# Protecting Land for Water Quality/Strategies for State Nonpoint Source Management Programs: Open Space Institute Report



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08/19/2025

The Open Space Institute ("OPS") has issued a report titled:

*Protecting Land for Water Quality: Strategies for State Nonpoint Source Management Programs (2025)* ("Report").

The contributing authors of the Report include:

- Hallie Schwab (Open Space Institute)
- Abigail Weinberg (Open Space Institute)
- Steve Epting (United States Environmental Protection Agency)
- Elise Turrietta (United States Environmental Protection Agency – Oak Ridge Institute for Science & Education Fellow)

The stated objective of the Report is to provide:

…tools for state NPS staff to learn how other agencies have leveraged land protection strategies to achieve NPS program goals, and highlights current approaches and future opportunities for advancing land protection.

Intended users of the Report include:

- United States Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") staff.
- Land trusts.
- Watershed associations.
- State government and non-governmental partners working to protect land for water quality.

The terms "point source" and "nonpoint source" have key jurisdictional significance under the Clean Water Act. A Clean Water Act National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Permit must be obtained if five jurisdictional elements are present:

- A person
- adds a
- pollutant
- to navigable waters
- from a point source.

The term “point source” is defined under the Clean Water Act to include:

…any discernable, confined and discrete conveyance, including but not limited to, any pipe, ditch, channel, tunnel, conduit, well, discrete fissure, container, rolling stock, concentrated animal feeding operation, or vessel or other floating craft, from which pollutants are or may be discharged.

Nonpoint source pollutants are normally associated with agricultural, silvicultural, and urban runoff. Some portions of such discharge tend to be generated by soil disturbance and sedimentation. They generally result from land runoff, atmospheric deposition, drainage, or seepage of contaminants. A stormwater runoff or flow can mobilize various pollutants such as metals, oil and grease, and nutrients.

A nonpoint source would include any source of pollution that does not fall within the scope of the definition of point source in Section 502(14) of the Clean Water Act.

The OPS Report states that nonpoint source pollution is the predominant cause of water quality issues in the United States.

Strategies are described to advance land protection through nonpoint source management efforts. They are identified as three scales:

- Statewide nonpoint source management program planning.
- Watershed-based planning.
- Local watershed projects.

The Report identifies what OPS considers “Key Recommendations” to include:

- Streamline Guidelines and Increase Integration: Facilitate the development of clear funding guidelines and support further integration of land protection into watershed planning.
- Foster Collaboration: Build awareness among state agencies and other stakeholders on the value of land protection for water quality and share best practices from successful state approaches.
- Expand Resources: Create centralized NPS program webpages and other resources dedicated to tools and guidance to build the effectiveness of land protection efforts for clean water.
- Enhance Reporting: Develop consistent language for Best Management Practices for land protection to support consistent and coordinated reporting on projects and impacts.
- Leverage Funding and Partnerships: Identify opportunities to coordinate state NPS programs with aligned funding sources and partner with other agencies and non-governmental organizations to advance land protection projects that impact water quality.

The OPS describes itself as a:

…national conservation leader that has partnered in the protection of 2.5 million acres across the eastern U.S. and Canada…[protecting] land for clean drinking water, public recreation, healthy communities, wildlife habitat, and to mitigate the impacts of extreme weather such as flooding.

A copy of the Report can be downloaded here.