

# Holding Polluters Accountable for Stormwater Runoff

Clean water is essential to the health and safety of our homes and families, yet polluted runoff has quickly become the one of the biggest sources of water pollution in the country.



Polluted runoff in Washington, DC. | Lynette Batt, American Rivers

## **Polluted Runoff Threatens Clean Water, Health, and Safety**

Runoff is a problem because when it rains, pollution like heavy metals, sediment, harmful excessive nutrients, and other wastes washes off of the hardened surfaces of our cities and towns. In most urban areas, runoff either flows untreated into rivers, lakes and streams or through storm drains into nearby rivers, lakes, and streams. Polluted runoff from hard surfaces essentially creates mini flashfloods, causing street closures, basement flooding, and high levels of sediment in waterways.

Although its impact is not limited to these areas alone, businesses, towns, and cities that rely on clean water for tourism can be severely impacted by polluted runoff. Eighty-five percent of all tourism dollars flow into coastal states. Yet, in 2011, polluted runoff caused 47 percent of beach closing and advisory days. For two beaches in California, illnesses associated with swimming in water contaminated by polluted runoff cost the public over \$3 million every year. Other communities suffer when favored fishing and swimming holes are closed by runoff pollution.

Much of untreated runoff comes from acres of shopping mall parking lots, industrial rooftops and other commercial surfaces that were built decades ago, many of which are currently not responsible for reducing their runoff pollution. Our communities and waters need to be protected by standards and permits that require owners of these places to plant buffers, construct filters, and take other measures to protect our waters and reduce flooding. These standards will also provide fairness and accountability and reduce the financial burden on local governments.

## **Petitioning to Protect Clean Water**

American Rivers, Anacostia Riverkeeper, Anacostia Watershed Society, Blue Water Baltimore/Baltimore Harbor Waterkeeper, California Coastkeeper Alliance, Conservation Law Foundation, Natural Resources Defense Council, PennFuture, Potomac Riverkeeper, and the Shenandoah Riverkeeper have submitted petitions to the EPA that call on the Agency to create better standards and permits and reduce runoff created by existing commercial, industrial, and institutional sites. These petitions are based on facts we all

## **The Costs of Polluted Runoff**

According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), up to 25% of economic damages caused by flooding occur because runoff overwhelms urban drainage systems.

Coastal and marine waters support 28.3 million jobs that depend upon safe, clean water.

In 2000, all 50 states surveyed the health of some of the nation's waters. Polluted runoff impaired at least 38,114 miles of rivers, 948,420 acres of lakes, 2,742 square miles of bays and estuaries, and 79,582 acres of wetlands.

Contamination and loss of aquatic species and habitats from polluted stormwater runoff costs the commercial fish and shellfish industry up to \$30 million every year.

know – that rainwater running off the pavement and rooftops in these areas pollutes our waters. They call on EPA to carry out this responsibility under authority assigned to it by Congress in 1987, known as residual designation authority, to take steps that will create cleaner waters by reducing polluted runoff and keeping it out of storm sewers and local waterways.

## Creating National Models in Three EPA Regions

American Rivers, the Conservation Law Foundation, and Natural Resources Defense Council, along with their co-petitioners from each of three EPA regions, targeted the petitions to regions that are home to some of the nation's most iconic and threatened waters. Additionally, these regions are well poised to become leaders for the rest of the country.

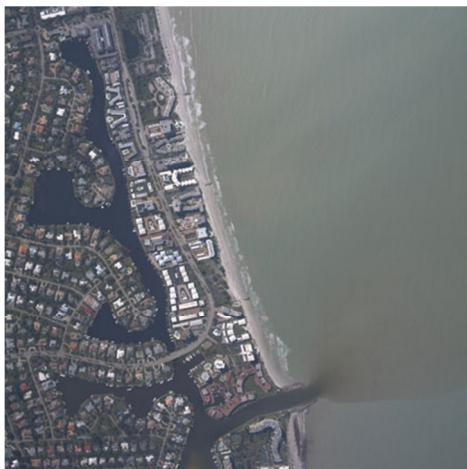


Polluted runoff enters storm drain | Andrew Wamboldt

## Building on Success: Petitioning for Residual Designation Authority in Vermont

In 2003, the Conservation Law Foundation petitioned the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) to require permits for sources of runoff discharges that the Agency had already established were contributing to water quality impairments in local brooks around Burlington, VT. Five years later, in 2008, the Vermont Environmental Court determined that the state must exercise its residual designation authority once the connection between the discharge and water quality violations are demonstrated. These “designated discharges” were discharges that were not currently managed under a state or municipal stormwater permit A general permit was then issued to 3 categories of existing discharges, requiring them to reduce existing levels of polluted runoff.

## Improving Accountability to Better Manage Polluted Runoff and Protect Clean Water



Polluted runoff along Florida coastline | NOAA

Polluted runoff is one of the only growing sources of water pollution across the country. The good news is that we have a much better understanding of how to reduce it – including capturing and treating runoff from already existing sites. These petitions ask the EPA to get existing sources of polluted runoff to do their fair share to reduce their impact. We are calling on EPA to carry out this responsibility and to take steps to better manage sources of polluted runoff that aren't being addressed, yet contribute to water pollution.

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