

Water Program Updates

Meet The Team



Name & Pronouns: Beth Roach, she/they

Role: Water Program Director

Location: Windsor, NC (Tuscarora/Skaruhreh Territory) in Bertie County

Watershed: Cashie River>Roanoke River>Albemarle-Pamlico Sound>Atlantic Ocean

Why do I work on water issues? Water issues have had a constant presence in my life. I was born and raised along a contaminated river with a decade long ban on fishing. I witnessed devastating effects on my community from family getting sick to our local fishing industries shutting down. Thanks to the Clean Water Act, protections were put in place to bring this river back to life. It's now safe to eat fish out of the river, to drink the water, and to enjoy its beauty. I have witnessed the power of strong policies that protect one of our most vital needs as humans—clean water. Listen to [Beth's sound clip for the Sierra Club's 130th anniversary.](#)

Clean Water Act 50th Anniversary



Passing the Clean Water Act in 1972 was a watershed moment in our history as a nation (pun intended). Clean water is a fundamental necessity of life, and decades of polling have shown that protecting our water and waterways garners overwhelming support from the general public. By enacting the Clean Water Act, Congress recognized the importance of clean water to our people, wildlife, plant life, and the ecosystems and communities we all share.

These protections are no less important today as polluters, including the oil and gas industries, and their allies in Congress continue to try to chip away at this bedrock environmental and public health law.

To commemorate the Clean Water Act's 50th anniversary this year, the Water Program released this [press statement](#). Beth Roach streamed [live](#) on Facebook from her local waterway, the Cashie River. Sierra Club's Environmental Law Program released a blog on our organization's long history of [protecting clean water in the courts](#).

Take Action

[Tell Congress: Defend and Strengthen the Clean Water Act!](#)

Fifty years ago, Congress passed the Clean Water Act, giving the EPA much-needed authority to protect our waterways after centuries of nearly-unchecked pollution.

While the Clean Water Act made significant progress in cleaning up our waters, these protections are increasingly under attack by corporate polluters. The Supreme Court recently heard arguments in *Sackett v. EPA*, where a ruling against EPA would erode critical CWA protections for wetlands.

Climate change will require us to defend and strengthen our water protections to respond to the water crises of today. From preventing the dumping of toxic "forever chemicals" into our waterways, algae blooms due to industrial agriculture runoff, and coal ash from contaminating our water, a strong Clean Water Act remains essential.

Water Protections at Risk: Sackett vs. EPA

In early October, the Supreme Court heard arguments in *Sackett vs. EPA*. A ruling against the EPA would significantly erode the Clean Water Act protections of critical wetlands. Read our [statement](#) here.

In response to this case, Sierra Club participated in a [Clean Water For All National Day of Action](#) by demanding that the court protect our waters for the public good – especially as climate change continues to put clean water sources around the world at risk.

PFAS Water Pollution

The Water Program is working to advance national policies to halt the use of toxic PFAS or "Teflon" chemicals, and to simultaneously clean up toxic pollution where it already exists. PFAS is used to make consumer products sturdy, non-stick, or stain-resistant. But science has found that PFAS chemicals are also highly toxic to people and last virtually forever in the environment. Staff are working with communities impacted by PFAS contamination, with Sierra Club members and Chapters to coordinate our efforts to pressure every level of government to set enforceable limits for the chemicals in drinking water, and to get water supplies regularly tested and protected.

Our team is working to address major gaps in federal and state implementation that have allowed PFAS contamination to spread, including the fact that most major industrial users are currently allowed to dump PFAS waste directly into rivers or the wastewater system, where it spreads to food crops and drinking water supplies.

In recent months, we've engaged to identify other sources of PFAS including sludge-based fertilizers [sold in Tennessee](#) and elsewhere and tannery pollution spread on a [CAFO in Michigan](#). We have also supported [two](#) successful [bills](#) to ban the unnecessary uses of PFAS in Colorado, and a new law that bans the [incineration of PFAS waste](#) in Illinois.

The reckless use of PFAS chemicals in firefighting continues to threaten people's health and water supplies. Just last week the Navy reported that its contractor [spilled more than 1000 gallons of concentrated PFAS-based fire fighting foam](#) at the Red Hill Fuel Storage facility on the island of O'ahu. Sierra Club Hawaii and O'ahu Water Protectors are scrambling to ensure the military immediately contains and cleans up the PFAS before any can enter the groundwater. [Sign this action alert to notify your member of Congress and ensure true accountability for the military at the Red Hill site.](#)



In The News

The Hill - [EPA allies support stronger safeguards for dangerous PFAS 'forever chemicals'](#)

Sonya Lunder teamed up with Green Latino's Mariana Del Valle Prieto Cervantez, and Jennifer Rawlison of the Newburgh Clean Water Project and National PFAS Contamination Coalition to support EPA's proposal to list two PFAS chemicals in the Superfund program, and to push back on the notion that cleanup requirements would burden low income communities of color.

Washington Post - ['Forever chemicals' upend a Maine farm point to a larger problem.](#)

Across the country, PFAS are being detected on farms and dairies where sewage sludge or industrial wastes was spread as a soil amendment or fertilizer. This story profiles Songbird Farms, where historic contamination by PFAS waste poisoned farm crops and lead to high PFAS exposure for farmers Adam and Johanna. Sierra Club is now working with Adam Nordell and Defend Our Health of Maine to ensure that there is compensation and support for agricultural producers who lose their livelihoods due to PFAS contamination.



Other Droplets of Info

Sierra Club's [The Water Sentinels Grassroots Network Team](#) is a space where members and water activists engage and coordinate on local, state and national water issues.

Check out their most recent [Autumn Newsletter](#), where you can sign up to be included in their team communications.