

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary, U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Re: Wildlife Hunting Heritage Conservation Council Requests the Expeditious
Restoration of Wetland and Stream Protections

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

As sportsman-conservation organizations representing millions of hunters and anglers nationwide, we ask you to communicate quickly to the Office of Management and Budget, the Council on Environmental Quality, and the Executive Office of the President your strong support for expeditiously restoring long-standing Clean Water Act protections for streams and wetlands across the country.

Sportsmen rely on clean water to ensure the opportunity to enjoy hunting, angling, and other outdoor-based recreation (and business) in the great outdoors. 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.

Since 2001, U.S. Supreme Court decisions in *SWANCC* (2001) and *Rapanos* (2006), along with 2003 and 2008 agency guidance that is inconsistent with those decisions and the related science, have combined to erode long-standing Clean Water Act safeguards for headwater streams and critical wetlands. At-risk wetlands and tributaries provide clean water for iconic systems such as the Mississippi River Delta and the Chesapeake Bay. They recharge aquifers like the Ogallala, help retain floodwaters in areas such as the Prairie Pothole region and Missouri River Basin, and provide important fish and wildlife habitat throughout the nation. As these waters are polluted and diminished, their tremendous ecological and public health benefits are lost, as well.

As we all work to create jobs and support economic recovery, we should nurture rather than neglect the economic benefits of hunting, angling, and other outdoor recreation. As the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's *2006 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Associated Recreation* attests, in 2006 alone, hunters and anglers spent \$86.1 billion, and wildlife watchers spent an additional \$51.3 billion. Altogether, they spent over \$137 billion in 2006 alone, breathing life into rural communities and supporting millions of jobs across the country.

In order to effectively safeguard key components of our economy, the sports and traditions that millions of Americans enjoy, and the health and integrity of some of our most important fish and wildlife resources, it is essential to act now to restore lost Clean Water Act protections consistent with existing law and science.

We commend the administration for proposing new guidance last spring for the Army Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency to follow in determining

Clean Water Act jurisdiction. The draft guidance, which garnered broad support from hundreds of thousands of people during the public comment period, is science-based and clearly respects the Supreme Court's decisions.

To complete this process, the administration must move quickly to finalize the guidance and initiate the rulemaking process early this year. Through rulemaking, the Corps and EPA can clarify and strengthen their regulatory definitions of "waters of the United States." There is widespread agreement among groups across the spectrum about the inherent value of rulemaking to address critical aspects of this issue. A successful process can provide clarity about the specific waters covered by the Act – clarity that is badly needed by land owners, developers, conservationists, and state and federal agencies alike.

In closing, we applaud the steps taken by the administration thus far, and we are committed to actively supporting the essential next steps to restore protections to millions of wetland acres and stream miles across the United States.

Respectfully,

DRAFT