

# Federal Environmental and Regulatory Updates Wetlands and Wildlife Developments Under the New Biden Administration

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February 1, 2022



## Today's Presenter



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# Uncertainty and change abounds...

- Changes expected in regulations addressing
  - Clean Water Act 404 program (WOTUS)
  - Endangered Species Act (and some high impact listings)
  - Migratory Bird Treaty Act
  - Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act
  - National Environmental Policy Act
- Most of these changes will also be affected by litigation
- Uncertainty makes timing and cost estimates difficult

3



## Clean Water Act 404 Permitting

- Is there a water of the United States (WOTUS)?
- Will you be conducting activities within a WOTUS?
- If so, are those activities regulated activities?
- If so, is there a streamlined option for permitting available to you?

4

# What is a WOTUS?

- What constitutes a WOTUS has been revised several times over the course of the 404 permit program
- The Trump Administration repealed the 2015 Obama era WOTUS definition.
- The 2020 Navigable Waters Protection Rule (NWPR) considerably narrowed what constitutes a WOTUS
- Over a dozen lawsuits challenged the legality of the 2020 rule. In August 2021, an Arizona court vacated the NWPR (other courts have made similar rulings)
- In response to the Arizona ruling, the EPA and Corps announced they will apply a pre-2015 approach to determining WOTUS
  - Pre-2015 approach = 1986 regulatory definition plus guidance established pursuant to the Supreme Court's Rapanos and SWANCC guidance

5

## Proposed Definition of WOTUS

- The Biden Administration has proposed a rule to revise the definition of WOTUS. The proposed definition largely mirrors the pre-2015 approach to identifying WOTUS.
  - Traditional navigable waters, interstate waters, and the territorial seas, and their adjacent wetlands;
  - Most impoundments of “waters of the United States”;
  - Tributaries to traditional navigable waters, interstate waters, the territorial seas, and impoundments that meet either the **relatively permanent standard or the significant nexus standard**;
  - Wetlands adjacent to impoundments and tributaries, that meet either the **relatively permanent standard or the significant nexus standard**; and
  - “Other waters” that meet either the **relatively permanent standard or the significant nexus standard**.
- Includes long-standing exclusions: Prior Converted Croplands and Waste Treatment Systems.



6

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First appeared as part of the conference materials for the  
17<sup>th</sup> Annual Renewable Energy Law Institute session  
"Federal Environmental and Regulatory Updates"