

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
Subcommittee on Environment
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

“Navigating the Clean Water Act: Is Water Wet?”

July 9, 2014

Thank you, Chairman Smith for holding this morning’s hearing to discuss the rule proposed by the Army Corps and EPA to define the term “waters of the United States” in the Clean Water Act. I’d also like to welcome Mr. Perciasepe and thank him for appearing before us this morning.

Access to clean water is essential to economic growth. A study by the World Health Organization found that every \$1 invested in water and sanitation yields economic benefits of between \$7 and \$12. Most Americans are lucky enough to be able to simply turn on the tap and have water that is safe to drink. Unfortunately, this is not the case everywhere. Although it is difficult to put a specific figure on the value of water to the U.S. economy, studies have shown that clean water is a prerequisite for nearly every industry from agriculture and manufacturing to commercial fisheries to tourism. With 3.5 million miles of rivers and streams, more than 100 million acres of wetlands, and 39.9 million acres of lakes and reservoirs in the United States, managing the availability and quality of this finite resource can be a challenge.

Though it may be a challenge, it is one that we must accept. As we will no doubt hear today, these streams, lakes, and wetlands offer a wide variety of benefits to our constituents. For example, wetlands can reduce the possibility of flooding by storing excess water after a heavy rain; they can also be a source of water during times of drought. Wetlands and streams improve water quality by trapping sediments and filtering out pollutants and they serve as critical habitat for fish and other aquatic life, increasing biological diversity.

According to the EPA, more than 100 stakeholders, from state and local governments to industry and agriculture associations to environmental groups, have asked the EPA and the Army Corps to provide clarity about what waters are and are not within the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. And although I know that not all of these organizations are supportive of the proposed rule, the goal of the agencies is to provide all interested parties the clarity that they need and deserve.

Mr. Chairman, some of my constituents have expressed concern about the potential impact the proposed rule may have, while others have expressed strong support for the proposed rule. I welcome the opportunity provided by today’s hearing to learn more about the details of the proposed rule as well as the opportunity to clarify some of the misinformation that has been circulating about the proposal.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and I yield back the balance of my time.