

Remarks of Bob Helland before the EPA and Army Corps of Engineers on revising
the Definition of “Waters of the United States”
August 23, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am Bob Helland, the Director of Congressional and Federal Affairs for the Golf Course Superintendents Association of America. GCSAA opposes repeal of the Navigable Waters Protection Rule. We are concerned because our over 19,000 men and women rely on clear rules to keep the waters on their property clean. Of the 150 acres on an average golf course, 11 are comprised of streams, ponds, lakes, and/or wetlands for a total footprint of 161,183 acres nationwide. Efforts to change the definition of Waters of the United States over the years have had a major impact on our operations, hurt our stewardship efforts, and impacted livelihoods. If the EPA and Corps does move forward with a repeal, GCSAA urges that any new rule reject a “one-size-fits all policy”; gives proper weight to Clean Water Act (CWA) § 101(b) of the policy of preserving states’ primary responsibilities over water pollution control and over land and water use; recognize that the CWA does not confer federal jurisdiction over all water features; and respects the important role that non-federal participants such as superintendents play.

Golf is a major industry -- yet largely comprised of small businesses -- with a profound positive impact on America’s economic, environmental and social agendas. Golf’s economic engine *contributes \$89 billion annually* to the economy. Nearly 2 million American jobs are tied to the golf industry. More than 75 percent of golf courses are public facilities in the United States. Further, 95% of those golf facilities are at or under the threshold for small businesses set by the Small Business Administration: \$15 million in revenue annually. Finally, golf has seen an increase in players during the COVID-19 pandemic: half a million additional people are now playing a sport that meets all social distancing requirements.

However, when it comes to the CWA, golf faces the same legal requirements – and burdens - as other businesses for its activities on, over, or near Waters of the United States. That can translate into a significant financial impact. Basic projects vital to golf course operations, for example - such as planting trees, installing drainage, dredging ponds/wetlands, and fixing stream alignments - can trigger the hiring of environmental scientists, ecologists, hydrologists and engineers to do the

environmental assessments, assist with permit requirements, and help with mitigation efforts and follow through, if a Section 404 permit under the Clean Water Act is potentially required.

Golf course superintendents are stewards who utilize best management practices to focus on protecting water quality by reducing the movement of sediment, nutrients and pesticides to water. Buffer strips are used extensively on golf courses to reduce the amount of sediments, nutrients and pesticides reaching surface water. Nutrients are applied based on turfgrass needs and are often applied in a slow release form or at extremely low rates applied every 1 or 2 weeks. Superintendents use multiple tactics to determine when to make a fertilizer application and routinely calibrate fertilizer application equipment. Pesticides are applied following IPM principals and superintendents use multiple tactics to determine if a pesticide application is needed. The GCSAA has launched the Best Management Practices Program. By the end of 2020, 50 states have a comprehensive environmental and agronomic BMP program in place. The need for state-level BMP programs and, ultimately, golf facility-written BMP plans for nutrient, drought, and water management and integrated pest management (IPM) is greater than ever.

Golf's turf, native landscapes and waterways provide valuable wildlife habitat. They also provide a vital environmental backstop in areas of the country facing the pressures of increasing development. Residential, commercial, and industrial facilities create impervious surfaces where rain runs off. Golf courses collect, and filter, that water. If they go out of business, we lose that vital environmental ecosystem. Our golf course superintendents use agronomic and environmental best management practices to protect these courses and look forward to working with the EPA to clearly articulate the extent of federal CWA authority.

That's why it is so important to clarify jurisdictional waters while respecting the balance of cooperative federalism under the CWA.

Thank you