



CLEAN WATER

PROTECTING WATER QUALITY

Clean water is a basic right and a necessity for all life. It keeps people healthy, supports fish and wildlife and provides recreational opportunities. Despite progress made in the last 30 years to restore the health of our nation's waters by passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972, 218 million Americans live within ten miles of polluted water, and 40% of the nation's assessed waters are still unsafe for fishing, swimming or supporting aquatic life.

Sierra Club's Clean Water Campaign strives to educate and enlist the public in protecting and restoring the quality of our nation's waters. The campaign focuses on three areas: Factory Farms, Wetlands and Water Quality.

Factory Farms

America's drinking water, rivers and lakes are at risk from giant, corporate-owned factory farms. These Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) confine thousands of animals in one facility, and produce staggering amounts of animal waste in the process (2.7 trillion pounds per year). Too often, this waste leaks into our rivers and streams, fouling our air, contaminating our drinking water and spreading disease. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, hog, chicken and cattle waste has polluted 35,000 miles of rivers in 22 states and contaminated groundwater in 17 states.

CAFOs are a major source of water pollution and drinking water contamination because they concentrate enormous amounts of animal waste in relatively small areas. Animal waste is rich in phosphorus and nitrogen and can be a



useful fertilizer when applied to crops at appropriate rates, but when overapplied to land or spilled and leaked from waste lagoons, these chemicals can enter groundwater, rivers and lakes, killing fish and other aquatic life and contaminating drinking water supplies.

The best way to protect our water, public health and communities is to:

- Impose a moratorium on new large CAFOs until clean-water protections are strengthened, and the massive pollution from current facilities is eliminated.
- Phase out open-air lagoons and require the development of better technology to treat manure.
- Allow public participation in the decision to grant a permit for a new or larger CAFO.

- Require frequent inspection of CAFOs and conduct regular air and water quality monitoring programs near manure storage facilities.
- Encourage consumers to avoid factory-produced meat and to select meat produced by diversified, family farmers.

The Campaign's ultimate goal is to stop new large CAFOs and achieve full implementation of the Clean Water Act's goal of zero discharge from these facilities.

Wetlands

Despite their unique value to society, a 1997 survey by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports that roughly 58,500 acres of wetlands are lost annually. Sierra Club is fighting for the restoration and protection of wetlands all across America.

CLEAN WATER AND WATER QUALITY

Wetlands protect our families and our property from flooding

Wetlands act like sponges, soaking up rain and storing floodwater runoff. Wetlands slowly release flood waters back into streams, lakes, and groundwater, making flooding impacts less damaging. When flooded to a depth of one foot, one acre of wetlands can store more than 360,000 gallons of water. States that have lost 80% or more of their wetlands (Ohio, Kentucky, California and Missouri, for example) have experienced the worst flooding in the last several years.

Wetlands act as nurseries for fish, shellfish, and provide homes for wildlife

Most fish and waterfowl species are born in wetlands. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimates that up to 43% of threatened and endangered species need wetlands for their survival. For many other animals, such as the wood duck, alligator and heron, wetlands are primary habitats. For others (more than half of the nation's migratory birds), wetlands provide important seasonal habitats where food, water and cover are plentiful.

Wetlands create recreational opportunities for wildlife watching, fishing, canoeing and hunting

Wetlands are critically important to maintaining healthy fisheries. Fishing is a favorite outdoor recreational pastime of many Americans. Over 49 million Americans spend \$24 billion a year on sportfishing, for striped bass, flounder, trout and other species.

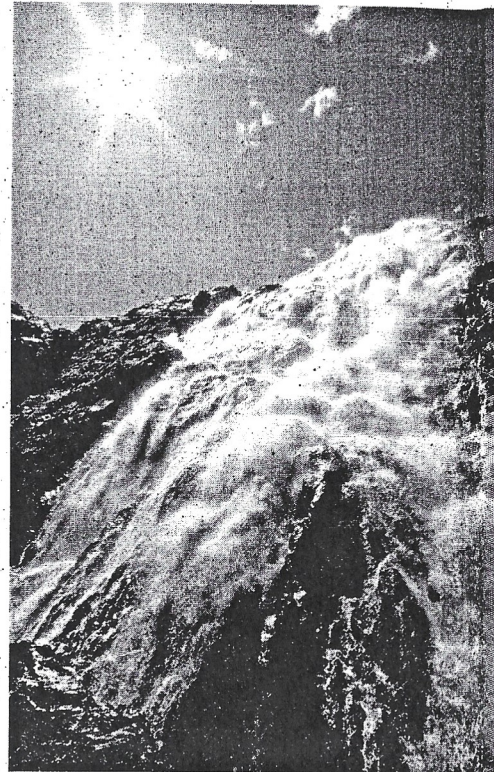
Wetlands also provide opportunities for popular activities such as hiking, kayaking and rafting. An estimated 50 million people spend approximately \$10 billion each year observing and photographing wetlands-dependent birds.

Congress must strengthen clean water and wetlands protection programs in order to preserve and protect our valuable remaining wetlands.

Water Quality

Thirty years ago marked the passage of the Clean Water Act -- a landmark piece of environmental legislation that has helped to turn the tide against water pollution. The Clean Water Act has helped to cut the nation's wetland losses by 75 percent and has restored health to more than a quarter of our nation's rivers. According to the EPA, the Clean Water Act's requirements prevent more than 900 million pounds of sewage and a billion pounds of toxic chemicals from entering our waterways every year. However, we have not yet achieved the Act's goals to make all waters safe for fishing and swimming; nor have we eliminated discharge of all pollutants into the nation's lakes, rivers and coastal waters.

Citizens have a right to know whether their water is safe for drinking, fishing or swimming. We need better alerts and access to information about our water quality, and a national system that requires consistent standards, monitoring and posting of dangerous waters. We



must reduce polluted runoff from federal and agricultural lands and assure greater protection for coastal waters.

We must demand strict enforcement of the Clean Water Act, and existing environmental laws, in order to more effectively stop illegal pollution and make polluters pay to clean up their mess. Laws intended to protect us are ineffective unless they are fully funded. Without adequate funding, we can't enforce the laws we have -- or strengthen them.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information on the Sierra Club's Clean Water campaign, please see the following articles and reports:

Clean Water and Factory Farms
<http://www.sierraclub.org/factoryfarms/factsheets/>

Clean Water and Wetlands
<http://www.sierraclub.org/wetlands/>

Water Quality
<http://www.sierraclub.org/cleanwater/waterquality/>

The Sierra Club's Clean Water Campaign is supported and implemented by the more than 700,000 Sierra Club members in Chapters and Groups across America. The Sierra Club has four national priority campaigns: protect America's water quality; protect wildlands; challenge sprawl; and end commercial logging on federal lands.