

Clean Water Act Anniversary

October 18 marks the 29th anniversary of one of the nation's most significant environmental laws, the Clean Water Act, that was signed into law by republican President Richard M. Nixon. As the Act nears thirty, the public, Congress, and the Bush Administration should recognize the Clean Water Act's successes, but also commit to achieving the Act's still unmet promise of ensuring clean water for all Americans.

Clean water is essential to our health, our economy, our environment, and our way of life. Some of us take clean water for granted, but it was not that long ago that many of our nation's waters were in serious trouble. In the early 1970's excessive pollution plagued our waterways: Lake Erie was considered biologically dead, major waterways like the San Francisco Bay and the Mississippi were virtually open sewers, and only 30 to 40 percent of America's lakes, rivers, and coastal waters were estimated to be safe for fishing and swimming. Even the mighty Potomac River in our nation's capitol was considered a severe threat to anyone who came in contact with it.

In 1972 an outraged public demanded that Congress act, and they did by passing the Clean Water Act. The law declared that eliminating water pollution by 1985 was a national goal.

We have reaped the benefits of this promise in numerous ways. Today 60 percent of our nation's lakes, rivers, and coastal areas are safe for swimming and fishing, wetlands losses have slowed to one-quarter of the rate of wetlands destruction in 1972, and modern sewage treatment prevents most raw sewage from reaching our rivers, lakes, and coastal areas.

But as we get ready to celebrate the Clean Water Act's 30th anniversary a year from now, many Americans are still waiting for the promise of clean water to be kept. Nearly 40 percent of America's rivers, lakes and coastal waters are still not safe for fishing and swimming. We have yet to control polluted runoff from farm fields and city streets. Our precious wetland resources continue to be destroyed at an alarming rate. State and federal governments have yet to fully implement and enforce the law that was passed nearly 30 years ago.

Here are some north state waters that have pollution problems identified by the state. Many more have not been identified, including source creeks for the major rivers, due to inadequate or nonexistent monitoring.

Waterway	Toxicity	Source	Priority
Colusa Drain	Carbofuran/Furadan	agriculture	medium
	Group A Pesticides	agriculture	medium
	Malathion	agriculture	medium
	Methyl Parathion	agriculture	medium
	Unknown Toxicity	agriculture	medium
Feather River, Lower	Diazinon	agriculture	high
	Group A Pesticides	agriculture	low
	Mercury	abandoned mines	medium
	Unknown Toxicity	unknown	medium
Sacramento River (Red Bluff to Delta)	Diazinon	agriculture	high
	Mercury	abandoned mines	high
	Unknown Toxicity	source unknown	medium
	Cadmium	abandoned mines	high
	Copper	abandoned mines	high
	Zinc	abandoned mines	high

California has also lost 91% of the estimated five million wetland acres that were present in the 1780's, leaving less than 450,000 acres in the state (Audubon 1992).

Approximately 200,000 acres of wetlands remain from the original four million acres in California's Central Valley (ecoregion [6]) (Audubon 1992; Kempka and Kollash 1990), making the remaining wetland savanna acreage critical to the vitality of the wildlands in this region.

Every time a state agency decides to permit an increase in the amount of pollution into a river or decides not to cleanup a polluted river, people who live, swim, or fish on that river are affected. Every time a developer is allowed to destroy acres of wetlands, our drinking water supply is threatened and aquatic habitat is lost forever. Every time an animal factory farm moves into a rural community, stores manure in open-air lagoons, and allows that manure to get into our streams, public health is seriously compromised.

As we move closer to the 30th anniversary of the Clean Water Act, we must challenge Congress, the Bush Administration, and all state environmental agencies to fully implement and enforce the Clean Water Act. Within the next year we call on Congress and the Administration to:

- Pass enforcement legislation that ensures polluters are held accountable for violating the law.

- Amend the Clean Water Act to reaffirm that the law is meant to protect all waters, including isolated waters.
- Implement, not weaken, Clean Water Act's Total Maximum Daily Loads program - the watershed clean up program for the most polluted rivers, lakes, and coastal waters.
- Support legislation to close the so-called Tulloch loophole, which developers have exploited to destroy wetlands and degrade streams without, permits or controls.
- Stop the discharge of raw sewage into our streets, neighborhoods, and playgrounds by releasing strong Sanitary Sewer Overflow rules.

Address coastal polluted runoff by reauthorizing the Coastal Zone Management Act with targeted funding for the Coastal Nonpoint Pollution Control Program. The Clean Water Act has been an effective tool in addressing our most egregious pollution problems, but the job is only half done. For our quality of life and for our children and generations to come, it is time to keep the promise of the Clean Water Act.

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