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Guest Commentary

Vervier: Raise a glass to the clean water rule

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By **Jenn Vervier**
GUEST CONTRIBUTOR

How important is it to protect clean water in Colorado?

The federal EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers are trying to do that with a new rule released in August. But now opponents are attacking the rule in the courts, and even the U.S. Senate is trying to block it.

This is bad news for our communities and our economies.

At New Belgium Brewing Company, we know how important water is. Beer, after all, is 90 percent water. If something happens to our water, the negative effect on our business — and our industry — would be substantial. Colorado breweries contribute \$249 million in direct value added to our economy every year and provide more than 5,000 jobs. Nationally, more than 3,400 craft breweries directly employ 110,000 people like mechanical techs, microbiologists and marketers. These are good jobs at growing companies, and they cannot be outsourced. We rely on responsible regulations that limit pollution and protect water at its source for our growth.

During the past 23 years we've learned that when smart regulation exists for all — and when clean water is available for all — business thrives. We've grown from the basement of our co-founders' house to our 1 million barrel-per-year brewery in Fort Collins. We're also building a new 500,000-barrel brewery in Asheville, North Carolina, a location we chose in part because of its abundant and clean water supply.

The Clean Water rule provides two elements critical to economic development: regulatory clarity and natural resource protection. The rule will restore clear safeguards against unregulated pollution and destruction for nearly 2 million miles of streams and tens of millions of acres of wetlands in the continental U.S. Bringing these streams and wetlands under the umbrella of the Clean Water Act will help protect drinking water for one in three Americans, or more than 117 million people.

More than 1 million Americans submitted comments on the rule, with an estimated 87 percent in support. New Belgium submitted supportive comments, as did many other brewers, along with sportsmen, religious leaders, public health advocates, environmental organizations and business coalitions like the American Sustainable Business Council.

This rule's development has been contentious. Some groups representing farmers like the Rocky Mountain Farmers Unions have supported this proposal, while others in the agricultural sector expressed concerns. EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy assured agricultural producers that the rule would not change the exemptions and exclusions they've received since the Clean Water Act was passed in 1972.

When McCarthy became the first Cabinet-level official to speak at the Craft Brewers Conference earlier this year, she assured the brewers in attendance that nothing would change for the farmers they work with after the Clean Water Rule is finalized.

She kept her word. And that's critically important to us, because while beer may be 90 percent water, it's our agricultural partners who provide the raw materials that supply everything else: from barley and hops to spices, fruits and other ingredients, everything in beer requires clean water.

At New Belgium, we do our part. We focus on crafting world-class beers, caring for the planet and doing what is right for people. Our journey has led us to take innovative steps to reduce our own impact on our water supply. We've built an onsite process wastewater treatment plant. We've cut water use. In 2014, we gave grants to 39 groups engaged in water conservation and restoration activities.

Just as we are connected to our communities, our suppliers and our customers, science shows that small streams and



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...we are committed to our communities, our employees and our customers, because where the clean streams and wetlands are linked to downstream water quality. Protecting our nation's water is good for the environment, good for the economy and good for your favorite craft beers. It's time for the rule's opponents to recognize that and let the rule proceed, instead of claiming we can help businesses by risking a resource they rely on.

Jenn Vervier is director of sustainability and strategy for New Belgium Brewing Company in Fort Collins.