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NC Sportsmen Rally Behind Clean Water Act Proposals

Raleigh, NC July 22, 2104 - Over the last few weeks, 60 groups totaling tens of thousands of members and supporters weighed in on the recent Clean Water Act rules affecting intermittent, headwater streams and isolated wetlands. These groups represented a huge range of North Carolina citizens, and included members from statewide hunting and fishing groups, the two most prestigious societies of fish and wildlife biologists and professionals, and even student groups. The groups submitted formal comments conveying collective support for the “Definition of ‘Waters of the United States’ Under the Clean Water Act” rule recently proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers.

Historically, the Clean Water Act has been a vital tool for maintaining or restoring water quality and wetland habitats where hunters and anglers spend their time pursuing fish and game. Despite this, the Clean Water Act has been weakened by two Supreme Court Decisions and subsequent agency guidance. Tim Gestwicki, CEO of the NC Wildlife Federation, said his group fully supported the 40-year-old Act and clarifying rules. **“If we don’t act responsibly on full water protections,” he said, “it’s like having protection for your home, but then leaving the door unlocked and the alarm system turned off.”**

The letter underscored the proven connections between these non-adjacent wetlands and downstream waters, and outlined how best to address protections for these wetlands in the final rule. There is sufficient scientific evidence that these waters as defined by the agencies have important biological, hydrological, and chemical connections to these downstream waters. **“We stand firm and united in calling for strong clean water rules to be issued,”** said Jim Mabrey, Council Chairman of NC Trout Unlimited. **“It’s imperative we do this for our coldwater fisheries.”**

By standing up for these small streams and wetlands, the Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers are protecting some of our state’s most important fish and waterfowl habitat. Lenny Smathers, Vice President of NC BASS Nation, **was encouraged by the wide and broad scope of the signing groups. “It’s a resounding call for action to protect the places important to us as hunters and anglers. Regardless of our preferred sports, our common denominator is we all need healthy habitats for outdoor pursuits.”**

The comments also pointed out:

- Forestry and farming exemptions remained intact.
- Emphasis on encouraging the rules to also cover Carolina bays and prairie potholes, also known as the “duck factory” region.
- North Carolinians depend on the state’s 242,500 miles of rivers and streams for clean and abundant drinking water, diverse and abundant fish and wildlife habitat, and local fishing, hunting, birdwatching, and boating recreation that supports a strong outdoor recreation economy.
- Wildlife recreation related activities lead to \$3.3 billion spent per year in NC alone, and these expenditures support more than 95,000 jobs in the state.

The comment letter ended with a statement of support for all of North Carolina’s aquatic ecosystems and the species and hobbies they support.

“We applaud the agencies for their efforts to protect these waters and look forward to working with them to finalize and implement the waters of the U.S. rule. From mountain trout anglers, to Piedmont bass enthusiasts and duck hunters in eastern NC, this is a critical step towards protecting our sporting heritage and our outdoor future.”

Link to the full letter and sign on groups [HERE](#) The open public comment period runs through October 20, 2014.