RE: Sixty Groups from Across the Country Urge Support for the Critical Safeguards in the 2015 Clean Water Rule

Dear Chairman Smith, Chairman Biggs, Ranking Member Johnson, and Ranking Member Bonamici,

In light of the House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee on the Environment holding a hearing to discuss “The Future of WOTUS: Examining the Role of States,” we write on behalf of our millions of supporters to express our support of the critical clean water protections laid out in the 2015 Clean Water Rule, and our opposition to rolling back those necessary protections.

The Clean Water Rule, finalized by EPA and Army Corps in 2015, was the result of vigorous public engagement over several years and developed using clear science and legal reasoning. The rulemaking was also a response to a request by stakeholders—ranging from states to regulated dischargers to environmental groups—for more clarity regarding which waterways were protected under the Clean Water Act. The agencies provided ample time for stakeholders to engage in the rulemaking process—they took comments for over 200 days, from April 21 to November 14, 2014, and held over 400 stakeholder meetings across the country. Over one million people have commented in support of the protections laid out in the 2015 Clean Water Rule since it was first proposed in 2014.

Years of scientific review, which included the findings of more than 1,200 peer-reviewed publications, led the agencies to conclude that headwater, seasonal, and rain-dependent streams, along with numerous wetlands and other water bodies, serve critical functions and should be entitled to the protections laid out in the Clean Water Act. Notably, one in three Americans receive drinking water from public water systems that draw supply from the kinds of streams the Clean Water Rule sought to protect. Moreover, wetlands filter pollution from contaminated runoff, recharge groundwater supplies, and store large volumes of flood water. As we have seen
from recent extreme weather events, protecting wetlands, which serve as flood mitigation systems, is critical – 9.6 million homes and $390 billion in property are located in 15,000 square miles of flood-prone areas. During Hurricane Sandy alone, wetlands avoided $625 million in direct flood damages.

The Clean Water Rule also supports the outdoor recreation economy. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, Americans spend $887 billion annually in outdoor recreation, and the outdoor recreation economy is responsible for 7.6 million American jobs. Streams and wetlands, many of which would be protected by the 2015 rule, provide essential fish and wildlife habitat and other recreational opportunities that are crucial for hunters, anglers, paddlers, and hikers, as well as the small businesses they support. Indeed, according to a bipartisan survey, 83 percent of hunters and anglers supported the 2015 Clean Water Rule.

Our country’s waterways and the American public have benefitted enormously from the protections laid out in the 1972 Clean Water Act. However, by attacking the Clean Water Rule and attempting to redefine the Waters of the United States to narrow the scope of waters protected, the Trump Administration is defying the intent of the Clean Water Act itself, jeopardizing progress towards achieving more fishable, swimmable, and drinkable water for all Americans.

We thank the committee for its consideration of the views expressed in this letter and urge members to keep in mind the necessary public health and environmental protections laid out in the Clean Water Rule as it is discussed in the hearing today.

Sincerely,

National Groups
Alaska Wilderness League
American Rivers
American Sustainable Business Council
Clean Water Action
Earthjustice
Endangered Species Coalition
Environment America
Hip Hop Caucus
League of Conservation Voters
League of United Latin American Citizens
National Audubon Society
National Parks Conservation Association
Natural Resources Defense Council
Physicians for Social Responsibility
River Network
Sierra Club
Voces
Regional Groups
Connecticut River Conservancy
John Flannagan Dam Advisory Group
Tennessee Riverkeeper

Local/State-Based Groups
Alabama Rivers Alliance, Alabama
Black Warrior Riverkeeper, Birmingham, Alabama
Cahaba River Society, Birmingham, Alabama
Choctawhatchee Riverkeeper, Troy, Alabama
Hurricane Creekkeeper, Tuscaloosa, Alabama
Little River Waterkeeper, Fort Payne, Alabama
One World Adventure Company, Fort Payne, Alabama
Copper River Watershed Project, Copper River Drainage, Alaska
Dry Creek Conservancy, Sacramento, California
Environment Florida, Florida
Florida Wildlife Federation, Tallahassee, Florida
Save the Manatee Club, Florida
Hanalei Watershed Hui, Hanalei, Hawaii
Idaho Conservation League, Idaho
Prairie Rivers Network, Champaign Illinois
Environmental Law & Policy Center, Chicago, Illinois
Illinois Council of Trout Unlimited, Illinois
Maine Rivers, Maine
Massachusetts Rivers Alliance, Massachusetts
Freshwater Future, Michigan
New Hampshire Rivers Council, New Hampshire
Hackensack Riverkeeper, Hackensack, New Jersey
Onondaga Environmental Institute, Syracuse, New York
Groundwork Cincinnati-Mill Creek, Cincinnati, Ohio
Mill Creek Watershed Council of Communities, Cincinnati, Ohio
Ohio Environmental Council, Columbus, Ohio
WaterWatch of Oregon, Oregon
Columbia Riverkeeper, Hood River, OR/Columbia River Basin
Environment Oregon, Portland, Oregon
TN Environmental Council, Nashville, Tennessee
Environment Texas, Austin, Texas
Utah Rivers Council, Salt Lake City, Utah
Friends of the Russell Fork, Virginia
Virginia League of Conservation Voters, Virginia
Virginia Conservation Network, Virginia
Milwaukee Riverkeeper, Milwaukee, Wisconsin
Northwest Watershed Institute, Washington
Puget Soundkeeper Alliance, Seattle, Washington
River Alliance of Wisconsin, Wisconsin
OVEC-Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Huntington, West Virginia