

## My Turn

### Old-Fashioned polluters still a threat to New Mexico's rivers

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In Taos, the Red River and Rio Grande provide the backbone of our community.

Even when we are not rafting, fishing, or drawing its water flows to our taps for drinking. These rivers bind us together and allow wildlife to flourish in our midst. The same is true for waterways across New Mexico. Unfortunately, new data shows that industrial polluters are still dumping chemicals into New Mexican waterways, and no one is holding them accountable. Moreover, officials in Washington, D.C., are now considering rollbacks and budget cuts that would make this situation even worse.

In reviewing Clean Water Act compliance data from January 2016 to September 2017, we found that industrial facilities dumped excessive pollution into New Mexico's waterways 48 times.

When the Clean Water Act was passed 45 years ago, Congress declared that all of our waterways would be clean by 1983 and that all direct discharge of pollutants would cease by 1985. Decades later, 40 percent of our rivers, lakes and streams are still polluted.

And instead of ratcheting pollution down to zero, industry is still dumping chemicals into our waters beyond legal limits set to protect human health and the environment.

A prime example of this pattern of pollution is the Chevron Mining Inc., formerly Molycorps, which discharges total suspended solids into the Red River and Rio Grande Basin. Yet according to the federal compliance database, Chevron dumped pollution into our local waterways beyond legal limits twice in a 21-month period.

In light of this situation, government officials should be redoubling their efforts to protect and restore New Mexico's waters. In the 21st century, we know how to produce things in our economy without dumping chemicals into our rivers.

But a core premise of the Clean Water Act is that such change rarely happens on its own. It will take robust enforcement of our clean water laws, including tough penalties, so it no longer pays to pollute.

Instead, the Trump administration is pushing policy changes that will make it even harder to enforce the Clean Water Act. It has proposed slashing the Environmental Protection Agency's enforcement program by more than \$30 million.

In particular, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt is trying to repeal the Clean Water Rule, which restored protections to wetlands and to streams that help provide drinking water for 280,000 New Mexicans.

Apparently, even Mr. Pruitt knows this rollback is on shaky legal ground.

As Congress faces a March 23 deadline to keep the government open, the Republican spending bill contains a provision that would exempt the repeal of the Clean Water Rule from all federal law.

It's time for New Mexicans to speak up and tell our officials that we need clean water now.

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