

## President George H.W. Bush: An Environmental Protection Legacy



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A quick pop quiz.

What do Newt Gingrich, Nancy Pelosi, Joe Barton, Henry Waxman, Jim Inhofe, Ed Markey, Jim Sensenbrenner, Chuck Schumer, and Fred Upton have in common?

The answer is provided by the League of Conservation Voters.

This combination of Democrats and Republicans all voted for the final passage of the 1990 Amendments to the Clean Air Act.

The enactment of arguably one of the most important pieces of environmental legislation in United States history would not have occurred without the management and support of former President George H.W. Bush and his Administration.

The passing of George H.W. Bush has resulted in remembrance of the skill in which he managed important foreign policy issues such as Desert Storm and the ending of the Cold War. However, a sometimes overlooked aspect of President Bush's single term in office is his work in developing and enhancing federal environmental protection programs.

National environmental organizations such as the Environmental Defense Fund do not normally praise Republicans these days on environmental matters. However, they noted President Bush's passing and stated:

... President George Herbert Walker Bush will be remembered for a great many proud achievements and outstanding qualities. He knew that our country matters far more than political party or personal ambition, and that the national interest demands that we protect America's precious natural heritage. And he knew that there is no inherent conflict between environmental progress and economic progress.

The first Bush Administration accomplished environmental goals in diverse ways.

From an environmental legislative standpoint, President Bush and a bipartisan Congress on November 15, 1990, enacted amendments to the Clean Air Act. Air related issues addressed by the amendments included:

- Acid Rain
- Urban Smog
- Hazardous Air Emissions
- Ozone Layer
- Expanded (Title V) Permitting Requirements

Certain aspects of these programs were innovative and precedent setting. An example are the provisions intended to drastically reduce acid rain. A market-based system of marketable pollution allowances was created. This program has dramatically reduced sulfur dioxide emissions with a corresponding decrease in acid rain. There has clearly been a reduction in damage to water quality in lakes and streams along with ecosystems and forests because of acid deposition.

An equally important achievement by the Bush Administration was undertaken pursuant to Executive Action.

In 1989 the Bush Administration established the National Policy of “No-Net Loss of Wetlands.” This imposed upon the Clean Water Act 404 program a requirement that each newly impacted quantity of wetlands must be replaced with a wetland of the same size and with similar wetland functions/values.

While the definition of what constitutes a jurisdictional wetland continues to be a subject of intense debate, the no-net loss policy remains in place – and is not the subject of serious debate. In view of the importance of wetlands to both public health and the environment (i.e., protection and nurturing of many species of plants and animals, storing floodwaters, filtering pollutants, serving as a carbon sink, providing recreation sites, etc.) this was clearly an important achievement.

I will end this post by quoting another national environmental organization. The National Resources Defense Council stated, in commenting on the President’s passing:

. . . George H.W. Bush left a legacy all Americans share with every breath we take. As President, he led efforts to pass one of the most successful environmental packages in history, the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990.