

Wisconsin Clean Water News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Earth Day, Monday, April 22, 2002

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Local Leaders, Groups Sound Earth Day Alarm:

Bush, Assembly Republicans Weakening Clean Water Act Protections for Wisconsin's Rivers, Lakes, and Wetlands

Madison (April 22, 2002) - At a rally here today celebrating the 32nd anniversary of Earth Day, the Sierra Club and local leaders warned that the Bush administration and state Republican Assembly leaders are trying to weaken Wisconsin Clean Water protections that protect our waterways from pollution. Agriculture Secretary Veneman and EPA Administrator Christine Whitman will be in Wisconsin this week to try to defend the Bush's bad environmental record.

"The Bush administration and Assembly Republicans have launched an unprecedented attack on the Clean Water Act, our rivers and lakes at the request of big polluters and irresponsible developers," said Dane County Supervisor Brett Hulsey, member of the Lakes and Watersheds Commission. "If the administration and state Assembly Republicans succeed, it will turn back the clock to a time to when polluters dumped toxic waste into our rivers and lakes at will. It will undo much of the progress we have made since the 1970s, when lakes stunk and rivers caught fire."

The Sierra Club stressed that the administration and Assembly Republicans' proposed changes threaten not only our beaches, waterways and marine life, they threaten us. "Water pollution makes people sick, kills fish, contaminates fish, and adversely impacts water-based recreation," said Richard Wetzel, a Sierra Club volunteer who recently filed suit to clean up a manure spill in central Wisconsin. "If the Bush administration and Assembly Republicans were serious about protecting public health and safety, they would not be trying to cripple federal safeguards for our water."

The groups pointed out several areas that are under attack.

- Since January 2001, the Bush administration has blocked an Environmental Protection Agency rule that would help keep pathogen-laden raw sewage discharges out of our streets, waterways and basements, and make public reporting and notification of sewer overflows mandatory. The administration is drafting plans to weaken the rule. Sanitary sewer overflows cause 1.8 million to 3.5 million cases per year of swimming-related illnesses. In Wisconsin, sewers regularly overflow closing beaches and threatening public health.
- Last Earth Day, President Bush and EPA Administrator Christine Whitman pledged to maintain strong protection for wetlands. Since that time, the administration has made it easier for the mining industry, developers and other polluters to fill more wetlands without reviewing adverse environmental consequences, and without notifying the public or

granting it the opportunity to comment. In addition, the administration has abandoned the national goal, originally set by George Bush Sr., of “no net loss” of wetlands,

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allowing thousands of wetlands to be destroyed without any plans to replace them. The inevitable result will be increased flooding, more water pollution, contaminated drinking water supplies, and further destruction of wildlife habitat.

- The administration announced that in April it will change Clean Water Act rules to allow the Army Corps of Engineers to issue permits for dumping mining and industrial waste into streams and other waters across the country. The administration’s rule change would allow polluters to bury miles of streams and wetlands under tons of waste, and pollute the Wolf River more with the Crandon Mine.
- The administration is formulating a plan to cripple the Clean Water Act’s basic program for cleaning up polluted waters, Dirty Water Clean Up Plans (known as the total maximum daily load, TMDL, program). The administration’s proposed new regulations, expected to be published in the Federal Register in June, would allow more toxic discharges and polluted runoff in our waterways.
- State Assembly Republicans, Speak Scott Jenson and Rep. John Gard, led efforts to gut clean water programs in Wisconsin by drastically cutting operating funds for DNR Clean Water Programs. Democratic Senator Rod Moen led efforts to destroy water-cleaning wetlands for Ashley Furniture, one of his big contributors, in the recent state budget repair bill.
- The Bush Administration is supporting more money for livestock factories and feedlots and less money for family farmers, like those waiting to restore more than 100,000 acres of wetlands and buffer strips in Wisconsin.

“On water pollution issues, the Bush administration and Assembly Republicans and Senator Rod Moen appear to be taking their orders from big polluters and irresponsible developers who want to roll back environmental protections at the expense our clean water, environment, and public health,” said Caryl Terrell of the Wisconsin Sierra Club chapter. “Earth Day is the perfect opportunity to call attention to these attacks on the Clean Water Act that have largely taken place in private. We urge the administration and Assembly leaders to stop attacking the Clean Water Act and instead work to keep the law’s promise of clean water for all Americans.”

The Sierra Club has worked to pass the Clean Water Act and protect Wisconsin drinking water, rivers, lakes, and beaches for more than 40 years. For more information on what you can do, call 608-256-0565 or check our website at www.sierraclub.org.

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