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Media Advisory: UNH Expert to Comment on EPA Change to Clean Water Act

Monday, February 25, 2019

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DURHAM, N.H. — The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of the Army recently announced a proposed change to the Clean Water Act that would reduce the types of waters currently protected. The change has stirred up debate between those who claim current regulations are too broad and limit economic growth and environmentalists and scientists who argue the rollback ignores basic hydrologic science and will inevitably lead to an increase in pollution and contaminated water.

Bill McDowell, professor of environmental science at the University of New Hampshire, is available to talk about the consequences of this proposed change and what it could mean for the country's waters.

“Even the smallest headwaters and ephemeral streams – those created from storms and snow melt -



BILL MCDOWELL, PROFESSOR OF ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE, IS ALSO THE DIRECTOR OF THE NEW HAMPSHIRE WATER RESOURCES RESEARCH CENTER (NH WRRC) AND THE UNH WATER QUALITY ANALYSIS LAB (UNH WQAL).

can carry significant pollution downstream, eventually impacting waters where people fish and source drinking water,” said McDowell. “Ignoring this fact flies in the face of well-established science.”

The rule change would affect an estimated 18 percent of streams and 51 percent of wetlands currently under federal protection.

“All waterways – including surface water, groundwater, small streams and big rivers - are connected like the circulatory system in your body,” said McDowell. “To say that we think of the arteries, veins and capillaries differently would be foolish. Obviously they are connected because we know blood moves through them all. It’s the same way water moves from the tiniest headwaters down to streams and rivers and ultimately to the ocean.”

Under the new rule, states can still enact regulations to compensate for the absence of federal oversight. McDowell says that’s little comfort on a national scale.

“The science shows that water doesn’t follow state boundaries,” said McDowell. “So if protections are scaled back considerably at the federal level and we leave it up to the states, we know some states will allow anything to the detriment of the downstream receivers. A low level of protection in one state will almost certainly have a downstream effect that extends beyond its borders.”

The EPA has scheduled public hearings on February 27 and February 28, 2019.

McDowell is also the director of the New Hampshire Water Resources Research Center (NH WRRC) and the UNH Water Quality Analysis Lab (UNH WQAL).

He can be reached at bill.mcdowell@unh.edu (mailto:bill.mcdowell@unh.edu) and (603) 862-2249 or (603) 781-3561. He is available for on camera and radio interviews in UNH’s ReadyCam studio (https://www.videolinktv.com/products-services/readycam/).

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