

For immediate release

February 1, 2017

Contact: Michael Kelly - 202-393-5449, mkelly@cleanwater.org | Brian Willis, Sierra Club, 202-675-2386, Brian.Willis@sierraclub.org | Alison Heis, National Parks Conservation Association: 202- 384-8762, aheis@npca.org

Congress is attacking clean water safeguards in order to protect the coal industry

Washington - Today the House of Representatives will use an obscure tool, the Congressional Review Act (CRA), to dismantle the **Stream Protection Rule** (SPR), which protects clean water for communities living near mining sites. The Senate is expected to vote on the House bill tomorrow.

SPR gives communities in coal country much needed information about toxic water pollution caused by nearby mining operations. It was finalized by the Obama administration in late 2016. The modest and long overdue rule also provides these communities basic protections from the devastating impacts of mountaintop-removal coal mining on water and public health.

This safeguard helps to ensure that coal companies don't profit off of the destruction of drinking water supplies. Unfortunately, leaders in Congress have targeted the SPR in a blatant attempt to put industry profits before public health. Repealing this commonsense protection through the CRA is a heavy handed tactic that will put many communities at risk now--and could constrain future administrations from acting to protect public health and drinking water in these communities.

A broad coalition of public health, environmental, and conservation groups opposing the CRA, released the following statements:

"Nobody voted against clean air and water in the last election. Regulatory safeguards that keep our air and water safe from toxic pollution are crafted using a democratic process and based on the best available science", said **Trip Van Noppen, President of Earthjustice**. "Any attempts to dismantle them using the Congressional Review Act should be opposed. These attacks have the power to fundamentally undermine the very goals of our environmental laws by trying to cripple future attempts to enforce protections for our air, water, and lands."

"This is an unconscionable attack on basic clean water safeguards for communities already devastated by toxic pollution from coal mining, said **Bob Wendelgass, President and CEO of Clean Water Action**. "Everyone has the right to know what is in their water and every community deserves access to clean water. Congress should reject any action that puts industry profits before protections for drinking water and public health."

"This attempt to scrap the Stream Protection Rule is a clear case of putting polluters' profits ahead of the basic well-being of vulnerable communities, and we must do everything we can to stop it," said **Michael Brune, Executive Director of the Sierra Club**. "No matter who you are or where you live, you have a right to clean water -- but this shameless attack puts families and communities at risk."

"The Stream Protection Rule protects both clean drinking water for people and habitat for endangered species and other wildlife," said **Jamie Rappaport Clark, President and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife**. "We can't have a bountiful natural heritage without securing clean water. Legislators who attack this rule through the Congressional Review Act are voting in the interest of big polluters, not local communities or future generations."

"The potential devastation if the Stream Protection Rule is struck down is unimaginable", said **Aimee Erickson, Executive Director of Citizens Coal Council**. "In the 25 states with active coal mining, nearly 100% of the drinking water comes from surface and groundwater that feeds into both public and private water supplies. These water supplies serve 11.4 million people in some of the poorest areas of the nation, where poverty levels in some areas reach nearly 43%."

"Republican leadership has wasted no time in rewarding Big Polluters by attempting to roll back the historic environmental progress made under President Obama. Undoing this critical Stream Protection Rule that helps prevent coal mining companies from dumping toxic waste into drinking water would be outrageous on its own, but this extreme attack goes even further by blocking the Department of Interior from ever issuing rules that allow communities living near mining operations to know what's being put in their water or to hold these polluters accountable for the increased rates of cancer, birth defects, and other health problems that have been linked to their waste", said **Gene Karpinski, President of the League of Conservation Voters**. "With communities across the country increasingly alarmed by contaminants like lead, flame-retardant chemicals, and many other pollutants showing up in their drinking water, shredding safeguards for clean water is the exact opposite of what Congress should do. We call on Congress to do what's right by standing up to Big Polluters and rejecting this radical attack on clean water."

"The politicians in Washington, D.C. are out of touch with Alaskans. Across our great state, Alaskans want healthy wild salmon streams, said **Bob Shavelson, Advocacy Director of Cook Inletkeeper**. "But the political elites don't get it—they take money from the coal corporations and ignore the will of the people."

"Think about it: spiking a rule that tells coal companies they can't poison our water sources, harm our landscapes or kill fish and wildlife with their waste", said **Scott Slesinger, Legislative Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council**. "This is a polluter-motivated attack on the American people."

"Appalachia has already lost 2,000 miles of streams to mountaintop removal mining. It's crucial we protect what is left", said **John Suttles, Director of Litigation and Regional Programs for SELC**. "Congress is placing coal-mining profits above the health of the people in Appalachia and the basic right to clean water."

"National parks and people stand to lose if Congress succeeds in dismantling the Stream Protection Rule," said **Theresa Pierno, President and CEO of National Parks Conservation Association**. "The rule safeguards waterways from toxic pollution produced by mining operations. Millions of Americans visit national parks in the Southeast each year, for activities such as bass fishing at Big South Fork National River and Recreation Area or white water rafting at New River Gorge National River each year. Will they continue to visit and spend millions of dollars in surrounding communities, if polluted waterways greet them upon arrival?"

"Mountaintop removal has devastated Appalachia's land and water, and it continues to threaten the health and wellbeing of residents throughout the region", said **Tom Cormons, Executive Director of Appalachian Voices**. "Appalachian communities are actively working toward a stronger economic future, not dominated by a failing coal industry. We are counting on Congress to do what is right for the people of Central Appalachia by preserving the Stream Protection Rule."

###