



CLEAN WATER DEFENSE

# POLICY PRIORITIES

Waterkeeper Alliance defends and enforces clean water laws, standards, and permits, and fights against the ever-growing threats to clean and safe water around the world. Our **Clean Water Defense** campaign calls for strong national laws, regulations, permits, policies, and international agreements to protect rivers, lakes, and streams. Below are the Alliance's priority issues and recommendations for reform.

## PRIORITY ISSUE

**Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) are a pervasive group of toxic contaminants that have been linked to harmful effects to public health and the environment.**

Waterkeeper Alliance's report, [Invisible, Unbreakable, Unnatural: PFAS Contamination of U.S. Surface Waters](#), found at least one PFAS compound in 83% of 114 sampled waterways. The Environmental Working Group [estimates](#) that PFAS contaminates the drinking water of at least 200 million people, and a National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey [reports](#) its presence in the bloodstreams of an estimated 97% of people nationwide.

## PRIORITY ISSUE

**U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) military sites are contaminated with PFAS causing environmental harm.**

The U.S. government estimates that PFAS clean-up at military sites alone will cost \$38 billion; however, the agency requested only \$300 million for PFAS cleanup for fiscal year 2025.

## PRIORITY ISSUE

**6PPD harms rainbow trout, coho salmon, and Chinook salmon.**

6PPD is an organic chemical widely used as a stabilizing additive in rubbers and commonly used in vehicle tires. When 6PPD is exposed to air it becomes 6PPD-quinone (6PPD-q), which is the second most toxic chemical to aquatic species documented to date, especially in [wild salmon populations](#). As tires break down on road surfaces, stormwater carries these harmful particles into nearby waterways, contributing to [ecotoxic impacts](#) on fish and other species.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**Advance regulatory frameworks to protect against toxic chemicals.**

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) should expand the types of PFAS listed as hazardous under existing law. In 2024, the agency listed two types of PFAS substances as hazardous; however, nearly 15,000 types exist. The agency needs to expand its regulation further to classify all short-chain PFAS as hazardous. In addition, it must work with more urgency to achieve all of the regulatory commitments it made in its PFAS Strategic Roadmap.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**Congress must fully fund DoD clean-up efforts of all PFAS-contaminated military sites.**

At current funding levels, it would take more than 125 years for the agency to clean up hundreds of military sites across the country.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**Ensure the U.S. government addresses 6PPD/6PPD-q contamination.**

Congress must adequately fund research to develop alternatives to 6PPD/6PPD-q and implement stormwater mitigation improvements to prevent exposure to toxic pollution.



Waterkeeper® Alliance is a global movement uniting more than 300 community-based Waterkeeper Organizations and Affiliates that patrol and protect nearly six million square miles of waterways. The Alliance represents the interests of more than 150 U.S. Waterkeeper groups and their more than one million members and supporters who protect the right to clean water for over 255 million Americans. For more information, visit [waterkeeper.org](https://waterkeeper.org).



#### PRIORITY ISSUE

**The U.S. Supreme Court's harmful decision in *Sackett v. EPA* weakened Clean Water Act protections for many waterways and wetlands.**

The Court's ruling removed the federal discharge permit requirement for many smaller or isolated waterways and opened the door to development projects—including pipelines, mines, and large-scale housing-filling in wetlands without meeting federal water quality protections.

#### PRIORITY ISSUE

**Nonpoint source pollution resulting from land runoff and drainage is the leading cause of water quality problems.**

Polluted land runoff is considered by EPA as one of the greatest threats to clean water in the U.S. Agricultural runoff and stormwater harms fish and other aquatic life, causes harmful algal blooms, and contributes to ocean acidification. Every community is impacted by nonpoint source pollution as pavement replaces green space. However, this type of pollution remains largely unregulated by Congress and EPA.

#### PRIORITY ISSUE

**Stormwater management systems are outdated and unable to meet current needs.**

The harmful impacts of land runoff could be mitigated through stormwater control methods and investment in green infrastructure. This technology is available now and not only cleans water and air, but also increases climate resilience, builds habitat for wildlife, and has economic and health benefits for humans. Proper stormwater management can reduce multiple pollutants such as PFAS, 6PPD, and microplastics, and is a critical first line of defense for water.

#### PRIORITY ISSUE

**The plastic pollution crisis is like a slow-motion oil spill into waterways throughout the world.**

The fossil fuel industry contributes to the nearly half a billion tons of plastic produced each year, a number that is expected to increase in the coming decades. This production exacerbates global climate change, poisons frontline communities, and harms wildlife. Only a small fraction of plastic is recycled, with the vast majority ending up in our communities and waterways—destroying natural resources, impairing public health, and threatening critical biodiversity.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**Protect all waters, including wetlands that are essential for ecosystems and have cascading effects.**

Congress and state officials must act following the decision in *Sackett* to protect clean water through legislation and state policies to restore Clean Water Act protections.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATION

**Strengthen Clean Water Act protections to prevent nonpoint source pollution from land runoff.**

Congress should ensure greater oversight and regulation of non-point source discharges. In addition, EPA should follow the U.S. Government Accountability Office's [recommendation](#) to issue regulations under its existing authority to better regulate nonpoint source pollution to ensure that water quality standards are met.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Adequately fund federal and state regulatory agencies, and tribal governments to address stormwater management.**

Fully funding and staffing stormwater control methods, including green infrastructure, through EPA and state-delegated programs would improve public health and safeguard ecosystems. In addition, Congress must provide sufficient grant funding to state and local authorities as well as tribal governments to address non-point source pollution and polluted urban runoff control.

#### POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

**Pass domestic plastic reduction legislation and support the Global Plastics Treaty.**

The U.S. Congress must pass the Break Free From Plastic Pollution Act, Plastic Pellet Free Waters Act, and the Farewell to Foam Act. These measures would significantly reverse the harm caused by plastics and help clean up existing plastic pollution. Globally, the U.S. must join other nations to sign a [binding international treaty](#) to end plastic pollution across its entire life cycle, including in the marine environment.

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#### FOR MORE INFORMATION PLEASE CONTACT:

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