

Washington, DC – Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) issued the following statement in the Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment hearing regarding “Inconsistent Regulation of Wetlands and Other Waters.”

“Clean water is important to all Americans, regardless of their political affiliation. According to a February 2004 nationwide survey conducted by prominent Republican pollster, Frank Luntz, 91 percent of those surveyed were concerned that America’s waterways would not be clean for future generations.

“Our record of simply complying with existing law has been inadequate. Today, 40 percent of assessed rivers, lakes, and coastal waters do not meet current water quality standards. We’ve already lost over one-half of our nation’s wetlands since European settlers arrived in this country, and in some areas we’ve lost over 90 percent of the original wetlands.

“This is not the time to look at limiting the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. If anything, we should be putting in place policies and programs that guarantee further restoration and protection of our nation’s water. We continue to lose between 60,000 and 100,000 acres of wetlands every year, in spite of the Bush administration’s “no net loss” policy.

“Earlier this Congress I was one of 218 members of the House of Representatives, including many members of this Subcommittee, to urge the President to abandon a proposed rulemaking to limit the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act. I am pleased that the administration has since withdrawn this rule, but I continue to be concerned that the guidance given to the Corps and the EPA is confusing, and has the potential of reducing wetland protections.

“The bottom line is that all waters of the United States deserve protection. Increased flows of pollution and floodwaters affect downstream drinking water quality, harm recreational uses such as fishing, swimming, and boating, harm water-based businesses all the way down to the coasts, and dramatically reduce the presence of wildlife, including migratory waterfowl. Protecting wetlands is also often the most cost effective way to purify water, increase wildlife habitat, and prevent floods.”