



## Catholic Committee of Appalachia STATEMENT ON REVERSAL OF STREAM PROTECTION RULE BY THE U.S. CONGRESS

February 6, 2017

The Catholic Committee of Appalachia (CCA) opposes recent actions of the United States Congress to reverse the Stream Protection Rule set to go into effect in January 2017. The rule would have offered greater protections to waterways in proximity to surface mine sites and would have encouraged more adequate reclamation of mined land.<sup>1</sup>

Catholics believe, quite simply, that water is life. Thus, CCA does not see environmental protection regulation as a mere “political” issue but as a *pro-life* issue at its most basic. Pope Francis emphasizes this in his encyclical *Laudato Si’*, stating that “access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.”<sup>2</sup> CCA echoed the teaching of Francis in our 2015 Statement on Protecting Water which reads,

[A]ll who claim to be pro-life must also make a commitment to protecting and conserving this precious resource [of water]. [...] We therefore call upon our sisters and brothers in Christ and all people of good will in Appalachia to make the protection and conservation of our region’s water a priority that will not be sacrificed for corporate profit, political expediency, or personal convenience.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, corporate profit and political expediency seem to be the prime motivations behind the reversal of regulations to protect our common home. We are startled by the number of representatives in the House and the Senate from Appalachian states who voted to repeal the rule, yet we see this as another example of the way that “corporate money from the fossil fuel industries... controls political life.”<sup>4</sup> We also see the revocation of this rule as part of the ongoing and misleading “War on Coal” rhetoric and other efforts to give false hopes to Appalachian communities suffering as a result of disappearing coal jobs.

We know well the effects of unregulated mining activity on Appalachian communities throughout history. The Catholic Committee of Appalachia laments the inevitable results of this dangerous deregulation and any further dismantling of environmental protections now in place, and we vow to monitor and oppose any such efforts made by Federal and state legislators. We likewise call on church leaders to use their voices in defense of water and of all life.

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<sup>1</sup> For a summary of the rule, see <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2016/12/20/2016-29958/stream-protection-rule>.

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, no. 30, available at [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>3</sup> Catholic Committee of Appalachia, “Life’s Foundation: A Statement on Protecting Water,” (Sept. 20, 2015), available at <http://ccappal.org/publications/statements-resolutions/protecting-water>.

<sup>4</sup> Catholic Committee of Appalachia, *The Telling Takes Us Home: Taking Our Place in the Stories that Shape Us (A People’s Pastoral from the Catholic Committee of Appalachia)* (Spencer, WV: Catholic Committee of Appalachia, 2015), 54, available at [http://ccappal.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/PeoplesPastoral\\_final\\_forweb.pdf](http://ccappal.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/PeoplesPastoral_final_forweb.pdf).