



Protecting the Clean Water Act: 37 Years of Progress

"If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

Over the last nearly 40 years, the Clean Water Act has been responsible for extraordinary advances in improving the quality of the nation's surface waters and watersheds. Not only has the Clean Water Act helped reverse the historic trend of wetlands losses, but because of this commonsense law we have restored streams and rivers degraded by pollution. As it has since it became law in 1972, the Clean Water Act continues to play a critical role in ensuring our nation's environmental protection.



Real-World Examples of the Clean Water Act's Ongoing Achievements:

- Water quality standards have now been set for every river, stream, lake, and bay in the country.¹
- Since 1972, the percent of surface waters that meet their goals and support basic uses such as fishing or swimming has **doubled** to almost 70 percent.²
- From the 1950s to the 1970s, an average of 458,000 acres of wetlands were lost each year. However, from 1998-2004, **overall wetland areas increased at a rate of 32,000 acres per year.**³
- *All 35 states and territories with coastal recreational beaches and waters* have adopted water quality standards as protective as EPA's standards, an increase from 11 States and Territories in 2000.⁴

Clean Water Act's Success Stories Continue to Protect America's Waters, Environment:

- With improved water quality, the American shad population in the Delaware River has **rebounced to over 900,000**, an increase from 100,000 in 1971.⁵
- The Allegheny and Monongahela Rivers in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, were so heavily polluted from industrial discharges that just 30 years ago they were devoid of fish. *Today it supports over 20 different fish species* and, in 2005, played host to the prestigious *Bassmasters Classic* fishing tournament.⁶
- In 2006, reproducing populations of Lake Whitefish returned to the Detroit River *for the first time since 1916.*⁸

¹ Communications with U.S. EPA staff; see EPA current water quality criteria, available at <http://www.epa.gov/waterscience/criteria/wqcriteria.html> (September 28, 2007).

² Mehan, T., Oct. 2007, *The Clean Water Act: An Effective Means to Achieve a Limited End*, article scheduled for publication in *Water Environment and Engineering Magazine*; see also 2000 Water Quality Inventory, U.S. EPA, available at <http://www.epa.gov/305b/2000report/>.

³ U.S. EPA, May 2007, *Draft 2007 Report on the Environment: Science*, available at <http://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/cfm/recordisplay.cfm?deid=140917>.

⁴ See Testimony of Benjamin Grumbles, Assistant Administrator for Water, U.S. EPA, before the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, June 27, 2007, available at <http://www.epa.gov/water/speeches/>.

⁵ Delaney, S.C., U.S. EPA, *Shad Return to the Delaware*, available at www.epa.gov/history/topics/25year/WATER1.pdf.

⁶ Hopey, D., July 28, 2005, *Tuesday's storms just might help Bassmaster Classic competitors*, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, available at <http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/05209/544965.stm>; see also *Regional Water Management in Southwestern Pennsylvania: moving toward a solution*, Framing Paper prepared by Regional Water Management Task Force, University of Pittsburgh Institute of Politics, July 2006.

⁸ Morrison, S., Aug. 2006, *Lake Whitefish Returning to the Detroit River to Spawn: federal scientists document first reproducing population of whitefish in the River since 1916*, USGS Monthly Newsletter, available at <http://soundwaves.usgs.gov/2006/08/research.html>.

- Millions of alewives, shad, Atlantic salmon and striped bass have returned to a 17-mile stretch of the Kennebec River in Maine. According to local biologists, in 20 years, the water quality has made a miraculous recovery.⁹
- In 1972, only one state had adopted a program to control water quality impacts from forestry activities. Today, **all states** with significant commercial forestry activities have programs to protect water quality based on best management practices.¹⁰
- Since 1972, Pennsylvania has successfully *reclaimed 34,000 acres* of abandoned coal mines as a result of re-mining. With the support of Clean Water Act funding, treatment systems have been installed at 19 other abandoned mines and, based on recent biological surveys, the streams and organisms are recovering.¹¹
- When excess sediment eliminated important streambed habitats and threatened aquatic life in Wyoming's Rock Creek, the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and landowners implemented best management practices specifically designed to improve irrigation efficiency. This **successful partnership** reduced sediment loads, resulting in the Rock Creek being removed from the state's list of impaired waters in 2004.¹²
- After the Texas Department of State Health Services (DSHS) banned people from possessing fish taken from Lake Como due to high concentrations of chemicals found in their tissues, local, state and federal agencies implemented a range of best management practices together in the city of Fort Worth. As a result, the fish tissue pollutant levels significantly diminished, the fish ban was rescinded, and the lake is now fully supporting its fish consumption use.¹²
- In 2006, local and state water quality experts worked with their community to successfully restore a 1.9-mile segment of the Mills River in western North Carolina to *once again support snail populations* that had previously been decimated from runoff.¹²

For every success story highlighted above, there are [many more success stories](#), testament to the Clean Water Act, and the progress continuing to be made to improve America's water quality.

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⁹ Sherwood, D., Aug. 15, 2005, *Fish Numbers Still Rising on The Kennebec*, available at <http://outdoors.maine.com/fishing/050814kennebec.html>.

¹⁰ Ice, G.G., G.W. Stuart, J. B. Waide, L.C. Irland, and P.V. Ellefson, 1997, *25-years of the Clean Water Act: How clean are forest practices?* Journal of Forestry 95(7):9-13.

¹¹ See 67 Fed. Reg. 3401 (Jan. 23, 2002); see also Pennsylvania DEP website at <http://www.depweb.state.pa.us/abandonedminerec/cwp/view.asp?a=1466&q=457733>

¹² U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Section 319 Success Stories, available at <http://www.epa.gov/owow/nps/Success319/>