



STEWARDS OF OUR EARTH All of God's Creation

Social Justice Committee, Holy Cross Parish, Mt. Airy, June 11, 2023

Nation's Critical Wetlands in Danger

In a March Stewards of Our Earth column, we were all encouraged to take action to defend the Clean Water Act, one of our bedrock environmental laws in jeopardy of losing federal protection.

Just two weeks ago, the Supreme Court voted to dramatically weaken the (Environmental Protection Act's (EPA) ability to protect our nation's critical wetlands and clean water, issuing an opinion gutting the Clean Water Act's definition of the term "Waters of the United States." It ruled that wetlands can be regulated under the Clean Water Act only if they have a "continuous surface connection" to larger, regulated bodies of water. According to environmental advocates, the decision would strip protections from **tens of millions of acres of wetlands**.

"The court's decision in **Sackett vs the EPA strikes at the heart of the Clean Water Act**, the law we depend on to protect American lakes, rivers, and wetlands ... and marks a major retreat in the nation's commitment to public health and the environment....

The science is clear. **Wetlands play a central role in the health of our nation's lakes, rivers, and streams**. They're even vital for protecting clean drinking water. Congress and the expert agencies understood this, which is why time and again the courts protected critical wetlands under the Clean Water Act [50 years ago].

But the current Supreme Court majority chose to ignore settled science to protect polluters at the expense of healthy wetlands and other waters that contribute to the drinking water supplies of millions of people. This anti-environment decision will cause incalculable harm, with communities across the country forced to pay the price." (Jon Devine, *Natural Resources Defense Council*, 5/27/23)

Why Are Wetlands Important?

Wetlands are immensely valuable to our ecosystems:

- ♥They absorb flood waters and lessen the impact of droughts.
- ♥They provide critical habitat for endangered species and countless other birds, mammals, and reptiles.
- ♥They store a massive amount of carbon, helping to safeguard us from climate catastrophe.
- ♥And they filter pollutants that otherwise would enter our drinking water." (*NRDC*, 5/27/23)

"Federal protections that don't depend on local politics or regional polluter influence are essential to vulnerable and disadvantaged communities nationwide. The court's ruling removes these vital protections from important streams and wetlands in every state." (Jim Murphy, *National Wildlife Federation*, 5/27/23)

"Congress CAN fix some of the damage done by this decision by passing new legislation to safeguard our waters. State governments can enact protections too. But those actions will only be taken if we all demand it. **Everyone, no matter their race, zip code, or income, deserves access to clean water.**" (Madeleine Foote, *League of Conservation Voters*, 5/26/23)