



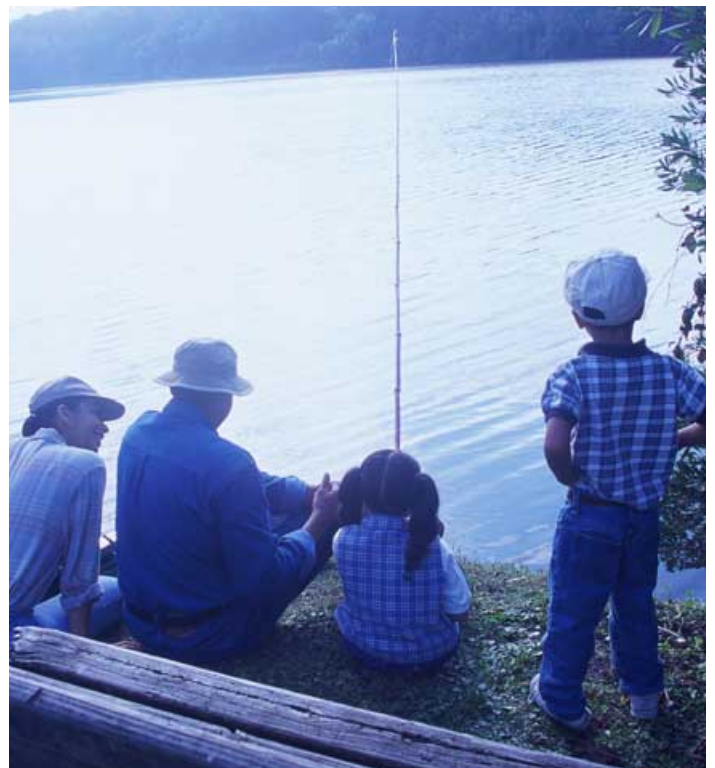
Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

Thirty Years Ago, Our Nation's Leaders Set A Reasonable Goal: Make All Waters Of The United States Safe For Swimming And Fishing...

THE CLEAN WATER ACT: The Key to Cleaner Lakes, Rivers and Coastal Waters

In 1969, a rail car passing over the Cuyahoga River set fire to a huge oil slick floating downstream. The flaming river became a powerful symbol for the abysmal conditions of our nation's lakes and rivers. Boston Harbor was little more than a cesspool; Lake Erie was declared biologically dead; and cities that lined the Potomac, Hudson, Delaware and other major rivers simply dumped their raw sewage directly into the water. Growing public concern that uncontrolled pollution was making our waters unsafe led to the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972.

Thanks largely to the Act, we have made considerable progress in cleaning up our nation's waterways over the past three decades. Today, seals and porpoises swim off South Boston's Castle Island, fishermen routinely catch lobsters, and tourists enjoy pleasure cruises through the harbor. Many of America's urban waterfronts, including Cleveland's once-notorious "Flats," are experiencing a revival, and many once sewage-filled rivers are now safe for fishing, swimming and boating.



Today about 60% of our rivers and 55% of our lakes are safe for swimming and fishing compared to just 36% in 1970.

So Why Is The Bush Administration Asking Us To Settle For Polluted Waters? We Can Make All Of Our Lakes, Rivers, Streams And Wetlands Healthy And Safe.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION IS THREATENING CLEANUP PROGRESS

Photo courtesy of Photodisc



In early 2003, the Bush administration administration proposed crippling the Clean Water Act with a rule change to remove protections from a majority of the nation's wetlands and streams. The administration also issued guidance instructing its agencies not to enforce rules protecting those waters without first obtaining permission from headquarters. Fortunately, a strong backlash from states, sportsmen, conservationists and a bipartisan majority of Congress caused the Bush administration to drop its ill-conceived proposal. But many wetlands and small streams will remain unprotected until the Bush administration removes the guidance and commits to enforcing protections to the full extent of the law.

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION INITIATIVE WILL:

- Pollute more waters
- Endanger sources of community drinking water and increase the costs of removing harmful pollutants
- Threaten public health through contact with bacteria, pathogens, toxics, and other pollutants in waters that would no longer be protected from all types of industrial discharges
- Deplete drinking water sources (like the Ogallala aquifer stretching from the Texas Panhandle to South Dakota) that are recharged by playa lakes and other wetland and stream systems
- Reduce and potentially destroy endangered or threatened wildlife species – 43% of which (including the whooping crane) rely on wetlands for survival

PROTECTING THEIR TREASURE: Narragansett Bay, Rhode Island and Massachusetts

NARRAGANSETT BAY AT A GLANCE



- The Bay covers 147 square miles but its watershed extends over 1,600 square miles in two states
- 1.8 million people live within the watershed
- More than 12 million people visit the Bay every year
- In 1987, the EPA recognized the Bay as an estuary of national significance
- Nearly 40,000 species depend on the Bay, including seals, winter flounder, lobsters and clams

Photo courtesy of Save the Bay

THE PAST

For hundreds of years, communities dumped raw sewage into the Bay, triggering cholera and typhoid epidemics in the 1800's. Despite improvements in the 1950's and 60's, sewer systems were overflowing and dumping 2.2 billion gallons of untreated sewage into Narragansett Bay and its tributaries each year. Frequently, the water was so dirty it was unsafe to swim at local beaches. By the 1970's, centuries of industrial activity, the construction of upstream dams, development and pollution had crippled Narragansett Bay.

Around 40% of the Narragansett Bay's wetlands have been filled, allowing more

pollutants to flow into the Bay and resulting in an increased flood risk. Fishing was frequently restricted due to pollution. In 1946, for example, the entire Bay was closed to shellfishing due to waste contamination.

THE PRESENT

Thanks to limits on industrial pollution put in place by the Clean Water Act, the level of toxic discharges into the Bay has dropped by 90% over the last 30 years. To comply with the Clean Water Act, cities used federal funding to improve their sewage treatment facilities along Narragansett Bay. Conservative estimates

indicate that the amount of sewage entering the Bay has been reduced by 60% since the Clean Water Act was enacted.

John Torgan, the baykeeper from Save the Bay, a local non-profit organization working to protect and restore Narragansett Bay, explains that Rhode Islanders "don't have gold, don't have diamonds; we have the Bay." Residents recognize the Bay as a crucial natural resource, essential for the local economy and necessary for many plants and animals.

The Clean Water Act has been a key tool in protecting the Bay and it has empowered local citizens to defend their right to clean water. Save the Bay and other citizen groups have frequently used powers given them under the Clean Water Act to ensure that the government fulfills its responsibilities in water protection, including limiting pollution from industry.

Despite progress in Narragansett Bay, the cleanup job is far from over. Excessive nitrogen contained in wastewater and runoff, as well as combined sewer overflows in the upper areas of the Bay, continue to threaten its health.

CLEANING UP OHIO'S LICKING RIVER

THE PAST

By the 1980's, high levels of health-threatening bacteria in the Licking River made it unsafe for boating, much less swimming. From 1979 until 1983, the local sewage treatment plant repeatedly violated its legal limits established under the Clean Water Act. The plant was in violation for almost the entire year in 1983, in large part due to discharges of toxic chemicals by a local industry, Owens-Corning Fiberglass. These chemicals upset the normal cleanup process at the sewage treatment plant, allowing untreated sewage to run into the river. One of these spills alone killed 80,000 fish, turned the water black and made the river stink of raw sewage.

THE PRESENT

Clean water rules should have prevented any discharges of toxic chemicals from ruining the operation of the sewage treatment plant, but the State of Ohio was failing to enforce the law.

A local resident, Ernie Grimm, went to court to force the Ohio EPA to enforce the law – and he won.

The Ohio EPA found both the municipal treatment plant and Owens-Corning in violation and



ordered a \$26 million renovation of the city's sewage-treatment plant, mostly funded through a Clean Water Act grant, and a \$1 million toxic chemical treatment system at Owens-Corning.

Photo courtesy of Jeffrey L. Freas

Thanks to these improvements, Owens-Corning is now complying with clean water safeguards, and water in the river is clear. Great progress has been made; most of the river is now clean. People can now safely swim, fish and boat on the Licking River.

BREATHING LIFE BACK INTO THE GREAT LAKES

THE PAST

The Great Lakes contain 95% of all surface fresh water in the United States. More than 35 million people living in the region depend upon the Great Lakes for clean water. But decades of urban and industrial pollution threatened this critical resource. Lake Erie was declared biologically dead in the 1960's; by the early 1970's, the public realized the threat to all the lakes.

THE PRESENT

Thanks to the Clean Water Act and cooperative efforts between the United States and Canada, the Great Lakes are much improved. The amount of toxic substances entering the lakes has been greatly reduced. The cleanup of sewage treatment plants has dramatically reduced the amount of raw sewage spilling into the lakes, sewage which once caused massive algae blooms and fish kills. Today, Lake Erie is home to a thriving sports fishing industry that generates \$11 billion annually.



Still, there is a long way to go before the Great Lakes can be considered truly clean. Warnings against eating fish remain in place on all of the lakes. Along the Great Lakes, the United States and Canada still must clean up 42 toxic sites.

Photo courtesy of John and Karen Hollingsworth/USFWS

THE CLEAN WATER ACT: One of Our Most Successful Environmental Laws

- Cleaner water has increased the size and variety of fish populations in our waters – helping angling grow into a sport enjoyed by 35 million Americans and creating an industry that generates \$38 billion annually.
- Striped bass stocks in every coastal state from Maine to North Carolina have been declared fully recovered.
- In 1972, the country lost an estimated 450,000 acres of wetlands each year. Today, losses are estimated at about one-fourth that rate.
- More than one billion pounds of toxic chemicals are removed from wastewater each year.
- 32 trillion gallons of wastewater are treated each day.
- More than 16 billion pounds of oxygen-depleting pollution are removed from wastewater each year.
- Thousands of cities have received federal funds to construct and expand wastewater treatment facilities that prevent or reduce the discharge of pollutants into the nation's waters.
- The number of Americans served by sewage treatment facilities has more than doubled in the last 30 years.



Front and back cover photos courtesy of Photodisc

PROTECT YOUR LOCAL STREAM, POND OR WETLAND

- Send a letter to the editor of your local newspaper about this issue. For a sample letter, visit the Sierra Club Clean Water website at http://www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/get_involved.asp
- Contact your Senators and member of Congress. Urge them to protect the waters in your region by opposing the Bush administration's efforts to weaken Clean Water Act rules. To contact them via email, visit <http://whistler.sierraclub.org/action/actionindex.jsp>
- Stay informed about the Bush administration's threat to clean water. Visit the Sierra Club's website at <http://www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater>. Join the Sierra Club's clean water email list by sending an email to clean.water@sierraclub.org
- Help protect a stream or wetland: Join a local water-monitoring group to help protect a stream or wetland in your community. To find a group near you, check this website: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/monitoring/vol.html>



For more information: Contact Ed Hopkins at ed.hopkins@sierraclub.org or 202-675-7908 or Robin Mann at robin.mann@sierraclub.org.