



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY
MONTANA CHAPTER

Joe Weigand
President
1546 Mineral Road
Helena, MT 59602

April 23, 2009

The Honorable Senator Max Baucus
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

The Montana Chapter of the Wildlife Society would like to strongly support recently introduced legislation that would protect important fish and wildlife habitat. The Clean Water Restoration Act (S.787) would restore crucial protections to our nation's rivers, lakes, streams, and other waters that have been lost in recent years. Restoring these protections and putting us back on the path of maintaining and restoring America's waters is a top priority for our members. We urge you to consider co-sponsoring this important legislation and to vote this year to restore the crucial clean water protections.

The Wildlife Society was founded in 1937 and is a non-profit scientific and educational association of over 8,000 professional wildlife biologists and managers, dedicated to excellence in wildlife stewardship through science and education. Among the principal objectives of The Wildlife Society is the development and promotion of sound stewardship of wildlife resources and of the environments upon which wildlife and humans depend and preventing human-induced environmental degradation. Further, the Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society maintains a membership of individuals employed by state and federal agencies, educational institutions, non-profit organizations, industry, and consultants, as well as retirees and graduate students who are dedicated to upholding these principle objectives.

It is essential to act this year. Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006 have dramatically reduced federal protection of important wetlands and streams. These waters include many ephemeral and intermittent streams, and their adjacent wetlands, prairie potholes, bogs, and other headwaters. At least 20 million wetland acres, as well as nearly 60 percent of the nation's streams once protected under federal law, are now increasingly vulnerable to development or degradation. The nation's fish and wildlife will suffer if these important habitats are lost. In addition, these Supreme Court decisions and the agency guidance to implement them have created confusion and uncertainty nationwide, undermined Clean Water Act enforcement, and delayed the Army Corps permitting process.

Wetlands and headwater streams provide critical habitat for many species of fish and wildlife, including numerous threatened and endangered species. Many wildlife species use wetlands, including deer, moose, and many bird species such as waterfowl, pheasants, quail, various songbirds, and shorebirds. Reptiles, amphibians, and other wetland dependent species rely on healthy wetlands as a key component of their habitat. Wetlands and headwater streams also provide important reproductive habitat, food resources, and refuge for fish.

In addition to their great importance for fish and wildlife, wetlands and headwater streams are also fundamentally important to water quality and quantity. Because most waters are interconnected, reduced or absent protection for these wetlands and headwater streams could negatively affect downstream waters, including traditionally navigable waters, which would be detrimental to interstate commerce, drinking water, and other public interests. Healthy wetland systems also reduce the potential for large-scale flooding, not unlike the flooding that has already occurred this year in the Red River system.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this important legislation. The Clean Water Restoration Act would make real progress towards definitively granting important protections to our nation's water resources. The passage of this Act will help ensure that the streams, tributaries, wetlands, rivers, lakes, and coastal waters Congress originally intended to be protected from pollution by the 1972 Clean Water Act will remain protected and ecologically functional, now and for future generations.

We ask that you consider co-sponsoring the Clean Water Restoration Act and that you vote this year to restore these vital protections to our nation's waters. We stand ready to work with you, committee leaders, bill sponsors, and others to strengthen public support for restoring the Clean Water Act's longstanding protections for our rivers, streams, lakes, and wetlands.

If you would like to co-sponsor, please contact Kelly Reed in Senator Feingold's office ((Kelly_Reed@feingold.senate.gov or 4-5323).

Sincerely,

Joe Weigand
President
Montana Chapter of The Wildlife Society