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National Religious Organizations Praise New Clean Water Rule
Faith Leaders Point to Moral Responsibility to Provide Clean Water for All Children

Washington, D.C. – National religious organizations today praised the new Clean Water Rule released by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as consistent with their moral obligation to care for God’s Creation, and ensure that every child can access clean drinking water.

“The Clean Water Rule is important to keeping our drinking water clean and safe – a moral obligation,” Dr. Sharon E. Watkins, General Minister and President, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). “Water is sacred in many religious traditions, and has enormous symbolism for Christians. Both faith and reason require that we protect our waterways from pollution.”

“Clean water is a human right, yet too many communities have been besieged by pollution and the corresponding health problems associated to exposure to toxins and contamination,” says the Reverend J. Herbert Nelson, Director of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Office of Public Witness, in Washington, DC. “It is good to hear that the EPA is back on the job, protecting the drinking water of all of our children.”

“The Waters of the U.S. rule will protect sources of water that we all depend on, from streams and wetlands to rivers, bays, and lakes and support the health of our communities and God’s good creation now and in the future,” says Mary Minette, Director for Environmental Education and Advocacy, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

“Clean drinking water is one of the most basic necessities for us and our communities,” said Rabbi Steve Gutow, President of the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. “By issuing this rule, the EPA has provided clarity regarding enforcement of the law and the danger of contamination.”

“In the Christian community, water is sacred and its significance is highlighted in the Bible and in our ceremonies,” says Tricia Bruckbauer, Program Director for Creation Justice Ministries. “From Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan to our own baptisms, water is central to our lives. We also know the importance of clean and fresh drinking water, and advocate for the right of all God’s people to have access to water. We commend the Environmental Protection Agency for finalizing the Waters of the United States rule and their efforts to ensure the cleanest water in our wetlands, streams, and rivers.”

The new Clean Water Rule is strongly supported by American voters across the political spectrum, as well as mayors, small businesses, sportsmen, conservationists, health organizations and faith leaders. The rule re-extends Clean Water Act protections to 60 percent of streams and 20 million acres of wetlands. These waterways, which had been vulnerable to pollution and development because of legal loopholes created by several confusing Supreme Court rulings, provide wildlife habitat and drinking water for one in every three Americans downstream.

“Pope Francis has said, ‘let us be ‘protectors’ of creation, protectors of God’s plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment.’ The new Clean Water Rule conserves our streams and wetlands, but also ensures clean drinking water supplies for all Americans, including communities most vulnerable to pollution,” said Cassandra Carmichael, executive director of the National Religious Partnership for the Environment, noting that Pope Francis’ encyclical on the environment is slated to be released in June, and is expected to address climate change and water issues.

“Our faith traditions teach us to care for vulnerable populations including communities of color and low-income communities,” said Sister Mary Ann Smith, Maryknoll Sisters, Eastern USA. “The Clean Water Rule will protect waters in communities that have significant populations of African Americans, Native Americans, or low-income communities.”

“All of life requires water, clean pure water,” said The Rev. Mitchell C. Hescoc, President/CEO, Evangelical Environmental Network. “The Evangelical Environmental Network supports the Clean Water Rule. We are thankful that both EPA and the Corps of Engineers listened to the comments and concerns from farmers, ranchers, businesses, and over 70,000 prolife Christians who offered suggestions during the comment period. Clean water is a matter of life for all creation.”

Approximately 117 million people -- one in three Americans -- get drinking water from public water systems that rely on seasonal, rain-dependent, and headwater streams, which are again protected from pollution and inappropriate development by the Clean Water Rule.

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The National Religious Partnership for the Environment is an association of independent faith groups across a broad spectrum: the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops along with its affiliated program arm the Catholic Climate Covenant, the National Council of Churches USA and its affiliate Creation Justice Ministries, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs and its affiliate the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. Each Partner — drawing upon its distinctive traditions — is undertaking scholarship, leadership training, congregational and agency initiatives, and public policy education in service to environmental sustainability and justice.