

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT

1969

Ohio's polluted **Cuyahoga River catches fire** and California beaches are fouled by 100,000 barrels of oil in the **Santa Barbara oil spill**, leading to calls for environmental protection.



1972

The **Clean Water Act**, the primary federal law that governs water quality in the United States, establishes regulations for discharging pollution into U.S. waters.



(NURPHOTO / GETTY IMAGES)

2001

In **SWANCC v. U.S.**, the Supreme Court strikes down the Migratory Bird Rule, which had protected even remote waters that provided habitat for migratory bird species that cross state lines.

1982

The EPA and Army Corps of Engineers adopt a **definition** of waters to be protected from pollution under the Clean Water Act that leaves a lot of questions, especially about intermittent streams and remote wetlands.



(WILLIAM WIDMER / NYT)

2006

In **Rapanos v. U.S.**, Supreme Court justices can't agree on which wetlands are protected under the Clean Water Act. Various justices' opinions espouse different jurisdictional tests. Confusion and lawsuits proliferate.

2015

In an attempt to end confusion and establish clear regulations, the Obama-era EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers issue the **Clean Water Rule**, which clarifies what kind of waters – including which intermittent streams and remote wetlands – are protected under the Clean Water Act. New lawsuits are filed.

Gina McCarthy, EPA administrator when the Clean Water Rule went into effect.



(AP PHOTO / EVAN VUCCI)

2019

The Trump administration's EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers **repeal the Clean Water Rule**.



(AP PHOTO / EVAN VUCCI)

Current EPA Administrator Andrew R. Wheeler, who oversaw the rollback of the Clean Water Rule.

2020

The Clean Water Rule is replaced by the **Navigable Waters Protection Rule**, which strips Clean Water Act protection from...

...over **1/2** of U.S. wetlands...

...and **18%** of U.S. streams.