

1 XAVIER BECERRA  
Attorney General of California  
2 SARAH E. MORRISON  
ERIC KATZ  
3 Supervising Deputy Attorneys General  
CATHERINE M. WIEMAN, SBN 222384  
4 TATIANA K. GAUR, SBN 246227  
ROXANNE J. CARTER, SBN 259441  
5 JESSICA BARCLAY-STROBEL, SBN 280361  
BRYANT B. CANNON, SBN 284496  
6 Deputy Attorneys General  
300 South Spring Street, Suite 1702  
7 Los Angeles, CA 90013  
Telephone: (213) 269-6329  
8 Fax: (916) 731-2128  
E-mail: Tatiana.Gaur@doj.ca.gov

LETITIA JAMES  
Attorney General of the  
State of New York  
PHILIP BEIN (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Senior Counsel  
TIMOTHY HOFFMAN (*admitted pro hac*  
*vice*)  
Senior Counsel  
Office of the Attorney General  
Environmental Protection Bureau  
28 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10005  
Telephone: (716) 853-8465  
Fax: (716) 853-8579  
Email: Timothy.Hoffman@ag.ny.gov  
*Attorneys for Plaintiff State of New York*

9 *Attorneys for Plaintiff State of California, by and*  
10 *through Attorney General Xavier Becerra and*  
*California State Water Resources Control Board*

11 [Additional parties and counsel listed on signature  
12 pages]

13 IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
14 FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

16 **STATE OF CALIFORNIA, et al.,**

17 Plaintiffs,

18 v.

20 **ANDREW WHEELER, et al.,**

21 Defendants,

22 **STATE OF GEORGIA, et al.,**

23 Intervenor-Defendants

**Case No. 3:20-cv-03005-RS**

**NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR  
SUMMARY JUDGMENT;  
MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND  
AUTHORITIES**

Date: June 3, 2021

Time: 1:30 pm

Courtroom: Courtroom 3 – 17<sup>th</sup> Floor  
San Francisco Courthouse

Judge: The Honorable Richard Seeborg

Action Filed: May 1, 2020

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**GLOSSARY**

1		
2		
3	1980s Regulations	Regulations issued in the 1970s and 1980s to define “waters of the United States” under the Clean Water Act. 42 Fed. Reg. 37, 144 (July 19, 1977); 45 Fed. Reg. 85,336 (Dec. 24, 1980); 47 Fed. Reg. 31,794 (July 22, 1982); 51 Fed. Reg. 41,206 (Nov. 13, 1986); 53 Fed. Reg. 20,764 (June 6, 1988).
4		
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8	2015 Clean Water Rule or 2015 Rule	80 Fed. Reg. 37,054 (June 29, 2015) (codified at 33 C.F.R. § 328.3 (2015))
9		
10	2019 Rule	84 Fed. Reg. 4,154 (Feb. 14, 2019)
11	2020 Rule or Rule	The Navigable Waters Protection Rule: Definition of “Waters of the United States 85 Fed. Reg. 22,250 (Apr. 21, 2020) (2020 Rule or Rule)
12		
13		
14	APA	Administrative Procedure Act, 5 U.S.C. § 551 <i>et seq.</i>
15	AR	Administrative Record
16	Army Corps	United States Army Corps of Engineers
17	CWA or Act	Clean Water Act, 33 U.S.C. §1251 <i>et seq.</i>
18	Connectivity Report	EPA Office of Research and Development “Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence”
19		
20		
21	EA	Economic Analysis
22	EPA	United States Environmental Protection Agency
23		
24	RPA	Resource and Programmatic Assessment
25	Science Board	EPA’s Science Advisory Board
26	TSD	Technical Support Document for the Clean Water Rule: Definition of Waters of the United States (2015)
27		
28		

1                   **NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT**

2                   **TO ALL PARTIES AND COUNSEL OF RECORD:**

3                   PLEASE TAKE NOTICE that, on June 3, 2021, at 1:30 pm, or as soon as it may be heard,  
4 Plaintiffs, by and through their undersigned counsel, will, and hereby do, move for summary  
5 judgment pursuant to Rule 56 of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure. This motion will be made  
6 before the Honorable Judge Richard Seeborg, San Francisco Courthouse, Courtroom 3 – 17th  
7 Floor, 450 Golden Gate Avenue, San Francisco, California 94102.

8                   This motion is based the Memorandum of Points and Authorities, the declarations in  
9 support filed herewith and previously in this matter, the administrative record for *The Navigable*  
10 *Waters Protection Rule: Definition of “Waters of the United States,”* 85 Fed. Reg. 22,250 (Apr.  
11 21, 2020) (2020 Rule or Rule), and the Court’s entire file in this litigation.

12                   **MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES**

13                   **INTRODUCTION**

14                   Plaintiffs (the States and Cities) challenge the 2020 Rule which drastically narrows the  
15 “waters of the United States” protected by the Clean Water Act (CWA or the Act). With the 2020  
16 Rule the EPA and the Army Corps (collectively, the Agencies) exclude from CWA jurisdiction (1)  
17 all ephemeral streams and any other streams that do not contribute surface flow to another water  
18 covered by the Rule (“covered water”) in a “typical year”; (2) most wetlands that do not have a  
19 surface water connection to another covered water; and (3) interstate waters as an independent  
20 category. The Rule is invalid under either of the two “distinct standards” that courts apply in  
21 reviewing agency regulations: the standard for agency decisionmaking under *Motor Vehicle*  
22 *Manufacturers Ass’n of U.S., Inc. v. State Farm Mutual Auto Insurance Co.*, 463 U.S. 29 (1983)  
23 (*State Farm*), and the standard for statutory interpretation under *Chevron, U.S.A., Inc. v. NRDC*,  
24 467 U.S. 837, 843 (1984) (*Chevron*). *Altera Corp. & Subsidiaries v. Comm’r of Internal Revenue*,  
25 926 F.3d 1061, 1075 (9th Cir. 2019) (citation omitted) (*Altera*).

26                   The Agencies’ decisionmaking is flawed for three independent reasons. First, the Agencies  
27 fail to examine important factors or address their prior factual findings, as required by *State Farm*  
28 and *FCC v. Fox Television Stations, Inc.*, 556 U.S. 502, 538 (2009) (*Fox*). As the administrative

1 record shows, while they state that the Rule balances the Act’s objective of maintaining the  
2 integrity of the Nation’s waters with the rights and responsibilities of states, the Agencies fail to  
3 examine how excluding all ephemeral streams and countless wetlands will impact water quality or  
4 state rights and responsibilities. Second, the Agencies ignore their prior factual findings about the  
5 impact on downstream water quality of the ephemeral streams and wetlands that the Rule  
6 excludes. They also adopt a vague and uncertain “typical year” requirement that conflicts with  
7 CWA’s goal of protecting and enhancing water quality. Third, the Agencies fail to examine the  
8 reliance interests of the States and Cities, who have relied on prior long-standing definitions of  
9 “waters of the United States” that included those streams and wetlands, as required by *Encino*  
10 *Motorcars, LLC. v. Navarro*, 136 S. Ct. 2117, 2126 (2016) (*Encino Motorcars*).

11 Alternatively, the 2020 Rule is unlawful under the *Chevron* standard for statutory  
12 interpretation because it is based on an unreasonable and impermissible interpretation of the CWA  
13 and conflicts with precedent. By excluding many previously covered waters from CWA  
14 protection, the Rule is contrary to the Act’s text, structure, and purpose, and controlling Supreme  
15 Court decisions.

16 Accordingly, the States and Cities are entitled to summary judgment vacating the Rule.

## 17 **STATUTORY AND REGULATORY BACKGROUND**

### 18 **I. THE CLEAN WATER ACT**

19 The CWA’s “objective . . . is to restore and maintain the chemical, physical and biological  
20 integrity of the Nation’s waters.” 33 U.S.C. § 1251(a). To achieve this objective, the Act prohibits  
21 discharges of pollutants from point sources to “navigable waters” without a permit or in violation  
22 of a permit. *Id.* §§ 1311(a), 1342, 1344, 1362(12). “Navigable waters” are “the waters of the  
23 United States, including the territorial seas.” *Id.* § 1362(7). This includes interstate waters. *Id.*  
24 § 1313(a) (specifying that protections for interstate waters under the CWA “shall remain in effect”  
25 without regard to navigability).

26 Before the CWA was enacted in 1972, states were primarily responsible for water pollution  
27 control, with the federal government playing a limited role. S. Rep. No. 92-414, at 2 (1971) (1971  
28 WL 11307, at \*3669). In passing the Act, however, Congress recognized that this state-led

1 scheme had been “inadequate in every vital aspect,” leaving many waters “severely polluted.”  
2 Congress responded by deliberately replacing the ineffective patchwork of state laws with the  
3 CWA, “an all-encompassing program of water pollution regulation.” *Id.* at 7 (1971 WL 11307, at  
4 \*3674); *City of Milwaukee v. Illinois*, 451 U.S. 304, 318 (1981). Through the Act, Congress  
5 created a uniform “national floor” of water quality protection by establishing minimum pollution  
6 controls for “waters of the United States.” *Arkansas v. Oklahoma*, 503 U.S. 91, 110 (1992) (CWA  
7 authorizes EPA “to create and manage a uniform system of interstate water pollution regulation”).

8 The CWA requires permits for two categories of discharges to “waters of the United  
9 States”: (1) discharge of a “pollutant” from a “point source”; and (2) discharge of dredged or fill  
10 material. 33 U.S.C. §§ 1342, 1344, 1362(6), (14). Permits for discharges from point sources are  
11 issued under Section 402 by EPA or authorized states. *Id.* § 1342(a), (b). Permits for discharges  
12 of dredged or fill material are issued under Section 404 by the Army Corps or authorized states.  
13 *Id.* § 1344(a), (h). Nearly all states operate the Section 402 permit program, and nearly all states  
14 rely on the Army Corps to operate the Section 404 permit program.<sup>1</sup>

15 The Act provides additional mechanisms for protecting “waters of the United States.”  
16 Under Section 303, states are required to establish water quality standards for waters within their  
17 borders and impose additional pollution restrictions on waters that fail to meet those standards. 33  
18 U.S.C. § 1313. Under Section 401, a project within a state that requires a federal license or permit  
19 and that may result in a discharge into “waters of the United States” is required to obtain a “water  
20 quality certification” from the state certifying that the project will comply with the Act and  
21 applicable state laws. *Id.* § 1341. Section 404 dredge or fill permits by the Army Corps and  
22 licenses for pipelines or hydropower projects by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission are  
23 among the federal permits triggering Section 401 state certification requirements. *Id.*

24 Nationwide controls are critical to protecting water quality in downstream states because  
25 many of the Nation’s waters cross state boundaries and downstream states have limited ability to  
26 control water pollution sources in upstream states. *See Int’l Paper Co. v. Ouellette*, 479 U.S. 481,

27 \_\_\_\_\_  
28 <sup>1</sup> See <https://www.epa.gov/npdes/npdes-state-program-authority>; <https://www.epa.gov/cwa-404/state-or-tribal-assumption-cwa-section-404-permit-program>.

1 490-91 (1987) (*Ouellette*). Those controls “prevent the ‘Tragedy of the Commons’ that might  
 2 result if jurisdictions [could] compete for industry and development by providing more liberal  
 3 limitations than their neighboring states.” *NRDC v. Costle*, 568 F.2d 1369, 1378 (D.C. Cir. 1977)  
 4 (citation omitted). Downstream states are disadvantaged if they have to impose more stringent  
 5 controls to address pollution from upstream states to safeguard public health and welfare within  
 6 their own borders. *See United States v. Ashland Oil & Transp. Co.*, 504 F.2d 1317, 1326 (6th Cir.  
 7 1974).

8 Section 101(b) of the Act states Congress’s policy to “recognize, preserve, and protect the  
 9 primary responsibilities and rights of States to prevent, reduce and eliminate pollution,” and “to  
 10 plan the development and use . . . of land and water resources.” 33 U.S.C. § 1251(b). The primary  
 11 purpose of Section 101(b) is to provide for state implementation of the CWA permit programs.  
 12 *See A Legislative History of the Water Pollution Control Act Amendments of 1972*, Committee  
 13 Print Compiled for the Senate Committee on Public Works by the Library of Congress, Ser. No.  
 14 93–1, p. 403 (1973) (hereinafter, Dkt. No. 31-1, Ex. P) (referencing Section 101(b) and the  
 15 “responsibility of states to prevent and abate pollution by assigning them a large role in the  
 16 national discharge permit system established by the Act”). Accordingly, within the CWA  
 17 framework, state rights and responsibilities are carried out as part of “a regulatory partnership,”  
 18 *Ouellette*, 479 U.S. at 499, “between the States and the Federal Government animated by a shared  
 19 objective: ‘to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s  
 20 waters.’” *Arkansas*, 503 U.S. at 101.

## 21 **II. “WATERS OF THE UNITED STATES” – PREVIOUS AGENCY RULEMAKING AND** 22 **GUIDANCE, AND SUPREME COURT CASELAW**

23 The CWA does not define “waters of the United States” and the Agencies have defined  
 24 those waters by regulation and guidance. Of relevance here, the Agencies defined those waters in  
 25 regulations issued in the 1970s and 1980s (1980s definition). 42 Fed. Reg. 37, 144 (July 19,  
 26 1977); 45 Fed. Reg. 85,336 (Dec. 24, 1980); 47 Fed. Reg. 31,794 (July 22, 1982); 51 Fed. Reg.  
 27 41,206 (Nov. 13, 1986); 53 Fed. Reg. 20,764 (June 6, 1988). The Supreme Court reviewed the  
 28 1980s definition in three decisions: *United States v. Riverside Bayview Homes, Inc.*, 474 U.S. 121

1 (1985) (*Riverside Bayview*); *Solid Waste Agency of Northern Cook County v. U.S. Army Corps of*  
2 *Eng'rs*, 531 U.S. 159 (2001) (*SWANCC*); and *Rapanos v. United States*, 547 U.S. 715 (2006)  
3 (*Rapanos*). Following *SWANCC* and *Rapanos*, the Agencies issued guidance in 2003 and 2008,  
4 respectively. See 68 Fed. Reg. 1995 (Jan. 15, 2003) (*SWANCC* guidance); *Clean Water Act*  
5 *Jurisdiction Following the U.S. Supreme Court's Decision in Rapanos v. United States & Carabell*  
6 *v. United States* (Dec. 2, 2008) (*Rapanos* Guidance), Administrative Record (AR) [EPA-HQ-OW-](#)  
7 [2018-0149-11695](#).<sup>2</sup>

8 In 2015, the Agencies issued the Clean Water Rule (2015 Clean Water Rule or 2015 Rule).  
9 80 Fed. Reg. 37,054 (June 29, 2015) (codified at 3113 C.F.R. § 328.3 (2015)). In 2019, before  
10 issuing the regulation under review here, the Agencies issued a regulation (2019 Rule) that  
11 repealed the 2015 Rule and reverted to the 1980s definition. 84 Fed. Reg. 4154 (Feb. 14, 2019).

12 All three sets of regulations predating the 2020 Rule defined “waters of the United States”  
13 to include navigable-in-fact or “traditionally navigable waters,” interstate waters, and the territorial  
14 seas. Those regulations differed in their treatment of non-navigable tributaries and wetlands but  
15 did not exclude all ephemeral streams and did not require wetlands to have a surface water  
16 connection to other covered waters.

#### 17 **A. The 1980s Definition**

18 In addition to defining “waters of the United States” to include traditionally navigable  
19 waters, interstate waters, and the territorial seas, the 1980s definition included tributaries of those  
20 waters and wetlands that were “adjacent to” them, defining “adjacent” to mean “bordering,  
21 contiguous, or neighboring.” See 51 Fed. Reg. 41,206 (Nov. 13, 1986) (codified at 33 C.F.R. §  
22 328.3 (c) (1987)).

23 \_\_\_\_\_  
24 <sup>2</sup> Documents in the Administrative Record contain the prefix EPA-HQ-OW-2018-0149  
25 followed by the Docket Document ID. Citations to the Administrative Record herein omit the  
26 prefix and cite only to the Docket Document ID. Thus, document EPA-HQ-OW-2018-0149-  
27 11695 will be cited as “AR 11695.” All AR page citations are to the page number of the  
28 electronic PDF due to the inconsistent application of enumerated page numbers across the record.  
All AR citations hyperlink to the [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) URL provided in the Administrative  
Record Index. Dkt. No. 206-2. For those [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) pages containing multiple  
documents, clarifying language identifies the referenced document. For [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)  
pages that contain PDFs of both a cover letter to a public comment and the public comment itself,  
the AR page citations are only to the PDF page number of the comment.



1           **B. Supreme Court Decisions Regarding the 1980s Definition**

2           In *Riverside Bayview*, the Supreme Court unanimously held that wetlands adjacent to  
3 traditionally navigable waters are “inseparably bound up” with such waters and thus properly  
4 included in the regulatory definition of “waters of the United States.” 474 U.S. at 134. The Court  
5 based its holding on the observation that “Congress chose to define the waters covered by the Act  
6 broadly . . . as ‘the waters of the United States,’” with the clear “inten[t] to repudiate limits that  
7 had been placed on federal regulation by earlier water pollution control statutes.” *Id.* at 133.

8           The Court in *Riverside Bayview* emphasized that the Act’s objective —“to restore and  
9 maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters,” 33 U.S.C.  
10 § 1251(a) —“incorporated a broad, systematic view of the goal of maintaining and improving  
11 water quality,” and that “the word ‘integrity’ . . . refers to a condition in which the natural structure  
12 and function of ecosystems [are] maintained.” 474 U.S. at 132 (citing legislative history). Noting  
13 “the evident breadth of congressional concern for protection of water quality and aquatic  
14 ecosystems,” the Court explained that, as Congress recognized, “[p]rotection of aquatic  
15 ecosystems . . . demanded broad federal authority to control pollution, for ‘[w]ater moves in  
16 hydrologic cycles and it is essential that discharge of pollutants be controlled at the source.’” *Id.*  
17 at 132-33 (citing legislative history).

18           In *SWANCC*, the Court held that the Agencies had incorrectly interpreted “waters of the  
19 United States” to encompass isolated, intrastate ponded waters in abandoned sand and gravel pits  
20 based solely on their use as habitat for migratory birds. 531 U.S. at 167. The Court confirmed the  
21 approach in *Riverside Bayview*, stating that it “found that Congress’ concern for the protection of  
22 water quality and aquatic ecosystems indicated its intent to regulate wetlands ‘inseparably bound  
23 up with the waters of the United States.’” *Id.* at 167 (internal quotation marks omitted). Thus, the  
24 Court made clear that the Act protects adjacent wetlands because of their “significant nexus” to  
25 traditional navigable waters. *Id.*

26           In *Rapanos*, the Court revisited the scope of “waters of the United States” and issued  
27 several opinions. The four-Justice plurality would have limited “waters of the United States” to  
28 “relatively permanent, standing or flowing bodies of water . . . [not] ephemeral flows of water,”

1 and “those wetlands with a continuous surface connection” to them. *Id.* at 732-33, 742. Justice  
2 Kennedy disagreed, concluding in a concurring opinion that “waters of the United States” include  
3 traditional navigable waters and other waters with a “significant nexus” to navigable waters. *Id.* at  
4 779. Justice Kennedy found that the plurality’s “relatively permanent” waters and “surface  
5 connection” limitations were “inconsistent with the Act’s text, structure and purpose.” *Id.* at 776.  
6 Writing for four Justices in dissent, Justice Stevens found that the plurality’s relatively-permanent-  
7 waters and surface-connection limits were “without support in the language and purposes of the  
8 Act or in our cases interpreting it.” *Id.* at 800 (quoting Justice Kennedy’s concurrence).

9 Both Justice Kennedy’s concurrence and Justice Stevens’ dissent emphasized that defining  
10 “waters of the United States” under the Act requires consideration of the critical functions  
11 performed by streams and wetlands and how they affect the chemical, physical, and biological  
12 integrity of downstream waters. Pointing out that the plurality’s requirements “made little  
13 practical sense in a statute concerned with downstream water quality,” Justice Kennedy noted that  
14 in the western United States, “irregular flows” in streams that are “often-dry water-courses” have  
15 significant downstream effects. 547 U.S. at 769. He also repeatedly stressed the important  
16 functions wetlands perform to maintain the integrity of downstream waters, including trapping and  
17 neutralizing of pollutants, flood prevention, control of surface run-off and erosion, and nutrient  
18 recycling. *Id.* at 775, 777, 779. And Justice Kennedy found that “wetlands [had] ‘significant  
19 effects on water quality and the aquatic ecosystem’” regardless of whether their “moisture  
20 originat[ed]” in “flooding or permeation” from “neighboring waterways,” and that “it may be the  
21 absence of interchange of waters . . . that makes protection of the wetlands critical to the statutory  
22 scheme.” *Id.* at 773-74, 775 (citations omitted). Similarly, Justice Stevens repeatedly referenced  
23 wetlands’ functions such as “nesting, spawning, rearing and resting sites for . . . species . . .  
24 valuable storage areas for storm and flood waters . . . and provid[ing] significant water purification  
25 functions” that “are integral to the ‘chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s  
26 waters.’” *Id.* at 796 (citations omitted); *see id.* at 797-99, 803-04, 807-08.

1           **C. The 2008 *Rapanos* Guidance**

2           In the 2008 *Rapanos* Guidance the Agencies explained that the “significant nexus” standard  
3 for identifying “waters of the United States” was the “controlling” standard, and required the  
4 Agencies to “focus[] on the integral relationship between the ecological characteristics” of  
5 tributaries and wetlands. *Rapanos Guidance*, [AR 11695](#) at 3, 9. The Agencies stated that, in  
6 addition to traditionally navigable waters, the territorial seas, and interstate waters, the “waters of  
7 the United States” include: (1) relatively permanent non-navigable tributaries of traditionally  
8 navigable waters; and (2) wetlands that are adjacent to traditionally navigable waters, including  
9 wetlands that have a shallow subsurface connection to them as well as wetlands that directly abut  
10 relatively permanent non-navigable tributaries. *Id.* at 4-7. The guidance further provided that the  
11 Agencies would rely on case-by-case “significant nexus” analyses to assess whether non-navigable  
12 tributaries that are not relatively permanent, including ephemeral streams, and their adjacent  
13 wetlands are “waters of the United States.” *Id.* at 8-11.

14           **D. The 2015 Clean Water Rule**

15           The 2015 Clean Water Rule replaced the 1980s definition. The rule defined the waters  
16 protected by the Act based on “the text of the statute, Supreme Court decisions, the best available  
17 peer-reviewed science, public input, and the agencies’ technical expertise and experience.” 80  
18 Fed. Reg. at 37,055. Like Justice Kennedy’s concurrence in *Rapanos* and the *Rapanos* Guidance,  
19 the rule relied on the “significant nexus” standard. *See* 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,057.

20           In promulgating the rule, the Agencies carefully relied upon a report prepared by EPA’s  
21 Office of Research and Development, entitled “Connectivity of Streams and Wetlands to  
22 Downstream Waters: A Review and Synthesis of the Scientific Evidence” (Connectivity Report),  
23 which accounted for more than 1,200 peer-reviewed publications. 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,057;  
24 Connectivity Report, [AR 11691](#). The Agencies also relied on independent review of the  
25 Connectivity Report by an expert panel of EPA’s Science Advisory Board (Science Board). *Id.*

26           Utilizing their “technical expertise and practical experience in implementing the CWA  
27 [for] over 40 years,” in 2015 the Agencies established “jurisdictional categories reflect[ing] the  
28 current state of the best available science [and] . . . based upon the law and Supreme Court

1 decisions.” *Id.* In addition to traditionally navigable waters, interstate waters, and the territorial  
2 seas,<sup>3</sup> the 2015 Rule defined “waters of the United States” to cover: (1) non-navigable tributaries  
3 to covered waters, including ephemeral streams, defining “tributary” as a water with sufficient  
4 volume, frequency, and duration of flow to create the physical indicators of a bed and banks and  
5 an ordinary high-water mark; (2) wetlands adjacent to otherwise covered waters, defining  
6 “adjacent” as bordering, contiguous or neighboring, including wetlands with connections to other  
7 waters through either surface water or “shallow subsurface water and groundwater flows”; and (3)  
8 other waters based on case-specific significant nexus analyses. 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,104-06. The  
9 Agencies determined that all these waters “require[d] protection in order to restore and maintain  
10 the chemical, physical or biological integrity of traditional navigable waters, interstate waters, and  
11 the territorial seas.” *Id.* at 37,055.

12 In 2015, the Agencies recognized that connections between waters “occur on a continuum  
13 or gradient,” *Id.* at 37,057, and made findings about those connections by considering the Act’s  
14 language and purpose, the significant nexus standard, and the best available science. The  
15 Agencies “characterize[d] the nature and strength of the chemical, physical, and biological  
16 connections between upstream and downstream waters” by “identify[ing] the functions that waters  
17 provide that can significantly affect the chemical, physical, or biological integrity” of downstream  
18 waters. *Id.* at 37,057; *see id.* at 37,067. Critically, the Agencies found that the effects of upstream  
19 waters on downstream water integrity are cumulative, resulting from “the accumulative  
20 contribution of similar waters in the same watershed and . . . their functions considered over time.”  
21 *Id.* at 37,057; *see id.* at 37,063. And the Agencies concluded that “[w]hen considering the effect of  
22 an individual stream or wetland, all contributions and functions of that stream or wetland should  
23 be evaluated cumulatively.” *Id.* at 37,064.

24 Applying accepted scientific principles, the Agencies found in the 2015 Clean Water Rule  
25 that tributaries, “including . . . ephemeral streams” are “waters of the United States” because “they  
26 significantly affect the chemical, physical, or biological integrity” of downstream waters and are  
27 therefore “vital” to downstream water integrity. *Id.* at 37,063, 37,066, 37,068. In particular, the

28 <sup>3</sup> The definition also included impoundments of these waters. 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,104.

1 Agencies explained that ephemeral streams protect the chemical integrity of downstream waters by  
2 trapping and removing harmful chemical substances through absorption to stream sediments, and  
3 transformation and export of nutrients and carbon to downstream waters. *See id.* at 37,068-69.  
4 Ephemeral streams protect the physical integrity of downstream waters by transporting water  
5 downstream “into local storage compartments such as ponds, shallow aquifers . . . and regional  
6 and alluvial aquifers . . . that are important sources of water for maintaining baseflow in rivers,” *id.*  
7 at 37,063; by transporting sediments, organic matter, and organisms to downstream waters; and by  
8 retaining and attenuating floodwaters. *See id.* at 37,068-69. Further, ephemeral streams protect  
9 downstream waters by performing biological functions that “are critical in the life-cycles of many  
10 organisms capable of moving throughout river networks.” *Id.* at 37,069. Notably, ephemeral  
11 streams are necessary to the dispersal and migration of amphibians, plants, microorganisms, and  
12 invertebrates as well as to providing food, habitat and refuge for numerous species of fish and  
13 wildlife such as salmon populations. *Id.* at 37,063, 37,069.

14 The Agencies also determined in the 2015 Clean Water Rule that wetlands within 100 feet  
15 of a protected water or within the 100-year floodplain of a protected water, out to a distance of  
16 1,500 feet, are “adjacent” waters and “waters of the United States.” *Id.* at 37,085-86. The  
17 Agencies concluded that these wetlands require the Act’s protection because they are “integrated  
18 with rivers via functions that improve downstream water quality.” *Id.* at 37,063. The Agencies  
19 identified multiple important chemical, physical, and biological functions performed by these  
20 adjacent wetlands. *Id.* at 37,085-86. Critically, the Agencies recognized that the functional  
21 connections between wetlands and downstream waters include physical connections both “through  
22 surface water” and through “shallow subsurface water and groundwater flows,” as well as  
23 “biological and chemical connections.” *Id.* at 37,063.

24 For example, floodplain wetlands promote chemical integrity of waters through processes  
25 such as “assimilation, transformation and sequestration of pollutants, including excess nutrients  
26 and chemical contaminants such as pesticides and metals that can degrade downstream water  
27 integrity.” *Id.* at 37,063. The Agencies found that floodplain wetlands protect the physical  
28 integrity of downstream waters through functions including “temporary storage of local

1 groundwater . . . releasing (desynchronizing) floodwaters, and containing large volumes of  
2 stormwater, sediment, and contaminants in runoff that could otherwise negatively affect the  
3 condition or function of downstream waters.” *Id.* And the Agencies determined that wetlands  
4 perform biological functions that are key to downstream water quality, by serving as “integral  
5 components of river food webs,” and “providing nursery habitat for breeding fish and amphibians,  
6 colonization opportunities for stream invertebrates, and . . . exchange of organic matter and  
7 organisms . . . that are critical to river ecosystem function.” *Id.*

8 In addition, the Agencies concluded that “waters of the United States” could properly  
9 encompass more distant non-floodplain wetlands and open waters (such as vernal pools) based on  
10 a case-by-case significant nexus analysis because of their “numerous functions that benefit  
11 downstream water integrity.” *Id.*; *see id.* at 37,086-91.

12 The 2015 Rule was stayed nationwide by the Sixth Circuit until the Supreme Court  
13 reversed that court’s judgment for lack of jurisdiction. *See Nat’l Ass’n of Mfrs. v. DOD*, 138 S. Ct.  
14 617 (2018). During the stay the Agencies applied the 1980s definition and the *Rapanos* Guidance  
15 to determine the jurisdictional status of waters. 84 Fed. Reg. 56,626, 56,630 (Oct. 22, 2019).

#### 16 **E. The 2019 Rule**

17 On October 22, 2019, the Agencies replaced the 2015 Clean Water Rule with the 2019  
18 Rule, which reinstated a definition identical to the 1980s definition while advising that the 2019  
19 Rule would be implemented in accordance with the *SWANCC* and *Rapanos* guidances. 84 Fed.  
20 Reg. at 56,626. The Agencies did not supplement or change their detailed factual findings in the  
21 2015 Rule because they did “not intend to engage in substantive reevaluation of the definition of  
22 ‘waters of the United States.’” 82 Fed. Reg. 34,899, 34,903 (July 27, 2017).

### 23 **III. THE 2020 RULE**

24 The 2020 Rule continues to define “waters of the United States” to include traditionally  
25 navigable waters and the territorial seas, but excludes many of the non-navigable tributaries and  
26 wetlands that have been protected under every prior rule and guidance. By the Agencies’ own  
27 estimates, the Rule excludes from the Act’s protections 18% of the nation’s streams (more than a  
28 third of streams in the arid west) and over 50% of the nation’s wetlands. [AR 11767](#) at 2-4, 9. The

1 Rule also, for the first time in the history of the Agencies’ interpretation of “waters of the United  
2 States,” excludes interstate waters as an independent category of jurisdictional waters.

3 *Ephemeral streams.* The 2020 Rule expressly excludes “ephemeral” streams from the  
4 scope of protected waters, defining “ephemeral” as “surface water flowing or pooling only in  
5 direct response to precipitation (e.g., rain or snowfall).” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,338. The Agencies  
6 received numerous comments – including from scientific organizations, government agencies, and  
7 environmental experts and advocates – identifying the chemical, physical, and biological  
8 connections between ephemeral streams and downstream waters and the importance of ephemeral  
9 streams for restoring and maintaining downstream waters’ integrity.<sup>4</sup>

10 The Agencies claimed that the 2020 Rule’s categorical exclusion of ephemeral streams  
11 from “waters of the United States” was justified by a “connectivity gradient,” 85 Fed. Reg. at  
12 22,288, asserting that the Connectivity Report and the Science Board supported this conclusion by  
13 recognizing that the connections between waters vary in degree based on multiple factors. AR 386  
14 at 64-65 (enumerated as 53-54). However, there is nothing in the Connectivity Report or the  
15 Science Board’s review of it stating that ephemeral streams should be excluded based on the  
16 connectivity gradient. Instead, the Connectivity Report and the Science Board stressed the  
17 important functional connections of ephemeral streams to downstream waters, and the significant  
18 cumulative impacts that the abundant numbers of ephemeral streams have on downstream waters’  
19 integrity. *See* Connectivity Report, AR 11691 at 26-27, 46-47, 113-114 (enumerated as ES-5 to  
20 ES-6, 1-10 to 1-11, 3-7 to 3-8); Science Board Review, AR 386 at 22, 25, 33-34 (enumerated as  
21 11, 14, 22-23). As the record shows, the Science Board and its members determined that the  
22 Agencies ignored the actual conclusions of the Connectivity Report and misrepresented both the

23 <sup>4</sup> *See, e.g.,* Society for Freshwater Science, AR 8909 at 5; American Society of  
24 Ichthyologists and Herpetologists, AR 4275 at 1; 10,000 Years Institute, AR 10975 at 1;  
25 Alliance for the Great Lakes, et al., AR 5131 at 2; New England Interstate Water Pollution  
26 Control Commission, AR 4875 at 5; The Nature Conservancy, AR 5061 at 2; Mississippi River  
27 Network, AR 5454 at 5; Maine Association of Wetland Scientists, AR 4389 at 2; Laura S. Craig,  
28 PhD, Director of Science and Economics, American Rivers, et al., AR 4909 at 2; Washington  
State Department of Ecology, et al., AR 4733 at 1; Maryland Department of the Environment, AR  
4901 at 3-4; California State Water Resources Control Board, AR 5198 at 2-5; Wisconsin  
Department of Natural Resources, AR 5304 at 1; Alaska Chapter of the Society of Wetland  
Scientists, AR 11015 at 1; North Carolina Environmental Restoration Association, AR 3701 at 3;  
Arizona Riparian Council, AR 9033; Defenders of Wildlife, AR 4346 at 2, 9.



1 Science Board’s review and the Connectivity Report’s explanation of the import of the  
 2 connectivity gradient. *See* [AR 3825](#) at 2-3; [AR 8909](#) at 5; [AR 3291](#) at 9; [AR 11589](#), Attachment 1.  
 3 Similarly, the record includes multiple comments explaining that the functions of individual  
 4 streams and wetlands are cumulative across entire watersheds and must be evaluated collectively  
 5 in order to accurately assess their contributions to and effects on downstream waters’ integrity.<sup>5</sup>

6 *Wetlands.* The Rule includes only those wetlands that qualify as “adjacent wetlands,”  
 7 defined as wetlands either touching another covered water or inundated by flooding from another  
 8 covered water in a typical year.<sup>6</sup> 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,338. Thus, the Rule excludes most wetlands  
 9 that do not touch or otherwise have a surface water connection to other covered waters.

10 The Agencies received numerous comments from professional and scientific organizations,  
 11 government agencies, and environmental research and advocacy organizations detailing the  
 12 importance of wetlands to downstream water quality. Echoing the Agencies’ own prior findings,  
 13 these commenters pointed out that wetlands, including those without a direct surface water  
 14 connection to other waters, perform multiple chemical, physical, and biological functions that are  
 15 vital for restoring and maintaining downstream waters’ integrity.<sup>7</sup>

16 *The “typical year” requirement.* The 2020 Rule includes non-navigable tributaries only if  
 17 they carry perennial or intermittent flows to otherwise covered waters in a “typical year.” 85 Fed.  
 18 Reg. at 22,286. Similarly, to be “waters of the United States” under the Rule, wetlands must  
 19 generally have a surface water connection to jurisdictional waters in a “typical year.” *See id.* at

20 \_\_\_\_\_  
 21 <sup>5</sup> *See, e.g.,* Delaware Riverkeeper Network, [AR 4736](#) at 7-8; Wisconsin Wetlands  
 22 Association, [AR 5064](#) at 1; Society for Freshwater Science, [AR 8909](#) at 3; The Nature  
 Conservancy, [AR 5061](#) at 5-6; Society of Wetland Scientists, [AR 4466](#) at 20; Natural Resources  
 Defense Council, et al., [AR 7673](#) at 24.

23 <sup>6</sup> The 2020 Rule provides that wetlands remain adjacent when they are physically  
 24 separated from a jurisdictional water by a natural barrier, or by an artificial barrier that allows for  
 a direct hydrologic surface connection in a typical year. *See* 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,338. By  
 imposing a direct surface connection requirement for artificial barriers, the Rule protects fewer  
 waters than the Agencies’ previous adjacency provisions in the 1980s definition, the *Rapanos*  
 25 *Guidance*, and the 2015 Clean Water Rule. *Cf. Rapanos Guidance*, [AR 11695](#) at 5; 80 Fed. Reg.  
 at 37,105.

26 <sup>7</sup> *See, e.g.,* Society of Wetland Scientists, [AR 4466](#) at 9, 10, 13, 16; American Fisheries  
 27 Society, et al., [AR 6851](#) at 2; Delaware Ornithological Society, [AR 4414](#) at 2; National Wildlife  
 Federation, [AR 6880](#) at 27; California State Water Resources Control Board, [AR 5198](#) at 4;  
 28 Society for Freshwater Science, [AR 8909](#) at 3, 8; Natural Resources Defense Council, [AR 7673](#) at  
 22; Ohio Wetlands Association, [AR 4879](#) at 2; Waterkeeper Alliance, et al., [AR 11318](#) at 67.



1 22,274. “Typical year” is defined as “when precipitation and other climatic variables are within  
2 the normal periodic range . . . for the geographic area of the applicable aquatic resource based on a  
3 rolling thirty-year period.” *Id.* at 22,339.

4 Numerous professional and scientific organizations, government agencies, academic  
5 experts, and environmental advocates submitted comments showing that the Rule’s typical year  
6 requirement diverges from actual present-day hydrological conditions that are driven by the  
7 profound and accelerating shifts resulting from climate change. Those commenters explained that  
8 the Rule’s retrospective typical year requirement (looking to the previous 30 years) fails to account  
9 for ongoing changes in precipitation, increased storm intensity, and altered hydrologic patterns of  
10 streams and wetlands that are apparent and intensified by climate change.<sup>8</sup> In addition,  
11 commenters explained that climate change is reducing overall stream flow, that this reduction in  
12 stream flow will occur at a quickly increasing rate, and that this will convert a significant number  
13 of perennial and intermittent streams into ephemeral streams that are left unprotected by the Rule.  
14 *See, e.g., AR 7628* at 15; *AR 1715* at 2; *AR 4343* at 19, 21, 29-30; *see also* Dkt. No. 30-18 ¶ 4.

15 The 2020 Rule’s definition of tributary based on stream flow in a “typical year”<sup>9</sup> also  
16 disregards the Agencies’ prior findings that a tributary is best evidenced by the well-recognized  
17 physical indicators of a bed and bank and ordinary high-water mark.<sup>10</sup>

18 *Resource and Programmatic Assessment and Economic Analysis.* The Agencies asserted  
19 that they analyzed the effects and impacts of the 2020 Rule on water quality by preparing a  
20 “Resource and Programmatic Assessment” (RPA) and an “Economic Analysis” (EA). *See* 85 Fed.

21 \_\_\_\_\_  
22 <sup>8</sup> *See, e.g.,* American Fisheries Society, et al., *AR 4256* at 3; The Nature Conservancy, *AR*  
23 *5061* at 19-20; North Carolina Association of Environmental Professionals, *AR 5435, Attachment*  
24 *2* at 1; American Rivers, *AR 5108* at 2; New England Interstate Water Pollution Control  
25 Commission, *AR 4875* at 3; Mississippi River Network, *AR 5454* at 5; Maine Association of  
26 Wetland Scientists, *AR 4389* at 3; Association of California Water Agencies, *AR 4280* at 5;  
27 California State Water Resources Control Board, *AR 5198* at 6; Natural Resources Defense  
28 Council, *AR 7673* at 13, 15-19; Environmental Law and Policy Center, et al., *AR 5453* at 5.

<sup>9</sup> The Agencies provide a long list of tools and methods to determine whether a stream is  
intermittent or ephemeral in a “typical year,” but do not explain or specify how or whether any of  
them should be used and do not provide an objective methodology to make such a determination.  
*See* 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,292-94. Similarly, the Agencies do not explain or specify the “other  
climatic variables” or “geographic area” components of the typical year definition.

<sup>10</sup> *See* U.S. EPA, *Technical Support Document for the Clean Water Rule: Definition of*  
*Waters of the United States* (2015 TSD) at 235-43, *AR 11395, Attachment F-9.*

1 Reg. at 22,331. But when issuing the Rule, the Agencies expressly disavowed the RPA and EA as  
2 bases for the Rule. *Id.* at 22,332 (“the final rule is not based on the information in the agencies  
3 [EA] or [RPA]”), 22,335; EA, AR 11572 at 12 (enumerated as xi); RPA, AR 11573 at 8  
4 (enumerated as 6). By their own admission, the Agencies’ reworking of the scope of the Act is not  
5 tethered to any findings about the effects and likely consequences of the Rule on Act’s objective to  
6 protect and restore the quality and integrity of waters nationwide.

7 The RPA and EA illustrate how the Rule’s severe reduction in covered waters results in  
8 increased water pollution. Acknowledging the breadth of the Rule’s impacts, the RPA observed  
9 that “many CWA programs—including water quality standards, state and tribal [Section] 401  
10 certification programs, and oil spill prevention and planning programs—apply only to waters  
11 subject to CWA jurisdiction.” RPA, AR 11573 at 61 (enumerated as 59).

12 The essential characteristics of the 2020 Rule are based not on an application of scientific  
13 principles or a consideration of harms to impacted waters, but instead on a “unifying legal theory  
14 for federal jurisdiction over those waters and wetlands that maintain a sufficient surface water  
15 connection to traditional navigable waters or the territorial seas.” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,252. The  
16 Rule’s exclusion of non-navigable waters—including streams and wetlands—that lack a specific  
17 surface water connection to other jurisdictional waters is drawn directly from the *Rapanos*  
18 plurality opinion that commanded only a minority of the Justices of the Supreme Court. *See, e.g.*,  
19 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,273 (citing “plurality decision in *Rapanos*” for “specific surface water  
20 connection” requirement); *id.* at 22,289 (“the requirement that a tributary be perennial or  
21 intermittent . . . reflects the [*Rapanos*] plurality’s” opinion); *see also id.* at 22,266, 22,278-79,  
22 22,309 (same). According to the Agencies, adopting this legal approach “balance[s]” the CWA’s  
23 water quality objective with the rights of states, *id.* at 22,252, recognizes the Act’s “non-  
24 regulatory” provisions, *id.* at 22,269, and “avoid[s] . . . constitutional questions,” *id.* at 22,291.

## 25 STANDARD OF REVIEW

26 The Administrative Procedure Act (APA) authorizes a court to “hold unlawful and set  
27 aside agency actions, findings and conclusions” found to be “arbitrary, capricious, an abuse of  
28 discretion, or otherwise not in accordance with law.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A). Because this is “a

1 case involving review of a final agency action under the APA, . . . the genuine dispute of material  
2 fact standard for summary judgment normally is inapplicable.” *California v. U.S. Dep’t of the*  
3 *Interior*, 381 F. Supp. 3d 1153, 1164 (N.D. Cal. 2019) (quotation marks and citation omitted).  
4 Rather, “summary judgment is an appropriate mechanism for deciding the legal question of  
5 whether the agency could reasonably have found the facts as it did,” *Occidental Eng’g Co. v.*  
6 *I.N.S.*, 753 F.2d 766, 770 (9th Cir. 1985), and the agency action is “otherwise consistent with the  
7 APA standard of review.” *San Joaquin River Grp. Auth. v. Nat’l Marine Fisheries Serv.*, 819 F.  
8 Supp. 2d 1077, 1084 (E.D. Cal. 2011) (quotation marks omitted).

9 Courts apply two distinct standards under the APA: one standard evaluates the rationality  
10 of the agency’s decisionmaking process and a second standard tests the reasonableness of the  
11 agency’s interpretation of the statute implemented by the regulation. *See Altera*, 926 F.3d at 1075  
12 (citation omitted). To be valid, an agency interpretation must meet both of these standards.

13 First, an agency’s decisionmaking is unlawful under *State Farm* if, among other things, the  
14 agency fails to examine important factors or relevant data. 463 U.S. at 43. An agency must  
15 “consider all relevant factors and offer an explanation for its conclusion that is grounded in the  
16 evidence.” *San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Auth. v. Locke*, 776 F.3d 971, 998 (9th Cir. 2014)  
17 (citing *State Farm*). An agency’s decisionmaking also is flawed if the agency disregards or  
18 countermands its earlier factual findings without a reasoned explanation, “even when reversing a  
19 policy after an election,” and that explanation must be “more substantial” when the agency’s  
20 decision “rests on factual findings contradicting those” made previously. *Organized Village of*  
21 *Kake v. U.S. Dep’t of Agric.*, 795 F.3d 956, 967-68 (9th Cir. 2015); *see also Fox*, 556 U.S. at 538.  
22 An agency issuing a rule that abandons prior policy or practice must also take into account the  
23 “serious reliance interests” engendered by the agency’s prior position. *Encino Motorcars*, 136 S.  
24 Ct. at 2126.

25 Second, an agency’s interpretation of ambiguous statutory language is unlawful under  
26 *Chevron* if it is not based on a “permissible” construction of the statute, which “is examined in  
27 light of the statute’s text, structure and purpose.” *Altera*, 926 F.3d at 1076; *see also Chevron*, 467  
28 U.S. at 843. Impermissible agency statutory interpretations include those that are “unmoored from

1 the purposes and concerns of the underlying statutory regime,” *Altera*, 926 F.3d at 1076 (citations  
2 omitted), or are “arbitrary or capricious in substance,” *Mayo Found. for Med. Ed. & Research v.*  
3 *United States*, 562 U.S. 44, 53 (2011) (citation omitted).

#### 4 **ARGUMENT**

5 The 2020 Rule removes the Act’s longstanding protections for vast numbers of diverse and  
6 important streams and wetlands nationwide and will result in increased pollution and harm to the  
7 integrity of downstream waters—including harm to drinking water and wildlife and increased risk  
8 of flooding of property owned by the States and Cities. As explained below in Section I, the Rule  
9 should be vacated because the Agencies’ decisionmaking is flawed under *State Farm*, *Fox*, and  
10 *Encino Motorcars*. As explained below in Section II, the Rule also should be vacated because the  
11 Agencies’ interpretation of the Act is unreasonable under *Chevron*. And as explained below in  
12 Section III, the States and Cities have standing to challenge the Rule.

#### 13 **I. THE AGENCIES’ DECISIONMAKING WAS ARBITRARY AND CAPRICIOUS**

14 The decisionmaking process for the 2020 Rule was arbitrary and capricious in three ways.  
15 First, contrary to the Agencies’ claim that they redefined “waters of the United States” based on  
16 the Act’s objective, 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,250, the Agencies in fact do not give meaningful  
17 consideration to that objective—“to restore and maintain the integrity of the nation’s waters”—and  
18 fail to provide reasoned explanation for their conclusion that the Rule’s new exclusions would  
19 further the Act’s objective. The Agencies also entirely disregard the factual findings they made in  
20 2015 regarding the impacts of those now excluded waters on downstream water quality. The  
21 Rule’s “typical year” requirement similarly fails to meet the requirements for reasoned agency  
22 rulemaking because it limits protections for wetlands and streams impacting downstream waters in  
23 conflict with the Act’s objective, and is vague and uncertain.

24 Second, while the Agencies claim they considered one of the Act’s policies regarding “the  
25 primary responsibilities and rights of States,” *see id.* at 22,252, 33 U.S.C. § 1251(b), they simply  
26 repeat the statutory phrase without explanation or analysis of how the 2020 Rule’s exclusion of  
27 waters from the Act’s protections serves that policy.

28 Third, the Agencies entirely fail to consider the States’ and Cities’ reliance interests

1 engendered by the prior, decades-long definition of “waters of the United States.”

2 **A. The Agencies Did Not Examine or Explain Whether and How the 2020**  
3 **Rule’s Narrower Definition of “Waters of the United States” Meets the**  
4 **Act’s Objective.**

5 An agency’s decisionmaking process is arbitrary and capricious when the agency has  
6 “failed to consider an important aspect of the problem” or failed to “examine the relevant data and  
7 articulate a satisfactory explanation for its action including a rational connection between the facts  
8 found and the choice made.” *State Farm*, 463 U.S. at 43 (quotation marks and citations omitted).  
9 In explaining the basis for the 2020 Rule, the Agencies state that the Act’s objective of  
10 maintaining and restoring the integrity of the Nation’s waters is an important aspect of defining  
11 “waters of the United States.” Despite asserting that they took water quality into account, the  
12 Agencies in fact entirely disregarded their own analysis of the water quality impacts of the 2020  
13 Rule. The Agencies also make unexplained and unsupported assertions that their prior analyses of  
14 water quality impacts now show that ephemeral streams and wetlands without surface connections  
15 to navigable waters should be excluded from “waters of the United States.”

16 Although the Agencies conducted assessments of the water quality impacts of the 2020  
17 Rule, they then chose not to rely on those assessments in their decisionmaking. In response to  
18 public comments, the Agencies state that they assessed the impacts in their RPA and EA (AR  
19 11574, Topic 1 at 112-13), but ignore the ways in which those assessments fatally undermine the  
20 Rule when they flatly declare that “the final rule is not based on” and “the agencies are not relying  
21 on” either the EA or the RPA. 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,332, 22,335. Because those impact assessments  
22 consider the Rule’s consequences for water quality, the Agencies refusal to rely on them is a  
23 concession that the Rule’s large reduction in the scope of water quality protection under the Act  
24 was adopted with in explicit disregard for the foundational purpose of the Act. And having  
25 disclaimed reliance on those impact assessments in the Rule, the Agencies cannot now use them—  
26 or selected excerpts from them—to justify the Rule. *See Dep’t of Homeland Sec. v. Regents of the*  
27 *Univ. of Cal.*, 140 S. Ct. 1891, 1907 (2020) (*DACA*) (“It is a ‘foundational principle of  
28 administrative law’ that judicial review of agency action is limited to ‘the grounds that the agency  
invoked when it took the action.’”) (quoting *Michigan v. EPA*, 576 U.S. 743, 758-60 (2015)).

1 It is unsurprising that the Agencies disclaim reliance on the RPA and the EA because those  
2 assessments show that removing all ephemeral streams and many wetlands from the Act’s  
3 jurisdiction will in fact harm downstream water quality by causing greater pollutant loads,  
4 increased oil spill risks, degraded aquatic habitats, and negative effects on drinking water intakes.  
5 AR 11572 at 129 (enumerated as 105). The assessments also show that, as a result of the  
6 exclusion of those waters, states will no longer have the authority to review and certify projects  
7 that require federal permits and may discharge into those waters, *see* 33 U.S.C. 1341, nor be  
8 required to impose water quality standards, and measures to meet them, on those waters, *see id.*  
9 § 1313, “result[ing] in reduced protection for aquatic ecosystems.” RPA, AR 11573 at 64  
10 (enumerated as 62). The assessments further demonstrate that the exclusion of previously  
11 protected waters will result in elimination of oil spill prevention and preparedness requirements.  
12 *See id.* § 1321(b); RPA, AR 11573 at 61, 64-66, 72-74 (enumerated as 59, 62-64, 70-72).

13 Once the Agencies chose to dispense with the only assessments that addressed the 2020  
14 Rule’s effects on water quality and the Rule’s ability to achieve the Act’s keystone objective, the  
15 only analyses of water quality impacts left are the analyses they relied on for the 2015 Rule:  
16 namely, the Connectivity Report and the Science Board’s analysis of that report. Those analyses,  
17 however, unequivocally demonstrate that ephemeral streams and wetlands without surface water  
18 connections to other waters have significant water quality impacts on downstream waters. See  
19 Connectivity Report, AR 11691 (as cited in Background, Section III); Science Board Review, AR  
20 386 (same). Yet the Agencies forged ahead with the exclusion of those waters in the 2020 Rule,  
21 claiming without explanation or support that those exclusions were based on “science.” 85 Fed.  
22 Reg. at 22,288, 22,310. In that process, the Agencies ignored not only the requirements of *State*  
23 *Farm* but also of *Fox*, which holds that an agency’s decision is arbitrary and capricious if it fails to  
24 address the agency’s prior factual findings. *See* 556 U.S. at 538.

25 By failing to meaningfully consider—and actually harming—the quality of the Nation’s  
26 waters, the Agencies in the 2020 Rule have acted irrationally because “[r]ational decision making  
27 also dictates that the agency simply cannot employ means that actually undercut its own purported  
28 goals.” *Office of Commc’n of the United Church of Christ v. FCC*, 779 F.2d 702, 707 (D.C. Cir.



1 1985). The Rule is arbitrary and capricious because it is “contrary to Congress’s purpose in  
2 enacting” the Act. *Ctr. for Biological Diversity v. NHTSA*, 538 F.3d 1172, 1197 (9th Cir. 2008);  
3 *Mercy Catholic Med. Ctr. v. Thompson*, 380 F.3d 142, 158 (3d Cir. 2004) (holding agency  
4 interpretation arbitrary where it “frustrates the regulatory goal”).

5 **1. The Agencies’ Decision to Exclude All Ephemeral Streams Was**  
6 **Arbitrary and Capricious.**

7 Rather than explaining how excluding ephemeral streams is consistent with the Act’s  
8 objective, the Agencies offer mere conclusions and fail to acknowledge their prior findings. The  
9 Agencies claim that the 2020 Rule’s exclusion of ephemeral streams “relied on the available  
10 science” and “rests upon a reasonable inference of ecological interconnection” with navigable  
11 waters. 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,288, 22,310. But they offer nothing by way of explanation or support  
12 for that “inference.” Moreover, the “available science” is the Connectivity Report and the Science  
13 Board’s review of it, which both contradict any inference that ephemeral streams are categorically  
14 not important for restoring or maintaining downstream water quality. Indeed, the Connectivity  
15 Report clearly shows that ephemeral streams perform multiple chemical, physical, and biological  
16 functions that are vital to protecting the quality and integrity of traditional navigable waters. *See*  
17 *Connectivity Report*, AR 11691 at 26-27, 46-47, 113-114 (enumerated as ES-5 to ES-6, 1-10 to 1-  
18 11, 3-7 to 3-8); *Science Board Review*, AR 386 at 22, 25, 33-34 (enumerated as 11, 14, 22-23).  
19 As discussed above (pp. 8-11), the Agencies made findings regarding these important connections  
20 between ephemeral streams and downstream waters in 2015, which they now fail to acknowledge.  
21 Thus, the Agencies’ decision to categorically exclude ephemeral streams is not supported by either  
22 a reasoned explanation or relevant data, as required by *State Farm*, nor does it address the  
23 Agencies’ prior findings, as required by *Fox*. Indeed, their conclusion is “flatly contradicted by  
24 the agenc[ies]’ own record.” *See Kansas City v. Dep’t of Housing & Urban Dev.*, 923 F.2d 188,  
25 194 (D.C. Cir. 1991) (citing *State Farm*, 463 U.S. at 43).

26 The Agencies also assert that their decision to exclude all ephemeral streams from the  
27 Act’s protections is supported by the “connectivity gradient,” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,288, a common-  
28 sense concept that the connections between waters vary in degree based on multiple factors as

1 recognized by the Agencies in 2015. *See* 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,057. But the Agencies offer only  
2 their conclusion that the connectivity gradient provides a scientific basis for the exclusion of  
3 ephemeral streams; there is no explanation or basis in the record that shows how the “connectivity  
4 gradient” in fact supports the Agencies’ categorical exclusion. Quite the contrary, the  
5 Connectivity Report and the Science Board’s review explain that the connectivity gradient does  
6 not support removal of CWA protections for the waters excluded by the 2020 Rule and instead  
7 demonstrates that non-navigable waters that flow infrequently can have significant impact on the  
8 integrity of downstream waters. The Connectivity Report found that “the evidence for  
9 connectivity and downstream effects of ephemeral streams was strong and compelling.” AR  
10 11691 at ES-7. And the Science Board’s review found that “[i]mportant cumulative effects are  
11 exemplified by ephemeral flows in arid landscapes, low frequency events that may nevertheless  
12 provide most of the subsidies to downgradient waters,” AR 386 at 33 (enumerated as 22), and  
13 emphasized “[t]he importance of considering waterbodies in the aggregate,” including ephemeral  
14 streams, “for evaluations of connectivity,” *id.* at 22 (enumerated as 11). Indeed, Science Board  
15 members who reviewed the Connectivity Report in 2015 commented that the Agencies’ 2020 Rule  
16 “ignores or misrepresents much of the Connectivity Report and subsequent Science Board  
17 Review,” “misrepresents” the Science Board’s hypothetical illustration of the connectivity  
18 gradient, and “arrives at an erroneous conclusion” that is “not supported by the science, and  
19 opposite the intent of the [Science Board].” AR 3825 at 2-3. In the 2020 Rule, the Agencies  
20 provide no cogent reason to dismiss those pointed, authoritative rebukes of their attempt to rely on  
21 this prior scientific work, and that fact is fatal to their effort to defend the Rule now.

22         The Rule’s exclusion of ephemeral streams also disregards the Agencies’ prior factual  
23 findings that ephemeral streams with a bed, banks, and an ordinary high-water mark significantly  
24 affect the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of downstream navigable waters and should  
25 be included within the scope of “waters of the United States.” *See* 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,068-69,  
26 37,079. The Agencies previously found that tributaries, including upstream ephemeral waters,  
27 “are significant enough that wetlands adjacent to them are likely, in the majority of cases, to  
28 perform important functions for an aquatic system incorporating navigable waters.” 2015 TSD,



1 AR 11395, Attachment F-9 at 71 (enumerated as 70), citing *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 781 (Kennedy,  
2 J., concurring). But in the 2020 Rule the Agencies assert, without any basis in fact, the exact  
3 opposite: all ephemeral streams categorically *lack* sufficient connection to navigable waters, 85  
4 Fed. Reg. at 22,288, and are *not* “significant enough that wetlands adjacent to them are likely, in  
5 the majority of cases, to perform important functions for an aquatic system.” *Id.* at 22,310.  
6 Because the Agencies have failed to provide a “reasoned explanation” for these new contradictory  
7 findings that disregard their prior findings, the Rule is arbitrary and capricious. *See Fox*, 556 U.S.  
8 at 516, 537.

9 **2. The Agencies’ Decision to Exclude Wetlands Without Direct Surface**  
10 **Water Connection Is Arbitrary and Capricious.**

11 The Agencies’ explanation of why they excluded wetlands without direct surface  
12 connections to other waters from their redefinition of “waters of the United States” fares even  
13 worse. Although the Agencies assert that the redefinition “achieves the goals of the Act,” 85 Fed.  
14 Reg. at 22,314, their explanation regarding the wetlands covered by the 2020 Rule does not  
15 mention, much less meaningfully consider, the impacts to downstream water quality that will  
16 result from the lack of protections for newly-excluded wetlands. *See id.* at 22,306-22,317.

17 Here, again, the Agencies claim that their decision to redefine adjacent wetlands covered  
18 by the Act was “informed by science.” *Id.* at 22,314. But while they refer to statements in the  
19 Connectivity Report and the Science Board Review that wetlands closer to streams have a greater  
20 impact on streams, they fail to provide any explanation of how they concluded that some wetlands  
21 should be excluded. *See id.* Moreover, the Science Board in its official capacity, and its members  
22 separately and in their professional capacities, have stated that the Agencies’ line-drawing with  
23 respect to wetlands “departs from established science,” AR 11589, Attachment 1 at 3, and  
24 disregards “[m]ultiple lines of evidence point[ing] to the importance of chemical and biological  
25 connectivity between wetlands and downstream waters.” AR 3825 at 5.

26 In violation of the requirements of *Fox*, the Agencies disregard *all* of their prior findings,  
27 discussed above (pp. 8-11), about the importance of shallow subsurface and groundwater  
28 connections between wetlands and downstream waters. AR 3825 at 5-6. Those findings show that

1 the wetlands excluded by the Rule perform functions essential to maintaining the integrity of  
2 traditional navigable waters, such as trapping pollutants, preventing flooding, and providing  
3 habitat for numerous species. *See, e.g.*, Connectivity Report, [AR 11691](#) at 23-25 (enumerated as  
4 ES-2 to ES-4). Indeed, the Agencies expressly found in 2015 that wetlands with “regular shallow  
5 subsurface-water connection” to downstream waters “clearly affect” these waters, and “floodplain  
6 wetlands are highly connected to streams and rivers through . . . shallow groundwater.” *Id.* at 24,  
7 192 (enumerated as ES-3, 4-39). Because the Agencies “offer no new information or data to  
8 justify [their] contrary finding” that CWA protection is *unnecessary* for the excluded wetlands, the  
9 Rule is arbitrary and capricious. *Friends of Alaska Nat’l Wildlife Refuges v. Bernhardt*, 463 F.  
10 Supp. 3d 1011, 1020 (D. Alaska 2020).

11 In promulgating the 2020 Rule, the Agencies received numerous substantive public  
12 comments detailing wetlands’ many vital functions that impact downstream water integrity, the  
13 similar functions performed by ephemeral streams, and the cumulative downstream effects of both  
14 types of waters. *See pp.* 11-15, *supra*. Despite the “[v]oluminous evidence support[ing] the  
15 commenters’ view,” the Agencies have “waved away those commenters’ concerns and their  
16 supporting evidence in a few sentences of defective argument.” *Dist. of Columbia v. U.S. Dep’t of*  
17 *Agric.*, 444 F. Supp. 3d 1, 23 (D.D.C. 2020). The Agencies do not respond to these comments and  
18 merely offer the conclusory phrase that the Rule was “informed by science” and repeat dozens of  
19 times that “science cannot dictate where to draw the line between federal and state or tribal waters,  
20 as those are legal definitions.” *See, e.g.*, Response to Comments, [AR 11574](#), Topic 1 at 16, 40, 67,  
21 115, 127, 134, 137; Topic 3 at 12; Topic 4 at 10; Topic 5 at 9; Topic 6 at 5; Topic 7 at 11; Topic 8  
22 at 12, 14, 42; Topic 10 at 3, 22; Topic 11 at 33, 41, 74, 114; Topic 13 at 1, 8, 13; *see also* 85 Fed.  
23 Reg. at 22,261, 22,271, 22,288, 22,308 (same). Simply “[n]odding to the concerns raised by  
24 commenters only to dismiss them in a conclusory manner is not a hallmark of reasoned  
25 decisionmaking.” *Gresham v. Azar*, 950 F.3d 93, 103 (D.C. Cir. 2020). Importantly, as discussed  
26 by the Supreme Court in *SWANCC*, *Riverside Bayview*, and *Rapanos*, and consistent with the  
27 Act’s text, purpose and intent, science is an essential factor in the Agencies’ interpretation of the  
28 scope of “waters of the United States.” *See pp.* 6-7, *supra*. Rather than meaningfully considering

1 significant comments and extensive record evidence about the importance to downstream water  
2 quality of the many wetlands and other waters the Rule excludes from the Act’s protections, the  
3 Agencies arbitrarily and capriciously “brushed aside critical facts” with conclusory responses.  
4 *Am. Wild Horse Pres. Campaign v. Perdue*, 873 F.3d 914, 932 (D.C. Cir. 2017).

### 5 **3. The “Typical Year” Requirement Is Arbitrary and Capricious.**

6 The 2020 Rule’s requirement that “waters of the United States” have a surface water  
7 connection to another protected water in a “typical year” is arbitrary and capricious. The typical  
8 year requirement excludes from the Act’s protections waters that are essential to restore and  
9 maintain downstream waters’ integrity and is contrary to the evidence before the Agencies.  
10 Purporting to encompass “times when it is not too wet and not too dry,” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,274,  
11 the Agencies offer no factual support for the limiting principle they have selected. By focusing on  
12 the preceding thirty-year period, the “typical year” requirement ignores significant comments and  
13 evidence about the substantial connectivity between waters during what are increasingly atypical  
14 years (when compared to 30 years of historical data) resulting from climate change. *See* pp. 13-  
15 14, *supra*. Wetlands that would otherwise function to trap pollutants and mitigate downstream  
16 flooding, regardless of their surface water connection in a typical year, will lose protection because  
17 of this arbitrary requirement. *See* [AR 4389](#) at 3; [AR 5061](#) at 19; [AR 5126](#) at 4-5; *see also* Dkt. No.  
18 30-22 at 10-13; Dkt. No. 30-15 at 12-13. The Rule also fails to explain the meaning of the “other  
19 climatic variables” and “geographic area” components of the typical year definition, 85 Fed. Reg.  
20 at 22,341, leaving identification of protected waters subject to “vague and uncertain analysis.”  
21 *Ocean Advocates v. U.S. Army Corps of Eng’rs*, 402 F.3d 846, 869 (9th Cir. 2005). The Agencies  
22 thus have failed to “articulate a satisfactory explanation for [their] action including a ‘rational  
23 connection between the facts found and the choice made.’” *State Farm*, 463 U.S. at 43.

### 24 **B. The Agencies Fail to Examine or Explain How the 2020 Rule’s Narrower** 25 **Definition of “Waters of the United States” Is Consistent with CWA’s** 26 **Policy Regarding the Responsibilities and Rights of States.**

27 The Agencies claim that they balanced the CWA’s objective against the Act’s policy to  
28 preserve and protect the “responsibilities and rights of states to prevent, reduce, and eliminate  
pollution.” *See* 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,252, citing 33 U.S.C. § 1251(b). As explained below (pp. 33-

1 38, *infra*), the policy cannot bear the weight the Agencies place on it: the policy reflects  
2 Congress’s intent that the states, rather than EPA, implement the Act’s permitting programs and  
3 thus does not provide any textual basis for narrowing the scope of “waters of the United States” in  
4 deference to state-only regulation. But even if the policy were an appropriate basis for excluding  
5 some waters from “waters of the United States,” the Agencies do nothing more than invoke the  
6 policy as a basis for narrowing the definition of “waters of the United States.” *See, e.g.*, 85 Fed.  
7 Reg at 22,250, 22,269, 22,273, 22,296. They offer no analysis or explanation of whether or how  
8 excluding interstate waters as an independent category, as well as ephemeral streams and wetlands  
9 without surface water connections, preserves or protects the “responsibilities and rights of States to  
10 prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution.” 33 U.S.C. §1251(b).

11 Because the Agencies fail to analyze and explain how the redefinition of “waters of the  
12 United States” impacts the CWA’s policy regarding state rights and responsibilities, the Rule is  
13 arbitrary and capricious under *State Farm*.

14 **C. The 2020 Rule Is Arbitrary and Capricious Because the Agencies Fail to**  
15 **Consider the States’ and Cities’ Reliance Interests.**

16 “When an agency changes course . . . it must ‘be cognizant that longstanding policies may  
17 have engendered serious reliance interests that must be taken into account.’” *DACA*, 140 S. Ct. at  
18 1913 (quoting *Encino Motorcars*; internal quotation marks omitted); *see also California v. Azar*,  
19 950 F.3d 1067, 1113 (9th Cir. 2020). In particular, an agency revising its prior policy is “required  
20 to assess whether there were reliance interests, determine whether they were significant, and weigh  
21 any such interests against competing policy concerns.” *DACA*, 140 S. Ct. at 1915.

22 The Agencies entirely fail to assess whether states have reliance interests in the prior  
23 definitions of “waters of the United States” and then weigh those interests against the other factors  
24 the Agencies considered in deciding to change their longstanding policy. As explained above (pp.  
25 11-15, *supra*), the 2020 Rule excludes (1) all ephemeral streams and any other streams that do not  
26 contribute flow to a covered water in a “typical year”; (2) many wetlands that do not have a  
27 surface water connection to another covered water; and (3) interstate waters as an independent  
28 category. In contrast, the 1980s regulations defined “waters of the United States” broadly and the

1 2008 *Rapanos* Guidance explained that the 1980s definition includes (1) ephemeral streams with a  
 2 “significant nexus” to traditionally navigable waters; (2) wetlands with a shallow subsurface  
 3 connection to traditionally navigable waters; and (3) all interstate waters. *Rapanos* Guidance, AR  
 4 11695 at 4-11. The 2015 Rule confirmed that “waters of the United States” include (1) ephemeral  
 5 streams with bed and banks and ordinary high-water marks; (2) wetlands with important functional  
 6 connections to covered waters other than surface water connections; and (3) all interstate waters.  
 7 80 Fed. Reg. at 37,055, 37,068, 37,079, 37,080-81. The 2019 Rule returned to the 1980s  
 8 regulations and the *Rapanos* Guidance. 84 Fed. Reg. at 56,626.

9 The States and Cities have relied on those earlier definitions to structure their water quality  
 10 protection programs and safeguard their waters.<sup>11</sup> AR 5126 at 2, 7-8; AR 5467 at 42, 44, 46-48,  
 11 50, 58-59, 68, 89, 93, 95, 97, 100, 102; AR 11442, Comment at 7-14; AR 4820 at 15-16; AR 4528  
 12 at 3. Many states did not seek authorization to administer the Section 404 dredge and fill  
 13 permitting program and decided not to develop their own dredge and fill programs or point source  
 14 programs because they relied on long-standing federal protections. AR 5126 at 7-8; AR 5467 at  
 15 58-59, 68, 89, 93, 95, 97, 100, 102; AR 11442, Comment at 7-14; AR 4820 at 15-16; AR 4528 at  
 16 3. The 2020 Rule upends longstanding state regulatory programs, increases state administrative  
 17 costs and burdens, threatens to profoundly damage state property, and drastically reduces federal  
 18 water quality protections. *Id.*; see Argument, Section III, *infra*.

19 In response to comments regarding states’ reliance interests, the Agencies take the position  
 20 that the states did not have reliance interests in the 2015 Rule because it was the subject of

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 22 <sup>11</sup> Dkt. No. 30-17 ¶¶ 14, 25, 34; Declaration of Roy A. Jacobson Jr. in Support of  
 23 Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Jacobson Decl.) ¶ 8; Declaration of Daniel Zarrili in  
 24 Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Zarrili Decl.) ¶ 2; Dkt. No. 30-14 ¶ 7;  
 25 Declaration of Steve Mrazik in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Mrazik  
 26 Decl.) ¶ 5; Dkt. No. 30-5 ¶ 16; Declaration of Jeffrey Seltzer in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for  
 27 Summary Judgment (Seltzer Decl.) ¶¶ 2, 24, 31; Declaration of Jonathan Bishop in Support of  
 28 Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Bishop Decl.) ¶ 31; Declaration of Teresa Seidel in  
 Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Seidel Decl.) ¶ 4; Dkt. No. 30-16 ¶ 11;  
 Dkt. No. 30-22 ¶ 31; Declaration of Kathleen M. Baskin (Baskin Decl.) ¶¶ 19-23.; Declaration of  
 David Davis in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Davis Decl.) ¶¶ 5-6;  
 Declaration of Rebecca Roose in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Roose  
 Decl.) ¶¶ 10-11, 19-22.

1 substantial litigation or in the 2019 Rule because it was in place only for a short period of time.  
2 AR 11574, Topic 1 at 29; Topic 11 at 12-25. The Agencies, however, ignore the fact that for  
3 many decades the Agencies’ regulations consistently covered a far wider scope of waters than are  
4 covered under the 2020 Rule. The 1980s regulations defined “waters of the United States”  
5 broadly, as did the 2008 *Rapanos* Guidance, which implemented Justice Kennedy’s significant  
6 nexus test and defined “waters of the United States” to include ephemeral streams and wetlands  
7 that are now excluded. *Rapanos* Guidance, AR 11695 at 4-11. The 1980s definition and the  
8 *Rapanos* Guidance have remained in place and were applied by the Agencies both during the  
9 litigation and stay of the 2015 Rule and after the 2019 Rule was promulgated, demonstrating that  
10 reliance on a broader, more protective definition of “waters of the United States” was long-  
11 standing and reasonable. *See* 84 Fed. Reg. at 56,626, 56,630.

12 The Agencies also assert that they have addressed the states’ reliance interests because  
13 there was ample notice that the 2015 Rule would be rescinded and the Agencies engaged in the  
14 rulemaking for the 2019 Rule and the 2020 Rule. *See* AR 11574, Topic 1 at 29. But the Agencies  
15 offer no authority for their claim that any reliance interests in longstanding agency policy  
16 evaporate once an agency provides notice that it plans to change course. And the mere fact that  
17 the Agencies initiated notice-and-comment rulemaking related to the definition of “waters of the  
18 United States,” during which time they received hundreds of thousands of comments describing  
19 the harm the new rule would cause, is insufficient under the APA. Instead, the Agencies were  
20 “required to assess whether there were reliance interests, determine whether they were significant,  
21 and weigh any such interests against competing policy concerns.” *DACA*, 140 S. Ct. at 1915. The  
22 Agencies failed to do so in the 2020 Rule.

23 The Agencies’ other contention that “even if serious reliance interests were at issue, which  
24 they are not, the agencies have provided a thorough and reasoned explanation for the changed  
25 definition,” AR 11574, Topic 1 at 29-30, 107-10, is unavailing. Rather than carefully balance the  
26 states’ reliance interests against other policy factors motivating the 2020 Rule, the Agencies  
27 simply state that “Congress envisioned a major role for the states in implementing the CWA” and  
28 “[t]he ultimate response of states and tribes to this rule would not change the agencies’



1 interpretation of the scope of their legal authority.” *Id.* at 28. As the Supreme Court has  
2 explained, the Agencies must “weigh any such interests against competing policy concerns.”  
3 *DACA*, 140 S. Ct. at 1915. Regardless of whether the Agencies’ explanation for their changed  
4 position is “thorough and reasoned”—which it is not—the Agencies have failed to balance the  
5 States’ and Cities’ significant reliance interests against any “competing policy concerns.”

6 This arbitrary failure to consider the States’ and Cities’ reliance interests has serious real-  
7 world consequences. The States and Cities are faced with the decisions of whether and how to  
8 establish and expand water pollution control programs to protect the countless waters no longer  
9 protected by the CWA. *See* Argument, Section III, *infra*. These efforts by the States and Cities  
10 will require long-term investment of significant resources, but in the meantime water quality, and  
11 the States’ and Cities’ important interests in their wildlife and public property, will be exposed to  
12 degradation and increased risk of harm. *Id.*

## 13 II. THE 2020 RULE IS AN IMPERMISSIBLE INTERPRETATION OF THE CWA

14 While the Agencies are authorized to promulgate regulations interpreting the scope of the  
15 “waters of the United States” protected by the Act, here their interpretation constitutes an  
16 unreasonable construction of the Act that is not entitled to any deference whatsoever. *See The*  
17 *Wilderness Soc’y v. U.S. Fish & Wildlife Serv.*, 353 F.3d 1051, 1061- 62 (9th Cir. 2003)  
18 (*Wilderness Society*). “An agency’s interpretation of statutory authority is examined ‘in light of  
19 the statute’s text, structure and purpose.’” *Altera*, 926 F.3d at 1088; *see also United States v.*  
20 *Dailey*, 941 F.3d 1183, 1192 (9th Cir. 2019) (courts do not reflexively defer to agencies’  
21 interpretations of statutes). The interpretation fails if it is “unmoored from the purposes and  
22 concerns” of the statutory regime. *Judulang v. Holder*, 565 U.S. 42, 64 (2011); *see also Altera*,  
23 926 F.3d at 1088. A statutory interpretation “is not a permissible (or reasonable) construction of  
24 the statute [if] it is directly at odds with the text and purpose of the Act.” *NRDC v. Nat’l Marine*  
25 *Fisheries Serv.*, 421 F.3d 872, 879 (9th Cir. 2005).

26 The 2020 Rule adopts an impermissible and unreasonable interpretation of “waters of the  
27 United States” because the Rule categorically excludes all ephemeral streams, many wetlands, and  
28 interstate waters as an independent category. This interpretation is untethered from and conflicts

1 with the Act’s text, structure, and essential objective, and contradicts Supreme Court precedent.

2 **A. The 2020 Rule Is Unreasonable Because It Excludes Ephemeral Streams.**

3 The Agencies’ exclusion of ephemeral streams in the 2020 Rule relies on the *Rapanos*  
4 plurality’s conclusion that ephemeral waters are not within the scope of “waters of the United  
5 States.” *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 733-34. That interpretation by the Agencies constitutes an  
6 impermissible interpretation because most of the Supreme Court Justices in *Rapanos* agreed that  
7 interpreting the term “waters of the United States” to categorically remove ephemeral streams  
8 from its scope is contrary to the CWA’s text, structure, and purpose. *Id.* at 769-70, 800. Justice  
9 Kennedy’s concurrence together with Justice Stevens’ dissent in *Rapanos* established the  
10 boundaries of the Agencies’ discretion when interpreting the statutory language at issue. *See*  
11 *Vasquez v. Hillery*, 474 U.S. 254, 262 n.4 (1986) (agreement of five justices, even when not  
12 joining each other’s opinions, constitutes a majority whose opinion carries “precedential weight”);  
13 *see also Moses H. Cone Mem. Hosp. v. Mercury Constr. Corp.*, 460 U.S. 1, 17 (1983) (four  
14 dissenting Justices and a Justice concurring in the judgment who agree on a particular legal  
15 conclusion “form[] a majority to require application” of that legal conclusion). Therefore, Justice  
16 Kennedy’s concurrence in *Rapanos*, which the Ninth Circuit has held is “controlling”, *N. Cal.*  
17 *Riverwatch v. City of Healdsburg*, 496 F.3d 993, 995 (9th Cir. 2007) (*Healdsburg*), together with  
18 the four-Justice dissent in *Rapanos* forecloses an interpretation that excludes ephemeral streams as  
19 a whole because such an interpretation is inconsistent with the Act’s text, structure and purpose  
20 and thus unreasonable and impermissible under *Chevron*. *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 769-770, 800.

21 **1. The Rule Adopts the *Rapanos* Plurality’s Exclusion of Ephemeral**  
22 **Streams.**

23 The 2020 Rule is based on the *Rapanos* plurality opinion’s exclusion of ephemeral streams.  
24 The Rule repeatedly cites “the plurality decision in *Rapanos*,” 547 U.S. at 732, as the basis to  
25 exclude ephemeral streams, explaining that, “[a]ccording to the *Rapanos* plurality . . . the  
26 ordinary meaning of the term ‘waters’ does not include areas that are dry most of the year, and  
27 which may occasionally contain ‘transitory puddles or ephemeral flows of water.’ 547 U.S. at  
28 733.” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,273.



1 Under the final rule, ephemeral features . . . are not jurisdictional and do not  
 2 become jurisdictional even if they episodically convey surface water from  
 3 upstream relatively permanent jurisdictional waters to downstream jurisdictional  
 4 waters in a typical year, and thereby help maintain the jurisdictional status of the  
 5 upstream waters. This approach incorporates the plurality’s requirement that  
 6 jurisdictional waters be continuously present, fixed bodies of water and that dry  
 7 channels, transitory puddles, and ephemeral flows be excluded from jurisdiction.  
 8 547 U.S. at 733–34; *see also id.* at 731.

9 *Id.* at 22,278, 22,289 (internal citations omitted) (the Agencies reasoned that ephemeral streams  
 10 should be excluded because “the requirement that a tributary be perennial or intermittent and be  
 11 connected to a traditional navigable water is reasonable and reflects the [*Rapanos*] plurality’s  
 12 description of a ‘wate[r] of the United States’ as ‘*i.e.*, a relatively permanent body of water  
 13 connected to traditional interstate navigable waters.’”). As explained below, because the  
 14 “relatively permanent waters” test was rejected by the controlling *Rapanos* opinion, the 2020 Rule  
 15 is unlawful.

16 **2. The Agencies’ Exclusion of Ephemeral Streams Is Not Entitled to**  
 17 **Deference Because the Controlling Rule of Law from *Rapanos***  
 18 **Rejects Such Exclusion as Impermissible Under the Act.**

19 The Ninth Circuit has repeatedly held that Justice Kennedy’s opinion in *Rapanos* is the  
 20 controlling rule of law. *Healdsburg*, 496 F.3d at 999-1000; *United States v. Robertson*, 975 F.3d  
 21 1281, 1290-92 (9th Cir. 2017) *vacated on other grounds by* 139 S. Ct. 1543 (2019). EPA cannot  
 22 dispute this point, having recently conceded that “Justice Kennedy’s opinion in *Rapanos* provides  
 23 ‘the controlling rule of law’ in the Ninth Circuit.” Br. for U.S. EPA at 32-35, *Sackett v. U.S. EPA*,  
 24 No. 19-35469 (9th Cir. June 22, 2020). Moreover, five Justices in *Rapanos* concluded that an  
 25 interpretation of “waters of the United States” that excludes ephemeral streams is contrary to the  
 26 Act’s text, purpose, and structure. *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 769-770, 800.

27 Justice Kennedy’s *Rapanos* opinion flatly rejected the plurality’s relatively permanent  
 28 waters test, explaining that “[t]he plurality’s first requirement—permanent standing water or  
 continuous flow, at least for a period of ‘some months,’—makes little practical sense in a statute  
 concerned with downstream water quality.” *Id.* at 769 (internal citations omitted). “Congress  
 could draw a line to exclude irregular waterways,” e.g., ephemeral streams, “but nothing in the  
 statute suggests that it has done so.” *Id.* at 769-770. “Quite the opposite, a full reading of the

1 dictionary definition *precludes* the plurality’s emphasis on permanence . . .” *Id.* (emphasis added).  
2 The four-Justice dissent, led by Justice Stevens, agreed that the plurality’s “relatively permanent  
3 waters” standard was “without support in the language and purposes of the Act or in our cases  
4 interpreting it.” *Id.* at 800 (quoting Justice Kennedy’s concurrence). For these and other reasons,  
5 both Justice Kennedy and the four-Justice dissent rejected the plurality’s “relatively permanent  
6 waters” test as “inconsistent with the Act’s text, structure, and purpose.” *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at  
7 769-770, 800. This conclusion is the controlling rule of law from *Rapanos*. See *Vasquez*, 474  
8 U.S. at 262 n.4; see also *Moses H. Cone Mem. Hosp.*, 460 U.S. at 17.

9 **B. *Brand X* Does Not Save the 2020 Rule.**

10 The 2020 Rule cannot be saved by the Agencies’ invocation of *National Cable &*  
11 *Telecommunications Ass’n v. Brand X Internet Services*, 545 U.S. 967 (2005) (*Brand X*). That  
12 case held that a *lower* court’s “construction of a statute trumps an agency construction otherwise  
13 entitled to *Chevron* deference only if the prior [lower] court decision holds that its construction  
14 follows from the *unambiguous* terms of the statute and thus leaves no room for agency discretion.”  
15 *Id.* at 982 (emphasis added). But *Brand X* has no application here.

16 As an initial matter, *Rapanos* is a Supreme Court decision, and “it is far from settled that  
17 *Brand X* applies to prior decisions of the Supreme Court.” *MikLin Enters, Inc. v. Nat’l Labor*  
18 *Relations Bd.*, 861 F.3d 812, 823 (8th Cir. 2017) (en banc). *Brand X* did not address whether an  
19 agency may defy Supreme Court precedent. 545 U.S. at 1003 (Stevens, J., concurring) (observing  
20 that the Court’s holding “would not necessarily be applicable to a decision by this Court that  
21 would presumably remove any pre-existing ambiguity”).

22 Tellingly, the Supreme Court has rejected invocation of *Brand X* where the agency’s  
23 statutory interpretation was contrary to a prior Supreme Court decision, even where the statute was  
24 ambiguous. See *United States v. Home Concrete & Supply, LLC*, 566 U.S. 478, 486-87, 488  
25 (2012) (rejecting agency’s *Brand X* argument that earlier Supreme Court decision “cannot govern”  
26 the case at issue, notwithstanding that the earlier decision acknowledged the statute’s  
27 “ambiguity”); *Cuomo v. Clearing House Ass’n*, 557 U.S. 519, 525, 528 n.2 (2009) (rejecting  
28 *Brand X* argument where agency’s interpretation of an “ambiguity” in the statute contradicted

1 prior Supreme Court decisions). Thus, the Agencies may not rely on *Brand X* here because *Brand*  
2 *X* did not eliminate the ordinary application of stare decisis, which applies when a Supreme Court  
3 decision interprets a statute, regardless of whether that decision “focused only on statutory text” or  
4 “relied on the policies and purposes animating the law.” *Kimble v. Marvel Entm’t, LLC*, 576 U.S.  
5 446, 456 (2015); *Golden State Transit Corp. v. City of Los Angeles*, 493 U.S. 103, 112 (1989) (“A  
6 rule of law that is the product of judicial interpretation of vague, ambiguous, or incomplete  
7 statutory provision is no less binding than a rule that is based on plain meaning of statute.”).

8 Five Justices in *Rapanos* rejected the interpretation the Agencies espouse, and, in any  
9 event, “*Brand X* does not require a court to defer to an agency’s interpretations of judicial  
10 precedent.” *MikLin*, 861 F.3d at 823; *Akins v. FEC*, 101 F.3d 731, 740 (D.C. Cir. 1996) (en banc)  
11 (no deference owed to agency interpretation of “limitation[ ] put on [statutory] language by  
12 Supreme Court decisions” because courts, not agencies, are the “experts in analyzing judicial  
13 decisions”) *vacated on other grounds by FEC v. Akins*, 524 U.S. 11 (1998). Rather, this Court is  
14 bound by Ninth Circuit precedent which (like every other Circuit to address the issue) holds that a  
15 water is “subject to the CWA” if it satisfies the “significant nexus” standard in Justice Kennedy’s  
16 *Rapanos* concurrence, which protects ephemeral streams and many wetlands that lack surface  
17 water connection with jurisdictional waters. *Healdsburg*, 496 F.3d at 995.

18 Accordingly, the Agencies cannot rely on *Brand X* to issue a rule that excludes ephemeral  
19 streams and or other waters protected by Justice Kennedy’s opinion. That controlling *Rapanos*  
20 opinion, endorsed by a majority of Supreme Court justices, held that the plurality opinion’s  
21 exclusion of such waters is “inconsistent with the Act’s text, structure, and purpose.” *Rapanos*,  
22 547 U.S. at 776. Because “*Rapanos* is unambiguously *against* the construction offered in the  
23 plurality opinion, on which the [2020] Rule is modeled. . . [and] *does* foreclose” an interpretation  
24 based on the plurality opinion, the 2020 Rule is unreasonable and impermissible. *Colorado v.*  
25 *EPA*, 445 F. Supp. 3d 1295, 1312 (D. Colo. 2020) (original emphasis) (preliminarily enjoining the  
26 2020 Rule), *appeal pending*, Nos. 20-1238, 20-1262, 20-1263 (10th Cir.) (argued Nov. 18, 2020).

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28

1           **C. The Agencies’ Interpretation of Section 101(b) and States’ Rights and**  
2           **Responsibilities Under the Act Is Impermissible.**

3           The 2020 Rule is contrary to law and fails under *Chevron* because it adopts an  
4 interpretation of the role of states under the Act that is unambiguously barred by Congress’s intent.  
5 “If the intent of Congress is clear, that is the end of the matter; for the court, as well as the agency  
6 must give effect to the unambiguously expressed intent of Congress.” *Chevron*, 467 U.S. at 842-  
7 843. “Congressional intent may be determined by ‘traditional tools of statutory construction,’ and  
8 if a court using these tools ascertains that Congress had a clear intent on the question at issue, that  
9 intent must be given effect as law.” *Wilderness Society*, 353 F.3d at 1059 (citing *Chevron*). That  
10 is because, even where “ambiguities in statutes” leave a gap for an agency to fill, courts “have not  
11 abdicated [their] judicial role” to “mark the bounds of delegated agency choice.” *Negusie v.*  
12 *Holder*, 555 U.S. 511, 531 (2009) (Thomas, J., concurring in part). The federalism principles  
13 embodied by the Act favor broad federal water quality protections, not narrower ones, as the  
14 Agencies try to do here.

15           In drastically narrowing the scope of protected waters, the Agencies specifically rely on  
16 CWA Section 101(b), which states Congress’s policy to “recognize, preserve, and protect the  
17 primary responsibilities and rights of States to prevent, reduce and eliminate pollution,” and “to  
18 plan the development and use . . . of land and water resources.” 33 U.S.C. § 1251(b). But the  
19 Act’s text, history, and caselaw regarding Section 101(b) demonstrate that Congress did not intend  
20 Section 101(b) to serve as a vehicle for the Agencies to undermine the Act’s “objective . . . to  
21 restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.” 33  
22 U.S.C. § 1251(a). Indeed, Congress referred three times in Section 101(b) to preserving State  
23 authority to “prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution,” State efforts that further the Act’s  
24 objective, *id.* § 1251(b), and Congress then effectuated that policy in Section 510, making clear  
25 that States can enact regulations beyond the federal CWA floor but not less stringent regulations.  
26 *Id.* § 1370. A contrary reading makes no sense at all.

27           The primary purpose of Section 101(b) is to preserve states’ authority to protect their  
28 waters and to provide for state operation of the CWA permit programs, not to defer to hypothetical

1 state regulation as a counterweight to the Act’s objective to restore and maintain national water  
2 integrity, and certainly not to reduce the scope of federally protected waters. The Act’s legislative  
3 history thus makes clear that Congress meant in Section 101(b) only to reinforce the  
4 “responsibility of states to prevent and abate pollution *by* assigning them a large role in the  
5 national discharge permit system established by the Act.” Dkt. No. 31-1, Ex. P (emphasis added).  
6 The Agencies’ interpretation is also belied by the very reason Congress enacted the CWA in 1972:  
7 to *replace* an ineffective patchwork of state laws with a strong national floor of federal water  
8 pollution controls. *See* pp. 2-4, *supra*; *City of Milwaukee*, 451 U.S. at 318; *City of Arcadia v. EPA*,  
9 411 F.3d. 1103, 1106 (9th Cir. 2005) (states’ Section 101(b) role “in combating pollution” is  
10 consistent with CWA’s “goals and policies”). In defiance of these two indisputable facts,  
11 however, the Agencies attempt to ascribe to Congress an intent *not* to replace that ineffective  
12 patchwork of state laws with a strong national floor but instead to continue that failed policy.  
13 Neither the CWA’s text nor its purpose or history support such a counterintuitive reading.

14         Contrary to this unambiguous Congressional intent and context, the Agencies assert that  
15 the 2020 Rule “strikes a . . . balance between Federal and State waters” that “carries out Congress’  
16 overall objective” while “preserv[ing] the traditional sovereignty of States.” 85 Fed. Reg. at  
17 22,252. Yet the Rule’s underlying assumption, that the definition for “waters of the United States”  
18 must “balance” between Federal and State waters, has no basis in the Act’s text. Likewise, the  
19 Rule’s proclamation that Congress demanded that the Agencies prioritize the “traditional  
20 sovereignty of States” is similarly bereft of any statutory foundation, as a protective definition of  
21 “waters of the United States” does not infringe on state authority. The Act established a federal  
22 prerogative “to restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the  
23 Nation’s waters” and allocated to the states discrete aspects of the federal programs necessary to  
24 achieve this purpose. And then, in Section 510, Congress *preserved* traditional state authority to  
25 establish both stricter and broader water pollution controls than federal law requires to promote  
26 that animating objective but expressly *prohibited* states from “adopt[ing] or enforc[ing]” any water  
27 pollution control standard that is “*less stringent*” than an existing federal standard to prevent states  
28 from undermining that objective. 33 U.S.C. § 1370 (emphasis added).

1 The Supreme Court has confirmed what the Act’s text, purpose, and context makes plain.  
2 In *EPA v. California ex. rel. State Water Resources Control Board*, for example, the Court stated  
3 that “[c]onsonant with its policy ‘to recognize, preserve, and protect the primary responsibilities  
4 and rights of States to prevent, reduce, and eliminate pollution,’ Congress also provided that a  
5 State may issue [Section 402] permits ‘for discharges into navigable waters within its jurisdiction,’  
6 but only upon EPA approval of the State’s proposal to administer its own program.” 426 U.S.  
7 200, 207 (1976) (quoting Section 101(b) (33 U.S.C. § 1251(b)) & § 1342(b)) (footnote omitted).  
8 Similarly, in *Ouellette*, the Court explained that Section 101(b) gives states “a significant role in  
9 protecting their own natural resources” and gave as examples the authority given to states to issue  
10 Section 402 permits to “require discharge limitations more stringent than those required by the  
11 Federal Government,” and to issue Section 401 water quality certifications for federally licensed  
12 projects in their states. 479 U.S. at 489-90 (citing 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251(b), 1341(a)(1), 1370,  
13 1342(b)). Accordingly, states’ rights under the CWA reflect the states’ responsibilities to perform  
14 their own set of obligations under “a regulatory ‘partnership,’” *Ouelette*, 479 U.S. at 490, which is  
15 a “partnership between the States and the Federal Government animated by a *shared objective*: ‘to  
16 restore and maintain the chemical, physical, and biological integrity of the Nation’s waters.’”  
17 *Arkansas*, 503 U.S. at 101 (emphasis added).<sup>12</sup>

18 The Act’s structure demonstrates that the role of states under the CWA framework is  
19 focused on the following: (i) implementing the Act’s regulatory programs under Sections 402 and  
20 404, when authorized, as well as developing water quality standards under Section 303; (ii)  
21 reviewing federally-licensed projects and approving or denying certifications under Section 401;  
22 and (iii) implementing and enforcing any additional state water quality protections that go beyond  
23 the national floor established by the Act. 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251 (b), 1313, 1341, 1342(b), 1344(h),  
24 1370. And, indeed, those are the state roles Congress specified in Section 101(b) and elsewhere in

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26 <sup>12</sup> See also *County of Maui v. Hawaii Wildlife Fund*, 140 S. Ct. 1462, 1471, 1476 (2020),  
27 (observing that Section 101(b) evidenced Congress’s intent that states have autonomy for  
28 “groundwater pollution and nonpoint source pollution,” as opposed to “regulation of identifiable  
sources of pollutants entering navigable waters”).



1 the Act. 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251(b) (“manage the construction grant program”; “implement” the  
2 Section 402 and 404 permit program); 1370 (state authority to establish stricter and broader water  
3 pollution control regulations). Thus, nothing in the text of Section 101(b) or the Act as a whole  
4 authorizes the Agencies to “strike a balance between Federal and State waters”—i.e., carving out  
5 some waters as subject to state jurisdiction alone where the record demonstrates that doing so  
6 would undermine Congress’ objective in Section 101(a)—when developing the regulatory  
7 definition of “waters of the United States.”

8 In fact, a balancing between state and federal waters, or between the Act’s clean water  
9 objective and state sovereignty, that narrows the scope of federally protected waters directly  
10 conflicts with the CWA. Congress intended the waters of the United States to be defined as  
11 broadly as possible, regardless of state sovereignty and the roles of states under the CWA  
12 framework. *See Riverside Bayview*, 474 U.S. at 133 (“Congress chose to define [navigable waters]  
13 broadly” as “the waters of the United States”); H.R. Rep. No. 92-911 at 818, S. Conf. Rep. No. 92-  
14 1236, at \*3822 (Congress intended the term “waters of the United States” be “given the broadest  
15 possible constitutional interpretation”). Indeed, a broad regulatory definition of federally  
16 protected waters that is not based on the scope of waters protected (or that may be protected) by  
17 individual states is consistent with and furthers Congressional intent. The Act was specifically  
18 enacted to establish a national floor of water quality protections and replace the prior failed federal  
19 regime which relied on state protections alone to improve the quality of the Nation’s waters. S.  
20 Rep. No. 92-414, at 2 - 7 (1971) (1971 WL 11307, at \*3669-\*3674) (explaining that, for the more  
21 than two decades prior to the 1972 CWA Amendments, “Federal legislation in the field of water  
22 pollution control has been keyed primarily to [the] principle [that] ... States shall lead the national  
23 effort to prevent, control and abate water pollution” with the federal role “limited to support of,  
24 and assistance to, the States” and concluding that “the Federal water pollution program ... has  
25 been inadequate in every vital aspect”).

26 By creating a definition for “waters of the United States” based on a rationale that defies  
27 the established meaning of Section 101(b) and is irreconcilable with other sections of the statute  
28 and the Act’s history and purpose, the Agencies contradict and undermine the cooperative



1 federalism Congress intended the CWA to achieve. Rather than further federalism, the 2020 Rule  
2 abdicates federal responsibility and weakens the important national floor of water quality  
3 protections that Congress set out to establish in the CWA. In fact, the Rule punishes states that  
4 adopt strong clean water safeguards by allowing states with weaker laws to effectively undermine  
5 and undo downstream states' efforts to protect water quality in their states. *See Rapanos*, 547 U.S.  
6 at 777 (citing Section 101(b) and noting that “the Act protects downstream States from out-of-state  
7 pollution that they themselves cannot regulate”). Because this is clearly not what Congress  
8 intended when it enacted the CWA in 1972, *see, e.g.*, 33 U.S.C. §§ 1251(a), 1370, the Agencies'  
9 contrary interpretation in the Rule must fail.

10 Nor can the Agencies justify narrowing the “waters of the United States” definition by  
11 invoking Section 101(b)'s acknowledgement of the “primary responsibilities and rights of States”  
12 to “plan the development and use (including restoration, preservation and enhancement) of land  
13 and water resources.” *See* 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,262. While development impacting a waterbody  
14 deemed to be a “water of the United States” may be subject to CWA permitting, that fact does not  
15 take primary *planning* responsibility away from state or local authorities; it merely establishes that  
16 a CWA permit among other local, state, or federal permits may be needed for the activity.

17 Equally without merit is the Agencies' contention that “waters of the United States” must  
18 be defined narrowly because the Act's “non-regulatory programs,” such as research and funding  
19 programs to assist states in water quality protection, apply to “the Nation's waters” broadly. *See*  
20 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,253, 22,269. Controlling pollution under the Act's regulatory programs and  
21 assisting states through research and grant programs are complementary, not mutually exclusive,  
22 ways to achieve Act's objective. *See Shanty Town Assocs. Ltd. P'ship v. EPA*, 843 F.2d 782, 791-  
23 92 (4th Cir. 1988) (describing Congress' intent that EPA use “the threat [of withholding grant  
24 funds] and promise of federal financial assistance . . . to influence the states to adopt nonpoint  
25 source pollution control programs that will accomplish the Act's water quality goals”) (internal  
26 citations omitted)). And since the “United States” and the “Nation” are synonymous, the  
27 Agencies' contention that “waters of the United States” are different from “the Nation's waters” is  
28 baseless. *Cf.* 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,253.

1 In sum, because the Agencies ground their new definition of “waters of the United States”  
2 on an interpretation of Section 101(b) that is unsupported by the Act, its history, and caselaw, the  
3 Rule must be set aside as “not in accordance with law.” 5 U.S.C. § 706(2)(A).

4 **D. The Agencies’ Constitutional Concerns Do Not Justify the Rule.**

5 The Agencies incorrectly claim that the 2020 Rule is necessary to “avoid regulatory  
6 interpretations of the [Act] that raise constitutional questions.” 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,269. That claim  
7 is both remarkable and meritless. First, precedent makes clear that the Agencies’ previous  
8 definition based on the significant nexus standard raises no constitutional concerns. Second, the  
9 Agencies do not even attempt to reconcile their new position with the contrary one they have taken  
10 for over four decades, including as recently as last year when, in their 2019 Rule, the Agencies  
11 expressly relied on the *Rapanos* Guidance and its embrace of the significant nexus standard—the  
12 constitutionality of which they now purport to doubt. 84 Fed. Reg. at 4198.

13 In any event, reliance on the “significant nexus” standard “raise[s] no serious  
14 constitutional or federalism difficulty.” *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 782-83 (Kennedy, J., concurring).  
15 In fact, employing the significant nexus test does the precise opposite: it “prevents problematic  
16 applications of the statute” that could raise such concerns. *Id.* The Agencies rely on *SWANCC* to  
17 argue that elimination of the significant nexus standard is needed to avoid Commerce Clause  
18 implications. 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,273. But *SWANCC*, which endorsed the significant nexus  
19 standard, concerned abandoned intrastate waters that were isolated and lacked a significant nexus  
20 to other waters protected by the Act, and in any case did not decide any constitutional questions.  
21 *See Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 766-67 (Kennedy, J., concurring); *SWANCC*, 531 U.S. at 162, 167, 174.

22 Moreover, the polluting activities controlled by the Act are economic in nature and subject  
23 to regulation under the Commerce Clause. *See, e.g., Chem. Waste Mgmt., Inc. v. Hunt*, 504 U.S.  
24 334, 340 n.3 (1992) (solid waste is an “article of commerce”); *Wickard v. Filburn*, 317 U.S. 111  
25 (1942). Protecting both navigable waters and the waters that significantly affect them provides  
26 ““appropriate and needful control of activities and agencies which, though intrastate, affect that  
27 [interstate] commerce.”” *Rapanos*, 547 U.S. at 783 (Kennedy, J., concurring) (quoting *Oklahoma*  
28 *ex rel. Phillips v. Guy F. Atkinson Co.*, 313 U.S. 508, 525-26 (1941)). As the Court stated in

1 *Hodel v. Virginia Surface Min. & Reclamation Ass'n., Inc.*, “the power conferred by the  
2 Commerce Clause [is] broad enough to permit congressional regulation of activities causing air or  
3 water pollution, or other environmental hazards that may have effects in more than one State.”  
4 452 U.S. 264, 282 (1981).

5 **E. The Rule’s Exclusion of Interstate Waters as an Independent Category of**  
6 **“Waters of the United States” is Contrary to the Act’s Text, History, and**  
7 **Purpose.**

8 The Agencies’ decision that interstate waters as a category are not “waters of the United  
9 States” contradicts clear Congressional intent as reflected in the Act’s text and structure and  
10 therefore fails under *Chevron* step one. *See Wilderness Society*, 353 F.3d at 1059. Federal  
11 jurisdiction over interstate waters under the Act, regardless of their navigability, has been  
12 longstanding and essential. In the CWA, Congress intended to prevent harms to downstream  
13 states from such detrimental upstream activities.

14 In a departure from all previous agency definitions, the 2020 Rule no longer includes  
15 interstate waters as an independent category of “waters of the United States.” Instead, interstate  
16 waters are protected only if they otherwise meet the new narrower definition of “waters of the  
17 United States.” AR 11574, Topic 1 at 26. The Agencies’ failure to protect all interstate waters is  
18 contrary to the plain language, structure, and history of the Act and defies controlling precedent.  
19 As waters spanning state boundaries, interstate waters are unquestionably subject to federal  
20 jurisdiction under the Act and must be included as a category under any definition of the “waters  
21 of the United States.” Failure to do so is an abdication of a core premise of the Act’s federalism.

22 The CWA’s language clearly demonstrates that the Act protects all interstate waters.  
23 Enacted in 1972, Section 303(a) of the Act provides, in pertinent part, that any pre-existing “water  
24 quality standard applicable to *interstate waters* . . . shall remain in effect,” unless determined by  
25 EPA to be inconsistent with any applicable requirements in effect prior to 1972. 33 U.S.C.  
26 §1313(a) (emphasis added). The Act’s specification of protection for interstate waters in the  
27 section setting forth the Act’s foundational water quality standards requirements demonstrates that  
28 interstate waters are categorically protected by the Act. Without reasoned explanation and in  
conflict with bedrock rules of statutory interpretation, *Lowe v. S.E.C.*, 472 U.S. 181, 219 (1985)

1 (“fundamental axiom of statutory interpretation that a statute is to be construed so as to give effect  
2 to all its language.”), the Agencies ignore section 303(a)’s plain language and state that it “was  
3 referring to interstate navigable waters,” despite the fact that the word “navigable” is not in section  
4 303(a). 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,284.

5 In addition to conflicting with the Act’s plain language, the Agencies’ exclusion of  
6 interstate waters also ignores that the “Federal Water Pollution Control Act as it existed prior to  
7 the 1972 Amendments . . . ‘ma[de] it clear that it is federal, not state, law that in the end controls  
8 the pollution of interstate *or* navigable waters.” *Illinois v. City of Milwaukee*, 731 F.2d 403, 408  
9 (7th Cir. 1984) (emphasis added) (quoting *Illinois v. City of Milwaukee*, 406 U.S. 91, 102 (1972)).  
10 The Agencies’ new interpretation, reading out protections for interstate waters, also ignores the  
11 purpose of the 1972 Amendments, which was to expand, not narrow, federal protection of waters.  
12 See S. Rep. No. 92-414, at 7 (1971) (1971 WL 11307, at \*3674) (prior mechanisms for abating  
13 water pollution “ha[d] been inadequate in every vital respect”); *City of Milwaukee*, 451 U.S. at 317  
14 (in passing the CWA, Congress “occupied the field by establishment of a comprehensive  
15 regulatory program . . . *not merely another law ‘touching interstate waters’*” (emphasis added)).  
16 As a means to protect interstate waters, the 1972 Amendments superseded the federal common law  
17 of nuisance in favor of a statutory “all-encompassing program of water pollution regulation.” *City*  
18 *of Milwaukee*, 451 U.S. at 318. Given that Congress’s purpose in the 1972 Amendments was to  
19 expand federal protections for waters, and that prior to the Amendments to the Act already  
20 protected navigable and interstate waters as separate categories, the Act necessarily continued to  
21 protect interstate waters after 1972.

22 The Agencies’ attempt to distinguish seminal Supreme Court cases demonstrating the  
23 Act’s applicability to interstate waters regardless of navigability ignores the Court’s analysis in  
24 those cases. See 85 Fed. Reg. at 22,286 n. 43. In both *Ouellette* and *Arkansas*, the Court  
25 explained that the Act had established a broad statutory scheme for addressing interstate water  
26 pollution disputes. The Court in *Ouellette* observed that, *regardless of navigability*, “the Act  
27 applies to virtually all surface water in the country,” and that “the control of interstate pollution is  
28 primarily a matter of federal law.” 479 U.S. at 486, 492 (citations omitted). Similarly, the Court

1 in *Arkansas* explained that “interstate water pollution is controlled by *federal law*” and “the Act’s  
2 purpose [is to] authoriz[e] the EPA to create and manage a uniform system of interstate water  
3 pollution regulation.” 503 U.S. at 110 (emphasis in original).

4 The Agencies’ contention that they were required to remove interstate waters because the  
5 Southern District of Georgia found the interstate waters provisions of the 2015 Rule unlawful has  
6 no merit. *Georgia v. Wheeler*, 418 F. Supp. 3d 1336, 1358-60 (S.D. Ga. 2019). First, the  
7 Agencies’ decision to propose the removal of interstate waters *pre-dated* the Southern District of  
8 Georgia’s decision by more than 6 months, *see* 84 Fed. Reg. 4154, 4171 (Feb. 14, 2019)  
9 (proposing to remove the interstate waters category), demonstrating unequivocally that the  
10 Agencies were not motivated by that court’s ruling. Second, *Georgia* is neither correct nor  
11 binding and, for the reasons provided above, should be disregarded. *See United States v.*  
12 *Ensminger*, 567 F.3d 587, 591 (9th Cir. 2009) (“a district court opinion does not have binding  
13 precedential effect,’ especially one from another federal circuit” (citations omitted)). Remarkably,  
14 in *Georgia*, the court did not even address the language of Section 303(a), which provides yet  
15 another reason to reject its conclusion, as the Agencies should have done here.

16 In summary, removing interstate waters as a category of protected waters under the CWA  
17 is contrary to statutory text, history, Congressional intent, and established case law.

### 18 **III. THE 2020 RULE HARMS THE INTERESTS OF THE STATES AND CITIES, GIVING THEM** 19 **STANDING TO BRING THIS ACTION**

20 States are “entitled to special solicitude in [Article III] standing analysis” and, given their  
21 interests “in all the earth and air within [their] domain,” are routinely held to have standing to  
22 challenge actions by federal environmental agencies. *Massachusetts v. EPA*, 549 U.S. 497, 518-20  
23 & n.17 (2007). To establish standing, only one party must satisfy the requirement that plaintiff’s  
24 injury be fairly traceable to the defendant and redressable by a decision in their favor. *Id.* at 518.  
25 Here, the States and Cities easily establish standing.

26 The States and Cities have and will continue to suffer four types of injuries traceable to the  
27 2020 Rule that can be redressed by vacatur of the Rule: (1) harm to their waters and water  
28 protection programs; (2) harm to wildlife; (3) harm to property; and (4) increased monetary

1 expenditures and administrative burdens. These four injuries are detailed in more than 30  
 2 declarations, including expert testimony, showing that “all states will be significantly impacted”  
 3 by the 2020 Rule and that the States’ and Cities’ “harms threatened by the Rule will be extensive,  
 4 long-lasting, and nationwide.”<sup>13</sup> Such harms easily establish state standing. *See Massachusetts*,  
 5 549 U.S. at 519 (standing shown by federal agency decision’s environmental harm); *California v.*  
 6 *Block*, 690 F.2d 753, 776 (9th Cir. 1982) (standing shown by federal policy’s effect on State  
 7 lands); *California v. Azar*, 911 F.3d 558, 571-73 (9th Cir. 2018) (standing shown by federal rule’s  
 8 creation of a regulatory gap that state would need to expend resources to fill).

9 *Harm to the States’ and Cities’ waters and water protection programs.* By leaving  
 10 ephemeral streams, interstate waters, and over half of the nation’s wetlands unprotected by the  
 11 Act, the 2020 Rule threatens entire watersheds, including 4.8 million miles of streams<sup>14</sup> and 16.3  
 12 million acres of non-floodplain wetlands.<sup>15</sup> The arid West—where several States are located—  
 13 will be particularly hard hit; for example, more than 85% of stream miles in New Mexico’s key  
 14 watersheds are no longer protected<sup>16</sup> and 40% of wetland acres in New Mexico are at risk of  
 15 destruction.<sup>17</sup> Because of the Rule, 25 to 45% of New Mexico’s stormwater general permits and  
 16 50% of its individual permits are no longer required.<sup>18</sup> As a result, pesticides, paint solvents,  
 17 acidic wastewater, and other pollutants will discharge into New Mexico waters—including the  
 18 Tijeras Arroyo, Gila River, and Rio Hondo watersheds—without regulatory limit.<sup>19</sup>

19 The 2020 Rule severely harms downstream States and Cities by increasing the risks of  
 20 pollution from upstream states. By excluding numerous waters from the Act’s jurisdiction, the  
 21 2020 Rule significantly curtails the Section 402 and 404 permit programs that previously protected  
 22 the States’ and Cities’ natural resources and citizens from upstream pollution.<sup>20</sup> For example, New  
 23 York does not regulate smaller wetlands because it relies on the Army Corps’ operation of the

24 \_\_\_\_\_  
 25 <sup>13</sup> Dkt. No. 30-18, ¶¶ 3, 21

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 3-5, 14, 21-22, 24, 34.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 5, 16, 34-43.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 3, 24.

<sup>17</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 3, 36-39.

<sup>18</sup> Roose Decl. ¶ 20.

<sup>19</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 9, 15-17.

<sup>20</sup> Dkt. No. 30-8 ¶ 9.



1 Section 404 program; while New York works to expand its state programs to fill the regulatory  
 2 gap created by the 2020 Rule (work that itself constitutes an injury establishing standing), many of  
 3 New York’s wetlands could be filled and therefore would not be able to reduce downstream  
 4 pollution before its waters flow into New Jersey.<sup>21</sup> Further, upstream harms will affect Maryland  
 5 because the health of Maryland’s Chesapeake Bay relies upon water protections in six upstream  
 6 jurisdictions—including plaintiffs suffering from a regulatory gap in protections as well as non-  
 7 plaintiff states such as West Virginia and Delaware.<sup>22</sup>

8 Moreover, because many states upstream of the States and Cities have laws preventing the  
 9 imposition of stricter water pollution controls than those under the CWA, the Rule allows  
 10 increased upstream pollution that threatens to significantly degrade water quality in the States and  
 11 Cities.<sup>23</sup> For example, California will be harmed by increased pollution in upstream states that  
 12 would flow to California via interstate waters, such as the Colorado River, which is an important  
 13 source of drinking water,<sup>24</sup> and the Amargosa River, which is ephemeral for the majority of its  
 14 length and subject to land use activities—such as Nevada’s largest working dairy farm and  
 15 hazardous waste disposal—that may discharge pollutants.<sup>25</sup>

16 *Harm to the States’ wildlife.* Plaintiffs also are injured by the Rule’s exclusion of waters  
 17 that are habitat for fish and other animals owned, regulated, or held in trust by the States.<sup>26</sup> For  
 18 example, habitats for scores of threatened and endangered species in California and other states

19 <sup>21</sup> Jacobson Decl. ¶¶ 7-8, 9-14; Dkt. No. 30-7 ¶¶ 13-15; *see also* Baskin Decl. ¶¶ 13-14  
 20 (discussing a similar regulatory gap in Massachusetts, and identifying specific projects involving  
 fill of wetlands that are no longer protected by either federal or state law).

21 <sup>22</sup> Dkt. No. 30-14 ¶¶ 5, 7 (The 2020 Rule will also harm Maryland by removing protection  
 22 for an estimated 10,000 acres of wetlands in the Nanticoke River watershed (a tributary to  
 Chesapeake Bay) within Delaware, thus eliminating the flood protection functions these wetlands  
 provide to communities downstream in Maryland.)

23 <sup>23</sup> Bishop Decl. ¶ 20; Dkt. No. 30-18 ¶ 23; Ariz. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 49-104(A)(16); Utah  
 Code Ann. § 19-5-105.

24 <sup>24</sup> Bishop Decl. ¶¶ 21, 23; *see also* Mrazik Decl. ¶ 9; Dkt. No. 30-13 ¶ 12; Dkt. No. 30-22  
 ¶ 20.

25 <sup>25</sup> Dkt. No. 30-20 ¶ 5-6, 12-13. The 2020 Rule will likewise harm Michigan given that its  
 water quality depends on adequate protection in other Great Lakes states. Seidel Decl. ¶ 3.

26 <sup>26</sup> Dkt. 30-18 ¶¶ 4, 16, 27-33, 38; Dkt. No. 30-6 ¶ 10; Declaration of Annee Ferranti in  
 27 Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment (Ferranti Decl.) ¶¶ 9-15; Dkt. No. 30-12 ¶¶  
 10-12; Dkt. No. 30-20 ¶¶ 13-17. For example, California wildlife are “publicly owned” and it is  
 28 the “state’s policy to conserve and maintain wildlife for citizens’ use and enjoyment.” *Betchart v.*  
*Department of Fish & Game*, 158 Cal.App.3d 1104, 1106 (1984); Cal. Fish & Game Code, §  
 1801.



1 face increased degradation under the Rule.<sup>27</sup> North Carolina will suffer a large loss of wetlands  
 2 under the 2020 Rule and the resulting decline in water quality and loss of wildlife habitat will  
 3 impact the 70% of rare and endangered plants and animals statewide that rely on these wetlands,  
 4 as well as North Carolina's \$430 million commercial and \$3.9 billion recreational fisheries.<sup>28</sup>

5 *Harms to the States' and Cities' property.* The Rule's elimination of protections for  
 6 several upstream waters that trap pollutants and store water threatens downstream States and Cities  
 7 with more frequent flooding and increased pollution.<sup>29</sup> For example, New York owns 658  
 8 facilities with replacement value of over \$254 million located in 100-year floodplains that are  
 9 directly at risk from the 2020 Rule.<sup>30</sup> This does not include State-owned or managed roads,  
 10 bridges, culverts, rail lines, airports and marine facilities that are also located in flood zones and  
 11 will also be threatened by implementation of the 2020 Rule.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, in the District of  
 12 Columbia, more than \$1 billion in District-owned property and approximately 10,000 District  
 13 residents are located within floodplains.<sup>32</sup> The total economic loss from a 100-year storm along  
 14 the Potomac and Anacostia Rivers is estimated at \$316 million.<sup>33</sup>

15 *Increased monetary expenditures by and administrative burdens on the States and Cities.*  
 16 The States and Cities have already and will increasingly need to expend money and resources to  
 17 fill the regulatory gaps created by the 2020 Rule. For example, to mitigate the Rule's harm, the  
 18 District of Columbia has developed local regulations for dredge and fill activities in wetlands and  
 19 streams no longer subject to the Act's protection, has diverted approximately 2,520 hours of staff  
 20 time from other activities, and is in the process of hiring an additional employee to implement a  
 21 new permitting program.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, New York has devoted staff time and funding to identify  
 22 and map wetlands no longer protected by the Act that will need to be protected under new state  
 23

24 <sup>27</sup> Dkt. No. 30-18 ¶¶ 4, 27, 40-41, 49; Dkt. No. 30-20 ¶¶ 14-16; Dkt. No. 30-12 ¶¶ 8-10;  
 25 Ferranti Decl. ¶¶ 11, 14-19.

26 <sup>28</sup> Dkt. No. 30-5 ¶¶ 12-13, 17-18.

27 <sup>29</sup> Dkt. No. 30-3 ¶ 11; Dkt. No. 30-7 ¶¶ 4, 7-8; Dkt. No. 30-18 ¶¶ 5, 15, 17, 34, 38, 41-42.

28 <sup>30</sup> Dkt. No. 30-22 ¶ 38

<sup>31</sup> *Id.*

<sup>32</sup> Seltzer Decl. ¶ 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Id.* ¶ 18.

<sup>34</sup> *Id.* ¶¶ 11-14.

1 efforts.<sup>35</sup> Oregon has likewise devoted tens of thousands of dollars in staff time to filling the  
 2 regulatory gap created by the Rule and expects to incur significant additional costs in the future.<sup>36</sup>  
 3 California, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, and Virginia will also incur costs from increased staffing  
 4 and staff training to address the regulatory gaps left by the Rule.<sup>37</sup> In addition, New Mexico will  
 5 need to overhaul its groundwater and surface water quality protection regulations to create a new  
 6 permitting program—at a cost of over \$7.5 million annually, which is a 115% increase in New  
 7 Mexico’s budget for all surface water programs.<sup>38</sup> Until this new program is in place, New  
 8 Mexico has sought to mitigate the removal of water protections by diverting funding from other  
 9 areas and diverting work time from several staff members to address the federal regulatory gap.<sup>39</sup>

### 10 CONCLUSION

11 For all of these reasons, the Court should grant the States’ and Cities’ motion for summary  
 12 judgment and vacate the 2020 Rule as arbitrary, capricious, and contrary to law.

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26 <sup>35</sup> Jacobson Decl. ¶¶ 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> Mrazik Decl. ¶ 8.

27 <sup>37</sup> Bishop Decl. ¶¶ 26-29, 38, 40, 43-44; Baskin Decl. ¶¶ 20-23; Davis Decl. ¶¶ 6-7;  
 Declaration of David Siebert in Support of Plaintiffs’ Motion for Summary Judgment ¶ 2.

28 <sup>38</sup> Roose Decl. ¶¶ 20, 22.

<sup>39</sup> *Id.* ¶ 23.

1 Dated: November 23, 2020

Respectfully Submitted,

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28

XAVIER BECERRA  
Attorney General of California  
SARAH E. MORRISON  
ERIC KATZ  
Supervising Deputy Attorneys General  
CATHERINE M. WIEMAN  
ROXANNE J. CARTER  
JESSICA BARCLAY- STROBEL  
BRYANT B. CANNON  
Deputy Attorneys General

*/s/ Tatiana K. Gaur*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
TATIANA K. GAUR  
Deputy Attorney General  
*Attorneys for Plaintiff State of California,  
by and through Attorney General Xavier  
Becerra and California State Water  
Resources Control Board*

For the STATE OF NEW YORK  
LETITIA JAMES  
Attorney General of the State of New York  
Philip Bein (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Senior Counsel

For the STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
WILLIAM TONG  
Attorney General

*/s/ Timothy Hoffman*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Timothy Hoffman (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Senior Counsel  
Office of the Attorney General  
Environmental Protection Bureau  
28 Liberty Street  
New York, NY 10005  
Telephone: (716) 853-8465  
Fax: (716) 853-8579  
Email: Timothy.Hoffman@ag.ny.gov

*/s/ David H. Wrinn*  
\_\_\_\_\_  
David H. Wrinn (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Matthew I. Levine  
Assistant Attorneys General  
Office of the Attorney General  
165 Capitol Avenue  
P.O. Box 120  
Hartford, CT 06141-0120  
Telephone: (860) 808-5250  
Email: Matthew.Levine@ct.gov  
Email: David.Wrinn@ct.gov

1 For the STATE OF ILLINOIS  
KWAME RAOUL  
2 Attorney General

For the STATE OF MAINE  
AARON M. FREY  
Maine Attorney General

3  
4 /s/ Jason E. James  
Jason E. James (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Assistant Attorney General  
5 Matthew J. Dunn  
Chief, Environmental Enforcement/Asbestos  
6 Litigation Division  
Office of the Attorney General  
7 Environmental Bureau  
69 West Washington, 18th Floor  
8 Chicago, IL 60602  
Telephone: (312) 814-0660  
9 Email: jjames@atg.state.il.us

/s/ Jillian R. O'Brien  
Jillian R. O'Brien, Cal. SBN 251311  
Assistant Attorney General  
6 State House Station  
Augusta, Maine 04333-0006  
Telephone: (207) 626-8800  
Email: Jill.OBrien@maine.gov

10 For the STATE OF MARYLAND  
11 Brian E. Frosh  
Attorney General of Maryland

For the STATE OF MICHIGAN  
DANA NESSEL  
Attorney General of Michigan

12  
13 /s/ Joshua M. Segal  
Joshua M. Segal (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
14 Special Assistant Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
15 200 St. Paul Place  
Baltimore, MD 21202  
16 Telephone: (410) 576-6446  
Email: jsegal@oag.state.md.us

/s/ Daniel P. Bock  
Daniel P. Bock (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Assistant Attorney General  
Michigan Department of Attorney General  
Environment, Natural Resources and  
Agriculture Division  
P.O. Box 30755  
Lansing, MI 48909  
Telephone: (517) 335-7664  
Email: bockd@michigan.gov

17  
18 For the STATE OF NEW JERSEY  
19 GURBIR S. GREWAL  
Attorney General

For the STATE OF NEW MEXICO  
HECTOR BALDERAS  
Attorney General of New Mexico

20  
21 /s/ Lisa Morelli  
Lisa Morelli, Cal. SBN 137092  
22 Deputy Attorney General  
Environmental Practice Group  
23 Division of Law  
R.J. Hughes Justice Complex  
24 25 Market Street, P.O. Box 093  
Trenton, New Jersey 08625  
25 Telephone: (609)376-2745  
Email: Lisa.Morrelli@law.njoag.gov

/s/ William Grantham  
William Grantham (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Assistant Attorney General  
201 Third Street NW, Suite 300  
Albuquerque, New Mexico 87102  
Telephone: (505) 717-3520  
Email: wgrantham@nmag.gov

1 For the STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA ex rel.  
2 Attorney General Joshua H. Stein and for the  
3 NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF  
4 ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY  
5 JOSHUA H. STEIN  
6 Attorney General  
7 Daniel S. Hirschman  
8 Senior Deputy Attorney General

9 /s/ Amy L. Bircher

10 Amy L. Bircher (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
11 Special Deputy Attorney General  
12 Marc Bernstein  
13 Special Deputy Attorney General  
14 North Carolina Department of Justice  
15 P.O. Box 629  
16 Raleigh, NC 27602  
17 Telephone: (919) 716-6400  
18 Email: abircher@ncdoj.gov

19 For the STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
20 PETER F. NERONHA  
21 Attorney General

22 /s/ Alison B. Hoffman

23 Alison B. Hoffman (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
24 Special Assistant Attorney General  
25 Office of the Attorney General  
26 150 South Main Street  
27 Providence, RI 02903  
28 Telephone: (401) 274-4400  
Email: AHoffman@riag.ri.gov

For the STATE OF WASHINGTON  
ROBERT W. FERGUSON  
Attorney General

/s/ Ronald L. Lavigne

Ronald L. Lavigne (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Senior Counsel  
Office of the Attorney General  
2425 Bristol Court SW, 2nd Fl.  
Olympia, WA 98504  
Telephone: (305) 586-6751  
Email: ronald.lavigne@atg.wa.gov

For the STATE OF OREGON  
Ellen F. Rosenblum  
Attorney General of the State of Oregon

/s/ Paul Garrahan

Paul Garrahan (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Attorney-in-Charge, Natural Resources  
Section  
Oregon Department of Justice  
1162 Court St. NE  
Salem, OR 97301-4096  
Telephone: (503) 947-4593  
Fax: (503) 378-3784  
Email: paul.garrahan@doj.state.or.us

For the STATE OF VERMONT  
THOMAS J. DONOVAN, JR.  
Attorney General of Vermont

/s/ Laura B. Murphy

Laura B. Murphy (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Assistant Attorney General  
109 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05609  
Telephone: (802) 828-3186  
Email: laura.murphy@vermont.gov

For the STATE OF WISCONSIN  
JOSHUA L. KAUL  
Wisconsin Attorney General

/s/ Gabe Johnson-Karp

Gabe Johnson-Karp (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Assistant Attorney General  
Wisconsin Department of Justice  
P.O. Box 7857  
Madison, WI 53707  
Telephone: (608) 267-8904  
Email: johnsonkarp@doj.state.wi.us

1 For the COMMONWEALTH OF  
2 MASSACHUSETTS  
3 MAURA HEALEY  
4 Attorney General

4 /s/ Seth Schofield  
5 Seth Schofield (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
6 Senior Appellate Counsel  
7 David S. Frankel (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
8 Special Assistant Attorney General  
9 Energy and Environment Bureau  
10 Office of the Attorney General  
11 One Ashburton Place, 18th Flr.  
12 Boston, MA 02108  
13 Telephone: (617) 963-2436 / 2294  
14 Email: seth.schofield@mass.gov  
15 Email: david.frankel@mass.gov

11 For the DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
12 KARL A. RACINE  
13 Attorney General

14 /s/ Brian Caldwell  
15 Brian Caldwell (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
16 Assistant Attorney General  
17 Social Justice Section  
18 Office of the Attorney General  
19 for the District of Columbia  
20 441 Fourth Street N.W., Ste # 600-S  
21 Washington, D.C. 20001  
22 Telephone: (202) 727-6211  
23 Telephone: (202) 445-1952 (m)  
24 Email: brian.caldwell@dc.gov

For the COMMONWEALTH OF  
VIRGINIA  
MARK R. HERRING  
Attorney General  
Donald D. Anderson  
Deputy Attorney General  
Paul Kugelman, Jr.  
Senior Assistant Attorney General  
Chief, Environmental Section

/s/ David C. Grandis  
David C. Grandis (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
Senior Assistant Attorney General  
Office of the Attorney General  
202 North Ninth Street  
Richmond, VA 23219  
Telephone: (804) 225-2741  
Email: dgrandis@oag.state.va.us

For the CITY OF NEW YORK  
JAMES E. JOHNSON  
Corporation Counsel of the City of New York

/s/ Nathan Taylor  
Nathan Taylor (*admitted pro hac vice*)  
New York City Law Department  
100 Church Street, Rm 6-144  
New York, NY 10007  
Telephone: (646) 940-0736 (m)  
Telephone: (212) 356-2315  
Email: NTaylor@law.nyc.gov

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**SIGNATURE ATTESTATION**

Pursuant to Civil Local Rule 5-1(i)(3), I attest that concurrence in the filing of this document has been obtained from each of the other signatories.

DATED: November 23, 2020

/s/ Tatiana K. Gaur  
Tatiana K. Gaur

LA2020300885



**CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE**

Case Name: **State of California, et al. v. Andrew Wheeler, et al.**

Case No.: **3:20-cv-03005-RS**

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I hereby certify that on November 23, 2020, I electronically filed the following documents with the Clerk of the Court by using the CM/ECF system:

**NOTICE OF MOTION AND MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT;  
MEMORANDUM OF POINTS AND AUTHORITIES**

I certify that **all** participants in the case are registered CM/ECF users and that service will be accomplished by the CM/ECF system.

I declare under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of California and the United States of America the foregoing is true and correct and that this declaration was executed on November 23, 2020, at Los Angeles, California.

Blanca Cabrera

Declarant

/s/ Blanca Cabrera

Signature