

Ducks Unlimited · Izaak Walton League of America · National Wildlife Federation · Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership · Trout Unlimited

Sportsmen Groups Urge Senators to VOTE NO on the Barrasso-Heller Amendment to the 2012 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill Blocking Vital Agency Action on Clean Water Act “Waters of the United States” Safeguards

November 16, 2011

Dear Senator:

As the Senate considers the Energy and Water Appropriations bill for FY 2012, the sportsman-conservation organizations above, representing millions of hunters and anglers nationwide, reiterate our strong opposition to the Barrasso-Heller amendment that would block the Army Corps of Engineers from taking agency action to partially restore Clean Water Act protections to streams, wetlands and other waters. **We urge you to vote NO on any amendment to block agency action on improving Clean Water Act “waters of the U.S.” safeguards when this bill comes to the floor.**

Sportsmen rely on clean water to ensure enjoyable and productive hunting and angling. When wetlands are destroyed and streams are polluted, sportsmen are often the first to be directly impacted. Consequently, hunters and anglers have consistently advocated for the conservation of our nation’s waters and wetlands.

As we all work to support economic recovery, the economic benefits of hunting and angling are worth noting. In 2006, hunters and anglers spent \$86.1 billion including trip-related expenses (\$25.7 billion), equipment costs (\$47.4 billion) and other expenditures (\$13.0 billion). In addition, wildlife watchers spent \$51.3 billion including trip-related expenses (\$14.5 billion), equipment costs (\$26.1 billion) and other costs (\$10.8 billion). Altogether, they spent over \$137 billion in 2006 alone, breathing life into rural communities and supporting millions of jobs across the country.

Since 2001, safeguards for headwater streams and critical wetlands have steadily eroded. Now endangered are the wetlands and tributaries that provide clean water for iconic systems like the Chesapeake Bay and Great Lakes, recharge aquifers, help retain floodwaters and provide important fish and wildlife habitat. As these waters are polluted and diminished, their tremendous ecological and public health benefits are lost, as well.

We urge the Senate to reject the Barrasso-Heller amendment or any amendment to the Energy and Water Appropriations bill that seeks to prevent the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers or the Environmental Protection Agency from continuing to work on administrative guidance and rulemaking that is being developed with an unprecedented level of public input. As proposed, the guidance increases clarity and efficiency for agencies, farmers and businesses while keeping Clean Water Act jurisdiction well within its historical bounds.

Moreover, the guidance does not – and cannot – limit exemptions for normal activity related to agriculture, forestry and mining that have been in the Clean Water Act since 1977. Our organizations have supported these exemptions, which provide operational certainty for the vast majority of the normal activities conducted by farmers, ranchers, foresters, and miners.

Any provision prohibiting a formal rulemaking process would be harmful and counter to the broad-scale support for rulemaking that exists among conservationists as well as industry organizations. Stakeholders on all sides of this issue agree on the need for a formal rulemaking as a means of brokering a long-term solution to this problem. Any such amendment to the appropriations bill would maintain the status quo of accelerating wetlands loss, stream impairment and regulatory confusion.

We urge you to reject such ill-conceived language and safeguard America's clean water legacy.

Respectfully,

Scott Yaich, Ducks Unlimited
Scott Kovarovics, Izaak Walton League
Jan Goldman-Carter, National Wildlife Federation
Steve Kline, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership
Steve Moyer, Trout Unlimited