



HUNTING AND FISHING

In January 2003, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued new guidelines to field staff. Their directions: Limit the kinds of wetlands, streams and other waterways they protect under the Clean Water Act. The result? Twenty million acres, or 20 percent, of the lower 48 states' remaining wetlands, as well as untold numbers of streams, lakes and ponds, are more threatened with pollution or outright destruction than they have been since the Clean Water Act was passed more than 30 years ago. Included are millions of acres of duck-rich prairie potholes, pocket swamps where snipe and woodcock feed, and forested wetlands cruised by otter and mink. Many are wetlands like playa lakes that may appear to lack a direct connection to other surface waters. Others are small, intermittent streams that go dry during certain seasons. But all are critical for some of North America's most cherished game animals and game fish. According to National Wildlife Federation (NWF) wetlands



duck blind

Native brook trout rising to a fly in an alder-ringed beaver pond.

Gadwall and teal wheeling over coastal marshes.

Steelhead coursing upstream, pushed by instinct alone.

Bird dogs locked on point, quivering at the scent of swampwoods and woodcock.

Such is the heritage of American hunting and fishing. And just such priceless memories are threatened as never before.



fly fishing

policy specialist Julie Sibbing, "these changes represent a crushing blow for an enormous number of wildlife species evolved to depend on an equally diverse suite of wetlands and streams." And a serious threat to a cherished sporting legacy.

The federal agencies claim that the guidelines are needed because of a 2001 U.S. Supreme Court ruling, *Solid Waste Agency of Northern*

Cook County vs. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (known as the SWANCC decision). The ruling stopped a long-standing practice of deeming isolated, non-navigable intrastate waters protected under the Clean Water Act as long as they were used by migratory birds. "But the changes we've seen go far beyond the SWANCC decision, which was based solely on migratory bird presence," says Sibbing. "These are radical efforts that are threatening waters that have long been protected." The administration also proposed to change the rules of the Clean Water Act. After sportsmen convincingly weighed-in against any rule changes, this effort was abandoned, but the inappropriate guidelines are still in place.

WHAT IS AT RISK?

SOME OF THE NATION'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER GAME AND FISH SPECIES.

DUCKS AND GEESE

The most common breeding ducks of the prairie potholes—mallards, northern pintails, gadwalls, blue-winged teal, and northern shovelers—include some of the most sought-after waterfowl for hunters. But it's not just about prairie potholes. Black ducks are a signature species of upland boreal forest swamps and ponds. Wood ducks use wetlands for all of their life cycle—nesting, rearing, feeding, and staging areas for migration. The standing dead trees often associated with small flowages and secluded wetlands provide critical nesting habitat for such cavity nesters.

And it's not just about ducks. Nearly all of the mid-continent's greater white-fronted geese stage in the Great Plains rainwater basins during their migrations. Tundra swans breed heavily in "polygonal ponds," a curious wetland type of the Arctic tundra. Most are small, measuring less than 30 square feet, and form as permafrost freezes and thaws, causing large cracks in the soil surface that eventually fill with meltwater.

FISH

Across the Northeast, beaver ponds provide classic—and critical—habitat for native brook trout. In the Pacific Northwest, legendary runs of salmon and steelhead rely on small headwater streams. And everywhere the types of wetlands most threatened under agency interpretations of the SWANCC decision serve as critical water filtering and stream recharge zones. Rebounding populations of American shad in the Mid-Atlantic and striped bass in the Southeast would be negatively impacted by the inevitable decrease in water quality and flow that follows the destruction of wetlands.

GAMEBIRDS

Woodcock and Wilson's snipe are heavily dependent on wetlands. Woodcock, beloved by bird hunters, probe for earthworms in the moist soils associated with small, open-water habitats. From alder seeps in the Northeast to Carolina pocosins and Louisiana swamps, woodcock habitat is threatened. Snipe prefer standing water in wadable depths—precisely the kinds of habitats provided by at-risk wetlands, both great and small.

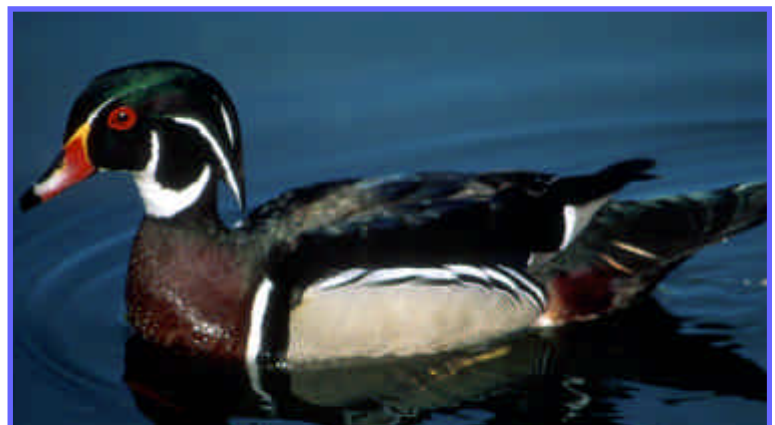
MAMMALS

Mammals such as moose and bear rely heavily on wetlands. Moose use wetlands as forage cover and as places to escape biting insects. Black bears key in on small wetlands for critical feeding as they come out of hibernation. Small pocket wetlands heat up more quickly than larger bodies of water, and provide lush growths of cowslip, cattails and skunk cabbage in the important early weeks of spring. Otter, mink, and beaver utilize wetlands extensively, and in turn serve as important prey for carnivores such as mountain lions and wolves.



gadwall

Each year the prairie pothole region of the Dakotas hosts an average of 3.8 million pairs of mallards, blue-winged teal, northern pintails, gadwall and northern shovelers.



wood duck

PRAIRIE POTHOLE—THE HEART OF WATERFOWL PRODUCTION IN CRISIS

Most prairie potholes are tiny: 80 percent of those in the Dakotas are less than an acre in size. Yet the prairie pothole region of the upper Great Plains provides the primary breeding habitat for 40 percent of the continent's puddle ducks, such as mallards, blue-winged teal, and northern pintails. These shallow wetlands support 70 percent of the breeding ducks in the prairie pothole region of the United States, and are the key to waterfowl carrying capacity in the region. That means they are critical to keeping the continent's marshes, swamps and coastal sounds filled with ducks and geese during hunting seasons.

Why are they so important? Warming early in the spring, prairie potholes host a nutritious stew of scuds, mosquito larvae and fairy shrimp just as millions of weary ducks arrive. About half of the small, shallow wetlands in North and South Dakota already have been drained for agricultural production. More than 95 percent of those in Minnesota and Iowa have vanished. When it comes to prairie potholes, there's not a single one left to spare.

HEADWATER STREAMS—WHERE TOMORROW'S TROPHY FISH LIVE

Stripping away protection of intermittent streams could also wreck the life cycles of important sportfish species. Headwater creeks that dry up in summer heat are absolutely critical to world-famous fish such as summer steelhead and Coho salmon. These fish seek out quiet headwaters flush with aquatic insects, and migrate to headwater streams far up the watershed. As the water recedes, young fish migrate with the falling stream, then pulse back up into the calm, nutrient-rich headwaters with the following year's rains. Some young steelhead might ebb and flow with the rising and falling water levels for several years until they are large enough to migrate to the sea. In particularly dry years, the stream stretches that host young steelhead during wet seasons might be five miles or more from the nearest flowing water.

WHAT DO HUNTERS AND ANGLERS SAY?

Outdoor enthusiasts and biologists from around the country know the devastating toll wetlands and stream protection roll-backs will take on game and fish.

WATERFOWL

"If we lose wetlands as a result of reduced federal protections, breeding duck numbers could decline, potentially causing shortened or even closed duck hunting seasons, based on the current criteria for setting them."—*Ron Reynolds, project leader for Habitat Population and Evaluation Team, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service*

FISH

"My fear is that government officials, developers and landowners will make misguided decisions about what is and what is not a connected waterway. You could say, 'Oh, that little swamp way over there by that headwall, that's no good for fish.' But in the winter it will be absolutely filled with juvenile Coho salmon, steelhead, trout, minnows and suckers."—*Jim Martin, recently retired chief of Oregon's fisheries division and member of the National Wildlife Federation Board of Directors.*



black bear



elk

"Drain these small wetlands and you

create permanent drought.

That's what it means to wildlife."

—Ron Reynolds

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

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MAMMALS

"Wetlands are a real refuge for large game animals. Moose populations have increased in the Northeast because upland wetlands have regrown with dense vegetation, and the early sprouting and greenup that occurs in flowages and small ponds are a magnet for black bears just coming out of their denning areas. Any further disturbance would be a disaster."—*Steve Wright, Northeast regional organizer with the National Wildlife Federation*

GET INVOLVED

Your Favorite Spot—It Was There Last Season and Provided Healthy Habitat for Wildlife, But Now?

That oxbow swamp where the mallards piled into your decoys at first light...

That willow-rimmed bog where the trophy moose left you gasping for breath...

That beaver pond with fat brookies perched so far up the valley that no one in their right mind could find it—but you did...

That cane-choked riverbottom that holds woodcock season in and season out...

Hunters and anglers can no longer count on them to be there.

This effort to strip wildlife-rich waters from the Clean Water Act affects you. And you can do something about it.

ACTION NEEDED:

Let the Bush administration and your federal legislators know that you do not support the administration's guidelines that weaken the Clean Water Act because they put America's waters and wildlife at risk.

Speak to your local sporting association or hunting and fishing club to educate others about this issue. Individually or collectively, write or call your senators and representative in Congress today, or log on to <http://www.nwf.org/ourprograms> (click on [Wetlands Conservation](#) under "National Programs") to learn more. Ask your legislators and President Bush to:

- Withdraw the harmful guidelines
- Fully enforce the Clean Water Act to ensure protections for all our valuable wetlands and streams
- Support the passage of the Clean Water Authority Restoration Act of 2003 (H.R. 962 and S. 473)



moose in New England



**FOR MORE INFORMATION
PLEASE CONTACT:**

Julie Sibbing, 202-797-6832 or
sibbing@nwf.org