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***Federal Rule Changes Are Putting Wetlands and Waterways at Risk Just When They're Needed Most - Wisconsin's Green Fire Releases Report Assessing Wetland Protections in Wisconsin***

**Rhineland, WI—**

Wisconsin's Green Fire, in partnership with The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin, has released a new report [Wetlands and Waterways in Wisconsin: Navigating Changes to the Federal Waters of the United States \(WOTUS\) Rule](#). The report examines the impact of recent changes to federal rules defining the Waters of the United States under the federal Clean Water Act.

In 2020, rollbacks in federal protection of waterways and wetlands under the Clean Water Act left millions of wetland acres in Wisconsin vulnerable to development. Although Wisconsin law protects many waterways and wetlands that are no longer covered by federal protections, continued weakening of state protections can lead to additional wetland loss, increasing the risks and impacts of flooding.

The new report reviews the origins of the Clean Water Act and the history of ongoing changes and legal decisions over the definition of "Waters of the United States," a definition that is critical to interpreting and implementing meaningful protections under the law. An assessment performed by the report contributors concludes that, *as many as 3.5 million acres, or 55% of Wisconsin's wetlands would not be protected under 2020 changes to federal rules re-defining the scope of the Clean Water Act.*

"Due to the 2020 rule changes, Wisconsin risks losing additional acres of wetlands at a time when our understanding of the importance of wetlands is higher than ever," said report contributor Nick Miller, Director of Science and Strategy for The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin. Miller offered, "Especially with the increase in frequency and severity of flooding, it is imperative that we protect and restore more wetlands, which slow and capture water during storm events, and not accept their continued loss under pressures of development and competing land uses."

The report examines the intersection and overlap between federal and state water protection authority, and explains the increasingly important functions, environmental benefits, and ecosystem services provided by wetlands, especially in light of the impacts being experienced as a result of climate change.

"Unfortunately, wetland loss places financial burdens on society, with direct impacts of flooding disproportionately damaging low-income, Native American communities, and communities of color," according to report contributor Joanne Kline, a wetland ecologist formerly with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR).

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Wisconsin's annual precipitation has increased by between 5% and 20% since 1950, and a significant amount of that increase is experienced in intense rainfall or snow events. These events are breaking records and causing costly flood damage to cities and municipalities across the state.

Community leaders, elected officials, floodplain managers, and urban planners are all increasingly recognizing that restoring and protecting Wisconsin's wetlands and waterways is a key step in mitigating flood damage and creating more resilient and healthy communities.

Key recommendations from the "[WOTUS Report](#)" for Wisconsin:

- Preserve and strengthen wetland protections in state law.
- Utilize the new wetland mapping protocol that the WDNR has developed in updating the statewide Wisconsin Wetland Inventory. Improved mapping will help guide modeling efforts critical to planning and adaptation.
- Support and invest in green infrastructure projects that address watershed-level impacts. These projects should be developed in close collaboration with Native Americans, communities of color, and low-income communities to reduce flooding impacts.

Federal funding currently being considered in Congress would create opportunities to engage with those impacted by flooding to execute wetland restoration projects within affected communities. Wetland restoration projects can help reduce flooding and serve as a step towards creating a more resilient and equitable future.

[Wisconsin's Green Fire](#) (WGF) is a statewide membership organization dedicated to science-based management of natural resources. WGF's work group members that created the *Opportunities Now* report on Wetlands and Waterways in Wisconsin include career natural resource professionals with expertise in water resource management and water law.

The full document is available at: <https://wgreenfire.org/wetlands-and-waterways-in-wisconsin-an-important-tool-to-navigating-changes-to-the-federal-waters-of-the-united-states-wotus-rule/>