



For Immediate Release March 26, 2014

Contact:
Ben Hellerstein, Environment Massachusetts
914-420-9706 | ben@environmentmassachusetts.org

Environmental groups hail EPA action as biggest step for clean water in a decade

Boston— Today, coming off the biggest step forward for clean water in more than a decade, Environment America stood with local organizations and officials to celebrate the Environmental Protection Agency’s proposal to restore Clean Water Act protections to waterways across New England and the rest of the country. The EPA’s proposed rule, announced Tuesday, would close loopholes from polluter-led litigation that leave 55% of New England’s streams at risk of unchecked pollution.

“From Long Island Sound and Narragansett Bay to the Charles River and lakes of Maine and New Hampshire, we cherish clean water here in New England,” said John Rumpler, senior attorney for Environment America. The group and its state affiliates – including Environment Massachusetts, Environment Rhode Island, Environment Connecticut, and Environment Maine - have worked for more than a decade to restore the Clean Water Act protections proposed yesterday. “We are thrilled to see the Army Corps of Engineers and EPA moving forward to protect all of our waters.”

Bob Zimmerman, Executive Director of the Charles River Watershed Association, Gene Benson, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions, and Deborah Szaro, Deputy Administrator of EPA Region 1 in New England all joined Environment America in celebrating the proposed clean water protections.

“For over four decades, the Clean Water Act has protected our right to safe drinking water and healthy water to swim, fish and play in,” said EPA Regional Administrator Curt Spalding in a written statement. “With our proposal to clarify Clean Water Act protection for upstream waters that are vital to downstream communities, we are continuing to protect America’s waters in a more efficient way.”

This rulemaking comes after a decade of uncertainty over the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act, following polluter-led Supreme Court challenges in 2001 and 2006. The rule, which could be finalized as soon as later this year, would restore Clean Water Act protections to many of New England’s wetlands and more than half of its streams.

“MACC commends EPA for this important action,” said Gene Benson of the Massachusetts Association of Conservation Commissions. “The work of Massachusetts Conservation Commissions protecting wetlands and water resources is complemented by the work of EPA and the Army Corps administering the federal Clean Water Act. We welcome our federal partners’ reaffirmation of their jurisdiction to protect streams and wetlands everywhere in our country.”

Local and statewide officials also joined in praising the move to restore clean water protections:

“The Clean Water Act was a major driver in the clean up of the Boston Harbor and Charles River in the 1990s,” said Boston Mayor Martin J. Walsh. “As a result, Boston's waterfront is undergoing a great renaissance; however there is still work to be done, and EPA's proposed rule change will help us get to the next level.”

“From the Housatonic to the Charles, and every river and stream in between, Massachusetts is healthy when our water is healthy,” said U.S. Senator Ed Markey. “This proposed rule will mean the Bay State and the waterways of New England will remain protected from pollution, and keep our water safe to drink and enjoy for generations to come.”

In September 2013, the EPA announced it was moving forward with the rulemaking to restore Clean Water Act protections to waterways throughout New England and across the country. It simultaneously released a draft science report on the connection between smaller streams and wetlands and downstream waters, which makes the scientific case for the rulemaking. Members of the public submitted more than 150,000 public comments in support of the report's findings that these waterways merit protection under the law.

Many of the nation's biggest polluters – mostly outside New England - are already fighting tooth and nail to keep the loopholes intact. With thousands of miles of pipelines running through wetlands, Big Oil has threatened “legal warfare” over the issue. With factory farms dumping millions of gallons of manure every year, corporate agribusiness is attacking the rule as a “land grab” to scare farmers. And with mountaintop removal burying valley streams in rubble and waste, big coal is also opposing the renewal of clean water protections.

Facing polluter opposition, Environment America and its state affiliates in New England and across the country have waged an intensive multi-year campaign to restore these Clean Water Act protections – including more than 1 million face-to-face conversations with people across the country, and rallying more than 400 local elected officials, 300 farmers, and 300 small business owners to call on the Obama administration to take action.

“This rule would protect the streams and wetlands that filter and feed New England waterways like the Charles River, Narragansett Bay, the Long Island Sound, and the lakes of Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont,” said Rumpel. “When finalized, this rule would be the biggest step forward for clean water in more than a decade. Thank you, Administrator Gina McCarthy and the EPA for fighting to protect clean water. Now let's get the job done.”

###

Environment America is a state-based, citizen-funded environmental advocacy organization dedicated to a cleaner, greener, healthier future. Regional affiliates include Environment Massachusetts, Environment New Hampshire, Environment Rhode Island, and Environment Connecticut.

www.environmentamerica.org