

February 16, 2012

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Re: Colorado Hunters, Anglers, and Conservationists Urge You to Expediently Restore Clean Water Act Protections for Wetlands, Lakes, and Streams

Dear Mr. President:

The Colorado sportsman-conservation organizations listed above, representing thousands of hunters, anglers, and conservationists statewide, urge your administration to expediently finalize your guidance and initiate rulemaking to clarify the waters protected by the Clean Water Act. Restoring protections for streams, wetlands, and other waters is a priority that you share with sportsmen and women here in Colorado and across the country.

Coloradans depend on their 107,000 miles of rivers and streams for clean and abundant drinking water, diverse and abundant fish and wildlife habitat, and local fishing, hunting, bird-watching, and boating recreation that support a strong outdoor recreation economy. Wetlands and riparian corridors comprise less than 2% of Colorado's landscape, but provide benefits to more than 75% of the wildlife species in the state. Almost half of the Colorado Division of Wildlife's "Tier 1" vertebrate species depend on wetland and aquatic habitats and are described in the State Wildlife Action Plan as "Species of Greatest Conservation Need." Colorado's headwater streams support nearly all of the remaining populations of Colorado's three species of native cutthroat trout. These populations already have been seriously affected by non-native fish and habitat loss.

But now well over half of these stream miles flow intermittently or are headwater streams that are now at risk of pollution and degradation. Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006 have confused and limited the scope of the Clean Water Act and made it much more difficult to maintain and restore Colorado's intermittently flowing streams, headwaters, freshwater wetlands, and playa lakes. These at risk waters support a strong outdoor recreation economy and a myriad of fish and wildlife species. In 2006, 2.2 million people participated in wildlife-related recreation in Colorado, spending \$3.0 billion total. Sportfishing alone contributed \$1.4 billion to the Colorado economy, supporting 11,800 jobs.

Weakened stream and wetland protections on the federal level leave these waters more vulnerable to adverse impacts from development and discharges of pollutants which ultimately could result in changing water temperatures, increasing erosion and sedimentation, changing nutrient levels, lowering water quality, and degrading critical and unique fish and wildlife habitats. The dredging and filling of these waters also reduces their flood storage capacity and increases flooding and flood damage downstream.

In order to effectively safeguard key components of our economy, the sports and traditions that Coloradans enjoy, and the health and integrity of some of our most important natural resources, it is essential to act now to begin restoring lost Clean Water Act protections as consistent with existing law and science.

We commend your administration for taking a very positive first step last spring by proposing new guidance for the Army Corps of Engineers and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to follow in determining Clean Water Act jurisdiction. The draft guidance, which garnered broad support from hundreds of thousands of people during the public comment period, is science-based and clearly respects the Supreme Court's decisions. To complete this process, we urge the Corps and EPA to finalize and begin following the guidance at the earliest possible date.

Although issuing final guidance is valuable, it is even more important to initiate the rulemaking process to clarify and strengthen the Corps and EPA regulatory definitions of "waters of the United States." A successful rulemaking process can provide clarity about the specific waters covered by the Act – clarity that is badly needed by land owners, developers, conservationists, and state and federal agencies alike.

In closing, our organizations and members across Colorado strongly urge you to commence rulemaking in early 2012 in order to safeguard America's clean water legacy, as well as our hunting and fishing heritage. We applaud the steps taken by your administration this year, and we are committed to actively supporting the essential next step.

Respectfully,

Colorado Wildlife Federation
Colorado Backcountry Hunters and Anglers
Bull Moose Sportsmen's Alliance
The Drift Fly Shop, Pueblo
Colorado Trout Unlimited, State Council
Collegiate Peaks Anglers, Trout Unlimited
Eagle Valley Chapter, Trout Unlimited
Evergreen Chapter, Trout Unlimited
Five Rivers Chapter, Trout Unlimited
Gunnison Gorge Anglers, Trout Unlimited
Rocky Mountain Flycasters, Trout Unlimited
Yampa Valley Flyfishers, Trout Unlimited
Western Resource Advocates