



Dear Sean,

For the past 20 years, New York has been entangled in a federal legal debate over what constitutes a wetland and who has the authority to protect these critical natural areas. The Trump Administration's rollback of Obama-era clean water rules has only intensified the need for New York to clarify how we as a state regulate freshwater wetlands, one of our most valuable and misunderstood resources.

**New Yorkers rely on swamps, fens, bogs, and wet meadows to filter pollutants from our waterways, recharge our aquifers, and absorb catastrophic floods.** Yet there often appears to be little public awareness that we are filling, dredging and draining wetlands at an alarming rate – at least until we find our neighborhoods underwater or our public water supplies contaminated.

Right now, we have a rare opportunity to pass historic reforms to NY's freshwater wetlands program, in a way that prioritizes protections for habitats that are most important to clean water and flood control, without relying upon significant new staffing resources.

[Will you reach out to state lawmakers and tell them to protect wetlands in this year's legislative session?](#)

Currently, for a wetland to be subject to regulation under NY state law, it must be delineated on existing freshwater wetlands maps prepared by DEC after lengthy public comment. But most of these maps have not been updated in over 20 years, making them woefully incomplete, and the amendment process can be time consuming and overly burdensome in administrative costs. There are hundreds of thousands of acres of wetlands in high development areas of New York that are not on official maps but desperately require protection.

**Case example:** The Sierra Club is fighting the development of the Graniteville wetland on Staten Island, a crucial fresh water marsh that saved lives from super storm Sandy's catastrophic flooding. But because the wetland was never properly delineated on official DEC maps – NY State has had little leverage to fully protect it, and now a BJ's Wholesale Club and acres of parking lots are slated to fill in this critical habitat ([Please sign our petition to stop this project from moving forward](#)).

**Currently, the Legislature is weighing legislation (S.5116) that will remove the jurisdictional barriers that these maps have created, and allow DEC to immediately protect and regulate wetlands if they meet the basic scientific definition of these critical habitat areas, to avoid conflicts like Graniteville in the future.** DEC Commissioner Seggos estimated that if this reform was enshrined in law it will be the equivalent of adding 1 million acres of wetland under the state's protection. This new legislation will also enhance how the DEC can identify and protect smaller wetlands that are effective for community flood water control, provide habitat for rare plant or animal species, or are important to maintaining clean drinking water.

[Please ask your Senator and Assembly member to prioritize the protection of wetlands this legislative session by passing S.5116!](#)

Thank you for all you do to protect NY's environment!

Roger Downs  
Conservation Director  
Sierra Club Atlantic Chapter



Take Action!

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Sierra Club  
Atlantic Chapter