

My Turn

Water is precious in New Mexico

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is currently accepting comments on a proposed rule to protect clean water. Amigos Bravos, a statewide water conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring New Mexico's waters supports this rule and urges New Mexicans who care about clean water to send a comment in support of the rule to EPA.

Without this new rule 90 percent of New Mexico rivers and streams are threatened by unregulated dumping of pollutants. Unfortunately there is a firestorm of misinformation about what this rule does. Let's get some facts straight.

After Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006, which waters were protected by the Clean Water Act was called into question. These Supreme Court rulings made Clean Water Act protections for some waters that historically had been covered under the law, such as waters that flow intermittently or are isolated, uncertain. In this confusion many of our rivers and streams lost Clean Water Act protection.

Because New Mexico is an arid state where less than 10 percent of our rivers and streams flow year-round and because many of our water resources are in closed basins, New Mexico is disproportionately vulnerable to pollution. The proposed EPA rule is in response to a call from Congress and the Supreme Court asking the EPA to draft rules to clarify the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act.

This rule would clarify that some of the rivers, streams, and wetlands that fell through the cracks in the post 2001 confusion are indeed protected. Contrary to the fear mongering we see popping up all over the county and the state, even if this rule is passed, less water would be protected today than was protected during the Reagan Administration.

This rule does not threaten farmers. In fact, the rule protects farmers by protecting clean water and rewarding conservation practices. All the agriculture exemptions that have been in place for decades will continue. In fact, the rule adds 56 beneficial conservation practices to the exemption. The rhetoric has gotten so bad that some are claiming that this rule would regulate puddles in driveways! This is a bald falsehood intended to scare people and to get people opposed to environmental protections to the polls during a contentious election year.

Water is precious in New Mexico. Without clean water our way of life is threatened and our communities suffer. While this proposed rule does not restore all the protections that were lost (that would take action by Congress) it is a good first step to restoring some of the protections that were in place for almost 30 years and guided the transition from rivers that literally burned to healthy watersheds where species like the bald eagle and river otter once again thrive.

The comment period on the proposed rule ends Nov. 14. Go to www2.epa.gov/uswaters to find out more and to submit a comment, or go to amigosbravos.org/take_action/letter/21 to send a pre-written comment letter in support of the rule.

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