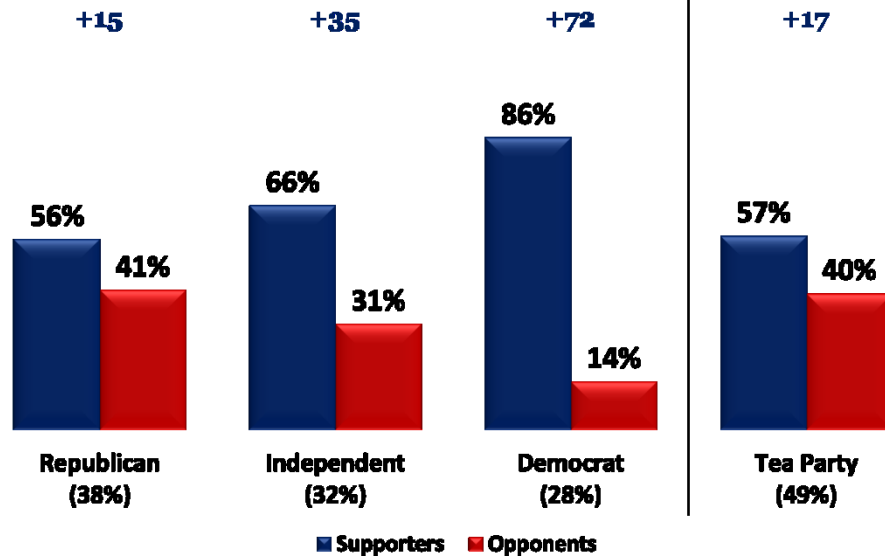
- **Once provided with two competing viewpoints, a healthy majority side with proponents of applying the same rules and standards from the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands.** Providing an equal representation of both sides in this debate, hunters and anglers side with supporters based on their arguments.

68% *Supporters of applying the same rules to smaller streams and wetlands say that these smaller streams provide drinking water for more than one-in-three Americans, are vital to public health, and are important for fish, waterfowl and other wildlife. Wetlands help filter out pollution, and act as a natural defense against flooding, yet they and our streams are increasingly threatened by development and pollution.*

30% *Opponents of applying the same rules to smaller streams and wetlands say that the Environmental Protection Agency is overstepping in trying to regulate small waterways, giving it the power to dictate land-use decisions and farming practices that are better left to state and local agencies. This will hurt businesses and farmers and cost jobs, due to more government red-tape and higher costs.*

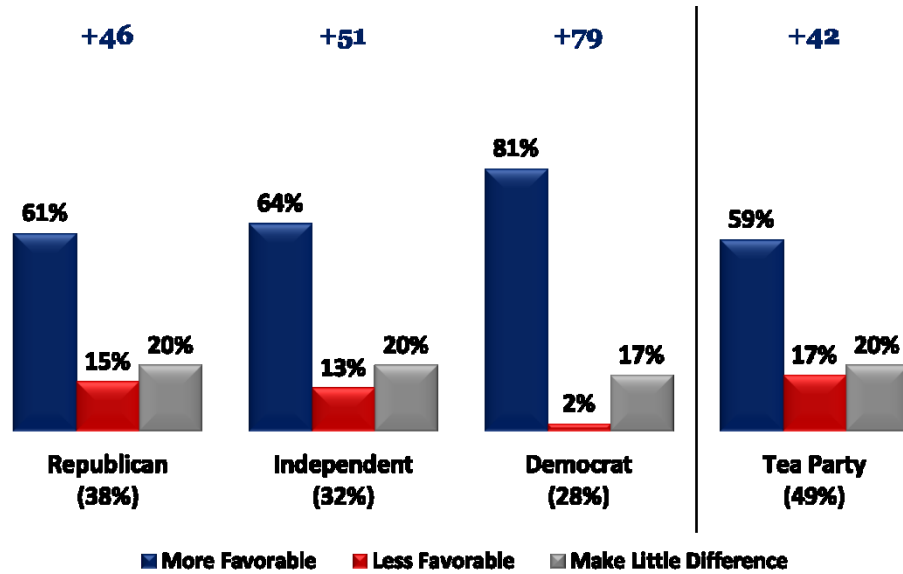
While there is a clear relationship between partisan affiliation and reaction to these arguments, it is worth noting that a majority of GOP sportsmen and self-identified Tea Party supporters continue to side with supporters of applying the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands.

**Side with Supporters or Opponents of Applying Clean Water Act to Smaller Streams
by Partisan Affiliation**



- **Water quality and fish and wildlife habitat issues are ones that sportsmen say are important to their vote decisions. In fact, nearly half (47 percent) say it is of “primary” importance in their decision-making.** We asked respondents to consider “other issues like the economy, health care, and education,” and then indicate “how important are issues involving protecting fish and wildlife habitat and the quality of our drinking water and streams, and rivers for you in deciding whether to support an elected public official.” Nearly all sportsmen say these issues are at least somewhat significant in their vote decisions (92 percent), but a plurality of 47 percent regard them as “very important,” meaning a “primary factor” in their vote decision.
- **More specifically, the application of the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands has the potential to have a positive effect on the image of supportive Senators with this audience of hunters and anglers – a typically more conservative and male audience.** We also asked how their view of their U.S. Senator could be affected if they support this policy. It is clear this would be a boon for that official, as two-thirds say they would have a more favorable opinion of their Senator who upholds this application of the Clean Water Act. Only one-in-ten would feel less favorably (11 percent). Moreover, sportsmen across the partisan spectrum admit feeling impressed with their Senator if they stand to uphold this application of the law.

Perceptions of Senator who Supports Applying Clean Water Act to Smaller Streams
by Partisan Affiliation



- In conclusion, the survey clearly demonstrates that sportsmen across the nation and across the partisan spectrum support applying the Clean Water Act to smaller streams and wetlands. This support is grounded in a sense that this is an important safeguard and that the Act has worked well for larger rivers and bodies of water. Hunters and anglers reject the idea that this would be burdensome regulations and overwhelmingly side with supporters' arguments over criticisms of the policy.

METHODOLOGY:

From June 23–July 4, 2015, Public Opinion Strategies and Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research completed 1000 interviews with registered voters who also identify as hunters, anglers or both. Half of the interviews were conducted on landline and cell phones, with the other half conducted via internet panels. Respondents are from throughout the United States and the sample was compared to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service surveys of adults who hunt or fish for demographic representation.