

My Turn

The *Arizona Republic* recently published a piece by Congressman David Schweikert attacking the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and its proposed rulemaking to define “waters of the United States” and to ensure consistent implementation of the Clean Water Act protections in Arizona. Congressman Schweikert mischaracterizes the EPA rulemaking, the underlying science, and the Clean Water Act.

Let’s begin with the Clean Water Act itself. In 1972, Congress enacted the Clean Water Act with broad bi-partisan support in order to protect the “waters of the United States.” The country had huge water pollution problems and rivers such as the Cuyahoga River in Ohio were so polluted that they actually caught on fire. The Clean Water Act has been remarkably successful over the last 40 years at improving water quality and preventing water pollution, including here in Arizona.

The Clean Water Act establishes the basic structure for limiting discharges of pollutants into our waters and provides legal authority for states to establish water quality standards for lakes, rivers, and streams to protect water quality for drinking water sources, recreation, agricultural irrigation, and to maintain and protect water quality for fish and wildlife. EPA, *in partnership with the states*, implements Clean Water Act programs to maintain, protect, and restore the biological, physical, and chemical integrity of the nation’s waters, including waters that do not flow year-round or consistently – which describes the vast majority of Arizona’s streams.

The Clean Water Act prevents water pollution, but also provides critically important funding to implement programs to control erosion and improve watershed health. The examples of how the Clean Water Act has protected Arizona’s waters are numerous and varied.

Just one Arizona example involves Clean Water Act grant funding for an erosion control project on the Hackberry Ranch near Safford. Boy Scouts and Americorps employees installed 540 sediment retention structures on ephemeral stream channels (these are streams that only flow when there is rain) crossing grazing land in the Whitlock Valley watershed which drains to the Gila River. The project was implemented to improve conditions on about 300 acres of grazing land. The sediment retention structures and range management improvements funded by the grant have reduced soil erosion by an estimated four tons of sediment per acre per year. The success of this Clean Water Act project is being shared with other ranchers in the area. It wouldn’t have happened if the scope of the Clean Water Act did not apply to the small ephemeral streams of the Whitlock Valley watershed.

Simply put, the CWA is the only law that protects surface water quality in Arizona. Our state would be in a world of water pollution hurt without it.