

EPA'S LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE (LGAC) DRAFT CHARGE ON 'WATERS OF THE U.S.' (WOTUS)

OVERVIEW

1. Background and Description

On February 28, 2017, the President signed the Executive Order on *Restoring the Rule of Law, Federalism, and Economic Growth* by Reviewing the "Waters of the United States" Rule (issued June 2015).¹ The Executive Order gives direction to the Administrator and the Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works to review the final Clean Water Rule (CWR) and "publish for notice and comment a proposed rule rescinding or revising the rule." The E.O. also directs that EPA and the Army "shall consider interpreting the term 'navigable waters' in a manner "consistent with Justice Scalia's opinion in *Rapanos* ²which includes relatively permanent waters and wetlands with a continuous surface connection to relatively permanent waters.

As part of EPA's efforts to consult with state and local government officials, EPA's Local Government Advisory Committee (LGAC) will provide its recommendations to the Administrator on revising the definition of "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS) and identifying ways to reduce the regulatory burden on local communities as well as balance that with environmental protection.

2. Project Scope

The agencies intend to follow an expeditious two-step process to provide certainty with the rule:

- 1) Establish the legal status quo by re-codifying the regulation that was in place prior to issuance of the CWR now under the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit's stay of that rule.
- 2) Propose a new definition of Waters of the U.S. that would replace the 2015 CWR that reflects the principles outlined by Justice Scalia (*Rapanos* plurality opinion).

The LGAC consists of 36 local, state and tribal government elected and appointed officials representing cities, parishes, counties, municipalities, and other local political jurisdictions. Local officials are knowledgeable and provide unique perspectives on issues relating to a revised rule. Further, the LGAC has potential to engage other knowledgeable local officials with unique valuable on-the-ground perspectives and knowledge. Through this collaborative process, the chartered LGAC will provide Administrator Pruitt with expeditious and meaningful advice relating to a revised "Waters of the U.S." rule. Overall, the goal would be to develop recommendations to the EPA for consideration on a revised rule. This advice and recommendations come from an 'on the ground' local government perspective which will assist the agency in providing the best means to communicate a revised rule with local officials.

¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-pres-office/2017/02/28/presidential-executive-order-restoring-rule-law-federalism-and-economic>

² *Rapanos v. United States*, 547 U.S. 715 (2006) 126 Supreme Court 2208; 165 L.Ed. 2d 159

3. Charge Issues

LGAC Charge:

The LGAC will develop recommendations for the EPA to consider in developing approaches to a revised rule defining “waters of the U.S.” that ensures that the nation’s waters are kept free from pollution while at the same time promoting economic growth and minimizing regulatory uncertainty. The following are specific charge questions and issues for the LGAC to consider:

Charge Questions

- 1) How would you like to see the concepts of ‘relatively permanent’ and ‘continuous surface connection’ be defined? How would you like to see the agencies interpret ‘consistent with Scalia’? Are there particular features or implications of any such approaches that the agencies should be mindful of in developing the step 2 proposed rule?
- 2) What opportunities and challenges exist for your locality with relying on Justice Scalia’s opinion?
- 3) Are there other approaches to defining “waters of the U.S.” that you would like the agencies to consider to providing clarity and regulatory certainty?
- 4) The agencies’ economic analysis for step 2 intends to review programs under CWA 303, 311, 401, 402 and 404. Are there any other programs specific to your locality that could be affected but would not be captured in such an economic analysis?
- 5) What additional information can you provide from a local government perspective that EPA should be aware of?
- 6) Are there other issues the agencies should consider which would help ease the regulatory burden for implementation of WOTUS for state, local and tribal government?
- 7) What should the agencies consider in communicating the final rule to state, local and tribal governments to help them fully understand these regulatory changes and implementing them efficiently and most cost-effectively?
- 8) The Workgroup will also develop recommendations on how the EPA can better work with local governments and engage local governments on issues such as: What additional regulatory issues could be revised or clarified to more effectively to help local governments understand how this rule would apply? Are there additional policy discussions that could help address local questions about implementation, in agricultural and rural small communities? Are there other considerations such as ditch maintenance, stormwater management or green infrastructure?

4. Deliverables

The LGAC will provide a letter of recommendation to the Administrator to identify approaches to consider in a revised “Waters of the U.S.” rule. The chartered LGAC will prioritize and summarize these issues in a report to the EPA that focuses on the charge issues. A final LGAC report will be conveyed to the EPA Administrator with a transmittal letter summarizing findings and recommendations. This Report will be published on the EPA’s website for LGAC.

5. Preliminary Timeline/Schedule

April 26, 2017 – Executive Committee meets to discuss and approve the LGAC’s Charge (Protecting America’s Waters Workgroup) and develops a work plan with timeline.

May 3– LGAC’s Protecting America’s Waters Workgroup meets to discuss charge (via teleconference).

May 18- LGAC’s Protecting America’s Waters Workgroup meets with National Intergovernmental organizations to discuss charge (via teleconference).

June 7 – LGAC’s Protecting America’s Waters Workgroup meets to discuss charge (via teleconference).

June 29, 2017-The LGAC meets in a public meeting (via teleconference) to review recommendations on rescission of the 2015 CWR and revising the CWR. (Deliverable: Letter of Recommendation)