

Earthkeeper Update: Protect Our Water! September 2026

Please read or skip to the end of this update where there is a petition to prevent the gutting of the Clean Water Act.

On September 11th, a group of Earthkeepers from parishes throughout Maine met at Camp Bishopswood. It could not have been a more beautiful day, and Rev. Jenny Reece led us in song, scripture, contemplation, and shared care for creation. Tom van Buren and I enjoyed meeting fellow Earthkeepers from around the diocese and heard about church gardens, educational resources, spiritual practices and legislative matters that deserve attention. We were also happy to share the earthkeeping that goes on at St. Brendan the Navigator.

Earthkeepers express their care in a variety of ways. One member of the group created a lovely ribbon of cloth sewn together in a variety of patches of blue. She draped it so that it really looked like a waterfall, cascading down the stairs. This project is pertinent to the focus on water during this Season of Creation, and it was nice to discover that parishioners throughout the state have been celebrating water and its life-giving sustenance this month.

Another Earthkeeper brought a list of recommended reading. Several titles caught my eye, including *Speak with the Earth and it Will Teach You: A field Guide to the Bible*. The book notes places in the bible that focus on the natural world and posits that nature is scripture in another form.

Yet another mission of Episcopal Earthkeepers is advocacy for life and all of God's creation. As we met on the anniversary of 9/11, we noted the ways in which that tragedy continues to unfold as the environmental impact of the destruction has led to [illness and cancer](#) in thousands of frontline workers and people who worked, lived, and went to school in Lower Manhattan.

The environmental impact of military operations is not negligible. According to the website climatefactchecks.org, "An [analysis](#) estimates that the Israel–Gaza war produced around 33 million tons of CO₂-equivalent due to military operations, fires, debris, and reconstruction demands." It also states that "Similarly, [news reports](#) found that the first two weeks of the US–Israel conflict with Iran released more than 5 million tons of CO₂ as oil depots, industrial facilities, and urban centers burned. These emissions are comparable to the annual output of dozens of low-emitting countries." In other words, war leaves a major footprint on the planet, as well as human loss. It is easy to feel out of control in light of all this, and to feel that positive change is out of reach. This is where prayer comes in. And song. And fellowship. And then there is advocacy.

Remember the Clean Water Act? I was 12 years old when it passed in 1972, and at that time, rivers were flooded with raw sewage and toxic chemicals were poured into wetlands, ponds and streams. As newer chemical concoctions are continually invented and released into the environment, the Clean Water Act gives citizens a way to object. PFAS are one example. These "forever chemicals" are in our water here in Maine and all over the country. Thanks to the hard

work of lawmakers, health advocates, and ordinary citizens, we have become aware of this problem, the continued release of these pollutants has been curtailed, and filtration systems have been funded. It is because of the Clean Water Act that regulations are put in place and corporate polluters are held accountable.

A recent proposal is putting the essence of the Clean Water Act at risk. You can read about this proposed change in the links contained [here](#). If the proposal goes through, millions of acres of wetlands and the people, animals, birds, fish and other wildlife that rely on these waterways are under threat. The proposal redefines “federal waterways” so that toxic sludge created by sewage, chemical waste, and fertilizers will be once again released into streams, irrigation ditches, marshes and other tributaries that seep into our wells, feed into rivers, lakes, and our oceans, and end up in our drinking water and food.

This is where you can help. While I could not find the place to submit comments on this issue on the EPA website, multiple environmental agencies are sponsoring petitions to protect the Clean Water Act. Here is a [link](#) to one of them, shared by a fellow Earthkeeper. Would you consider signing it? We have only until October 9, 2026 for our voices to be heard.

Thank you.

Ann van Buren