

# NORTHWEST ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCATES

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## Clean Water Program

### The Problem: Water Pollution is Increasing

Although the Clean Water Act was passed 28 years ago to protect and restore water quality, approximately 40 percent of the nation's assessed waters are unsafe for fish, wildlife, and people. In some areas the problems are more widespread: nearly 80 percent of Oregon's waters are too warm for salmon; 97 percent of the Great Lakes shorelines are impaired by chemicals. These unsafe pollution levels reflect harmful land practices, excessive water withdrawals, pollution from industries and cities, air deposition of chemicals, and waste disposal. The effects of water pollution vary based on the kinds of human and wildlife uses, and the type and extent of pollution. For endangered salmon in the



Northwest, high temperatures make survival nearly impossible. High levels of toxics are causing reproductive failure in fish-eating birds and mammals and people eating contaminated fish are exposed to higher than average risks of cancer and chronic diseases. [More on the problems of Water Pollution...](#)

### The Solution: The Federal Clean Water Act

When it passed the Clean Water Act in 1972, Congress created a regulatory program to clean up and protect water quality. In addition to requiring minimum pollution controls, EPA and the states are required to use an approach whereby controls would be based on the needs of the waterbody. The law requires that where too much pollution is entering a stream, all sources must restrict their contribution of pollution and habitat damage to the extent necessary to meet water quality standards. This water quality-based approach has three primary thrusts: [permits](#) for pollution discharges, clean-up plans -- called [TMDLs](#) -- for polluted waters, and [antidegradation](#) policies to prevent pollution. All of these depend upon the establishment of [water quality standards](#) to protect human health, fish, and wildlife. [More on the Clean Water Act...](#)



### NWEA's Action: Lawsuits and Advocacy to Implement the Clean Water Act

NWEA is active in advocacy and litigation to ensure that every stage of the Clean Water Act is both carried out and is implemented in such a way as to protect water quality, vulnerable species, and related habitat. Central in NWEA's efforts are numerous lawsuits brought against EPA to force the federal agency and the states to develop TMDLs in [Oregon](#) and [Washington](#). NWEA has also been very active in the development of new federal rules to ensure that TMDLs bring about environmental improvements, first as a member of EPA's [TMDL Federal Advisory Committee](#) (FACA) and later in the development of and lobbying for the new federal regulations that were finalized in June, 2000. NWEA continues to work against anti-environmental riders that seek to delay and/or repeal these important new rules. NWEA also works to ensure that the region's states develop [environmentally protective water quality standards](#) and issue [NPDES discharge permits](#) that conform to the Clean Water Act. Other federal laws, such as [Superfund](#), the [Endangered Species Act](#), and the [Resource Conservation and Recovery Act](#) (RCRA) also come into play in NWEA's work to clean up water pollution. [More on NWEA's advocacy...](#)

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