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## Congress Acts to Protect Clean Water

Tuesday, May 22, 2007  
By: American Rivers

### Clean Water Restoration Act Introduced in the House

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**Washington, DC** — Americans deserve clean water. It's a principal that more than 150 members of Congress, led by Representatives James Oberstar (D-MN), John Dingle (D-MI) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) are showing they agree with, by sponsoring the Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA) of 2007. In recent years, both federal agencies and the courts have removed the vital protections of the clean water act from millions of miles of rivers and streams, and many millions of acres of wetlands. If passed, CWRA will restore full protection to the waters that millions of Americans and thriving communities all across the country depend on every day.

In response, Rebecca Wodder, President of American Rivers, issued the following statement:

"It's been about 340 years since Sir Isaac Newton was famously sitting under a tree, when a revolutionary idea, in the form of a falling apple, hit him right between the eyes, or so the story goes. Ever since, the whole idea of gravity hasn't been much of a mystery to anyone. Everything, including water, flows downhill. It's one of those laws you can't break, you can't bifurcate, and you can't ignore.

Today, our nation's wetlands, headwater and intermittent streams are under attack by polluters and our very own government. Last year, even some members of the Supreme Court appeared to turn their backs on the basic laws of gravity by removing Clean Water Act protection from many

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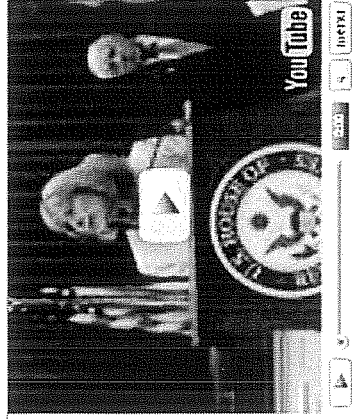
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waters that flow downstream.

It is lunacy to say the Mississippi River needs to be protected but the stream in your hometown that flows into it doesn't. Not only does it stand Sir Isaac Newton on his head, but it's a slap in the face to the millions of people who live near, work on, and play in America's rivers and streams. It's all the same water; it all has to be protected. A thriving river feeds a thriving community; it shouldn't be treated like a sewer.

So on behalf of the 65,000 American Rivers members and supporters across the country, and the millions of members of other environmental organizations, I'm proud to be standing next to Congressman Oberstar, Congressman Dingell and Congressman Ehlers today as they introduce their bill. Today more than 150 members of Congress have co-sponsored this bill and are standing up for clean water for all of us.

Congress must pass the Clean Water Restoration Act. Not only is this an important issue for the environment, but it effects all of us. It's important for our children, and for generations to come. I look forward to the day that we can all get back together, to celebrate the passage of this bill, and the return of common sense, to the responsibility of protecting our Nation's waters."

###

American Rivers is the only national organization standing up for healthy rivers so our communities can thrive. Through national advocacy, innovative solutions and our growing network of strategic partners, we protect and promote our rivers as valuable community assets that are vital to our health, safety and quality of life. Founded in 1973, American Rivers has more than 65,000 members and online supporters nationwide, with offices in Washington, DC and the Mid-Atlantic, Northeast, Midwest, Southeast, California and Northwest regions. [www.AmericanRivers.org](http://www.AmericanRivers.org)

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# Headwaters in a Warming World



**American Rivers**  
*Thriving By Nature*

## Key Points

Headwater streams and wetlands provide many benefits including:

- Flood control
- Groundwater recharge
- Water storage
- Pollution control
- Protection of biological diversity

Global warming threatens to:

- Increase flooding and droughts
- Reduce water supply
- Aggravate water quality problems

*U.S. Global Change Research Program*

## Key Statistics

55% of the water volume in large rivers in the northeastern U.S. stems from headwater streams.

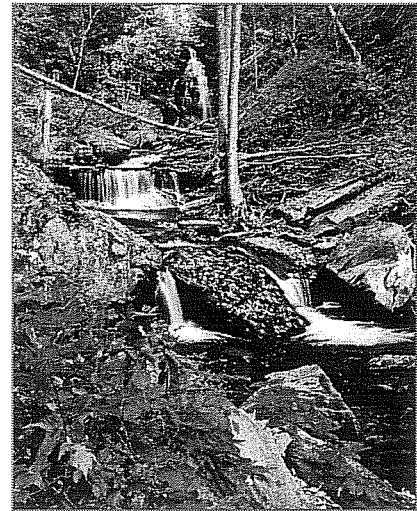
Urbanization of a 160-acre watershed in Pennsylvania led to 50,000 additional cubic feet of sediment being carried downstream every year.

Headwater Streams represent 75% or more of total stream length in a stream network.

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## The Case for Protecting our Headwaters

Global warming is expected to increase the frequency and intensity of floods and droughts, threaten water supplies and aggravate existing water quality problems. As a result, our communities will be increasingly vulnerable to natural disasters and disruptions to water supplies. We must reduce greenhouse gas emissions or face greater crises in the future. Just as important, we must begin to manage our water resources in anticipation of dramatic changes to our climate and in turn, our hydrologic cycle. Preserving headwater streams and wetlands reduces the downstream impacts of floods and droughts and helps ensure a consistent and safe supply of water. Rather than protecting these natural defenses, however, rapid development is destroying small streams and wetlands and impairing their ability to control floods, store water and process pollutants. Recent court decisions have further weakened federal protection of these water bodies. If we are to weather the uncertainties of global warming, we must reaffirm the government's duty to protect our headwater streams and wetlands by supporting H.R. 2421 and S. 1870, the Clean Water Restoration Act (CWRA).



*Ozone Falls, Courtesy of Jennifer Bulava*

## Global Warming Impacts

One of the greatest threats global warming poses is the disruption of the water supplies humans and other species depend on for survival. Throughout the country, warmer temperatures will increase evaporation, lowering surface water levels and groundwater recharge in many places. While increased precipitation may offset a portion of these losses, some regions will experience more intense and more frequent droughts. The Great Plains are expected to see some of the greatest reductions in soil moisture and surface water levels. Some models predict that extreme droughts will be a common occurrence in much of the country by the end of next century. Decreases in water availability will put further pressure on existing supplies and encourage overuse of groundwater resources and destruction of rivers through the construction of new dams.

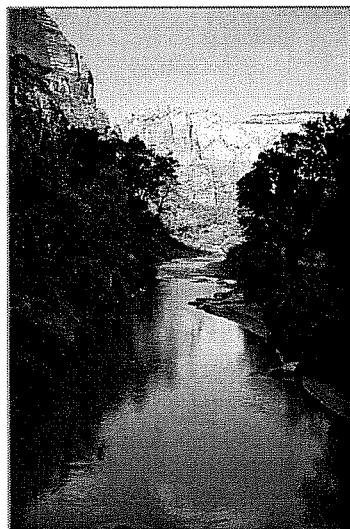
While water shortages will affect some regions, excessive rainfall will plague others. More frequent and more powerful extreme precipitation events will increase flooding in parts of the country. Earlier snowmelt and higher winter and spring precipitation will make mountainous areas particularly likely to experience increased flooding. These floods will claim lives and destroy property, especially in communities built in floodplains. They will also carry nutrients, toxics and other contaminants off of the landscape and into waterways, threatening human and ecosystem health. High velocity flows will damage river channels, further reducing their ability to control future floods.

## The Importance of Streams and Wetlands

Headwater streams and wetlands perform a variety of essential functions that provide communities and ecosystems with a steady supply of clean water. Small streams and wetlands are a primary source of water for the major rivers and aquifers that feed municipal, agricultural and industrial needs around the country. These waterways absorb and gradually release precipitation, which flows downstream in surface channels, feeding larger waterways. Fifty-five percent of the water volume in fourth- and higher-order rivers in the northeastern U.S. stems from headwater streams.

Headwater streams and wetlands are also a primary source of groundwater recharge. The water absorbed in these areas replenishes aquifers, which in turn feed rivers and streams. Especially in drier periods, groundwater can provide virtually all of a stream's flow. By absorbing precipitation and releasing it slowly, headwater streams and wetlands ensure a consistent supply of groundwater and surface flows, greatly reducing the impact of droughts.

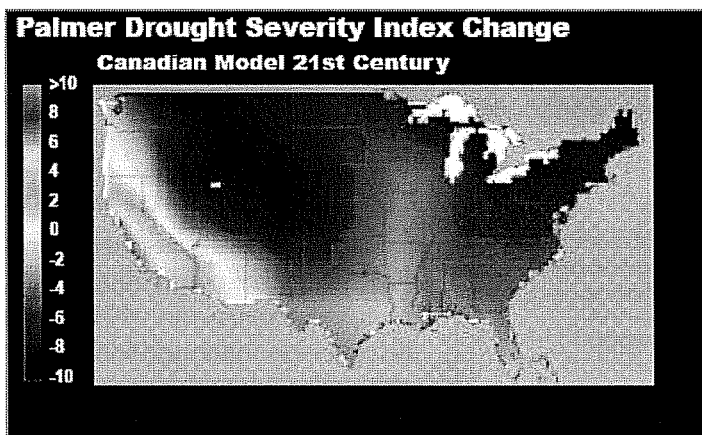
Headwater streams and wetlands also provide vital flood control by absorbing precipitation and slowing the movement of water through streambed friction. In areas where streams and wetlands have been filled in or paved over, precipitation moves rapidly across the surface and through larger waterways, overtopping river banks, destroying property and damaging river channels. Development near Watts Branch Creek, Maryland for example, has tripled the number of annual floods and increased average flood size by 23%. Increased runoff also enlarges river channels, allowing water to flow more rapidly and resulting in yet more flooding. Whereas streams and wetlands would have absorbed much of the floodwaters and recharged groundwater, instead high volumes of rapidly-moving water destroy ecosystems and property.



*Courtesy of John Ellis*

### Solutions

Past and present greenhouse gas emissions guarantee changes to freshwater supplies in the U.S. While it is important to reduce future emissions, we must begin to adapt to these changes. Rather than weakening the natural defenses that will help us deal with increased drought, floods and runoff, we must dedicate ourselves to preserving the integrity of remaining streams and wetlands. CWRA will reaffirm Congress' original intent for the Clean Water Act to protect all waters of the United States and will help us adapt to the changes to come.



*Courtesy of the U.S. Global Change Research Program*

Finally, headwater streams and wetlands play an important role in maintaining water quality far downstream. They retain large amounts of sediment, which can otherwise increase downstream water treatment costs and require dredging to maintain river channels. They also store and transform many pollutants including nutrients and chemicals, preserving downstream water quality. When streams and wetlands are destroyed, agricultural and naturally-occurring nutrients are carried downstream where excess nutrient levels cause algal blooms, kill fish and pose a threat to human health.

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