

The Trump administration has rolled back major protections for America's rivers and streams

By Emily Shugerman, February 1, 2018



The Mississippi river at sunset ahead of arriving at Dayton International Airport, Ohio (Christophe Chammartin/ SI2 via Getty Images)

The [Trump](#) administration has blocked Obama-era clean water protections from taking effect, as it prepares to roll out its own, less stringent rules later this year.

Environmental Protection Agency Director [Scott Pruitt](#) has filed the documents needed to suspend the 2015 Clean Water Rule for two years, claiming the action will “reduce confusion and provide certainty to America’s farmers and ranchers”.

The Clean Water Rule expanded the [EPA’s](#) jurisdiction from large bodies of water, like the Mississippi River and Puget Sound, to smaller bodies that feed into them, like wetlands and estuaries. This allowed the agency to limit pollution in these smaller bodies – and sparked outcry from farmers and property developers, who claimed it would stunt their business growth.

The rule has yet to take effect, owing to court challenges from more than 30 US states and several industry groups. The Supreme Court decided to send the matter back to district courts last week, ending the years-long stay on the regulations.

Ten days later, Mr Pruitt announced he was formally rolling back the rule.

“The 2015 WOTU rule developed by the Obama administration will not be applicable for the next two years, while we work through the process of providing long-term regulatory certainty across all 50 states about what waters are subject to federal regulation,” Mr Pruitt said in a statement, referring to the rule by its nickname, the Waters of the US (WOTUS) rule.



*White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer takes questions during the daily press briefing
Getty Images*

Mr Pruitt is expected to roll out his own version of the rules – with fewer limitations on farmers, ranchers, and developers – before the end of the year, according to the *New York Times*. While Republicans in farming states heralded the move, environmental groups vowed to fight it.

“Communities across our country can’t just ‘suspend’ their need for clean water anymore than they can suspend their need for the sun to come up, which makes this ridiculous giveaway to polluters all the more galling,” said Dalal Aboulhosn, Deputy Legislative Director for Land and Water for the Sierra Club.

She added: “We will fight this despicable action today with all the resources we have and continue to fight for clean water protections across America.”

Mr Trump directed Mr Pruitt to rescind the rule in an executive order early last year, as part of his promised move to roll back many of his predecessor’s environmental regulations. Mr Trump has also scrapped the Obama administration's [Clean Power Plan](#), and pulled the US out of the Paris climate accord on greenhouse gas emissions.

Signing the order on the Clean Power Plan last year, Mr Trump declared that his actions would "create American jobs and to grow American wealth".

"We're ending the theft of American prosperity and rebuilding our beloved country," the President said.