



Harvard Model Congress Boston 2024

Water Quality Update

There has been minimal effort from both Congress and the executive branch on improving American water quality since the summer. In fact, the most notable update to report may be inaction rather than action — the federal Government Accountability Office released a report in November which found the Environmental Protection Agency has failed to meet Clean Water Act deadlines regarding the cleanliness of bodies of water, at least in Washington State (GAO 2023). The poor water quality in Washington has led to a precipitous decline in the salmon population, which has economic and cultural ramifications for the state (GAO 2023). In the report, the GAO “reiterate[d] its recommendation from 2013 that Congress should consider revising the Clean Water Act’s largely voluntary approach to restoring waters impaired by nonpoint source pollution,” emphasizing the flaws in federal oversight of water pollution nationwide (GAO 2023). What’s more, much of the oversight power over wetlands which used to be protected under the Clean Water Act was divested to the states following a summer Supreme Court Ruling, which have struggled to fill the void left by the federal government, per a report in *Stateline* (Brown 2023). According to the piece, “the loss of federal rules means that many waters are now largely unregulated” (Brown 2023).

While there has been limited movement from the federal government, there has been some new research which has only emphasized the importance of careful oversight over water quality. One study, published in the prestigious journal *Nature*, emphasizes the interconnectedness of water quality with broader conversations on the climate. The study found that water quality in rivers mostly deteriorates following droughts, heatwaves, rainstorms, floods, and the effects of long-term climate change (van Vliet et. Al, 2023). In the same vein, a team of scientists from Purdue University found that a policy which would raise the price of carbon-intensive products would have the effect of reducing groundwater contamination in the Mississippi River Basin and the Gulf of Mexico (Purdue News Service 2023). These studies demonstrate the extent to which Congress’s ability to deal with water quality is tied up in its broader efforts to address climate change.

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