



July 30, 2026

To: EPA Office of Water

We write as a follow-up to our June 15, 2026 meeting. We appreciate the opportunity to discuss our concerns about microplastics with the Office of Water. As discussed, plastic pellets (otherwise known as nurdles), harm the environment, and public health, requiring oversight and regulation by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The lack of strong regulation, monitoring, and enforcement of microplastic, including plastic pellet pollution and discharge has adversely impacted watersheds around the country. In the absence of EPA action, Waterkeeper groups have had to step in to conduct monitoring and ensure enforcement of the law against microplastic pollution.

This widespread pollution was most recently demonstrated by Waterkeeper Alliance's June 2026 [findings](#) from our second annual International Plastic Pellet Count. More than 1,000 volunteers surveyed waterways at 249 sites across 31 states, the District of Columbia, and six countries. In total, they found **nearly 1.1 million** plastic pellets—almost 22 times last year's final reported total.

Additional recent examples of plastic pellet pollution include:

San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper's citizen suit against Formosa Plastics, the sixth largest petrochemical company in the world led to a \$50 million settlement, along with an agreement for zero discharge of plastics and a promise to clean the existing plastic pellet pollution. As part of this case, 2,428 samples were collected from the waters around the plant, with a staggering estimated 26 million plastic pellets submitted as evidence. Since this landmark case, several Post-Consent Decree violations have been documented resulting in millions of dollars of fines. San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper continues to monitor the plant and document pellet pollution.

This is not the only fight against plastic pellets that the San Antonio Bay Estuarine Waterkeeper is facing. The organization is leading a challenge against Dow Chemical's pending permit request from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) that would essentially allow for unmitigated discharge of plastic pellets into surrounding ecosystems. This would be a devastating development for local ecosystems, and set a dangerous precedent for plastic pellet pollution across the nation.

Three Rivers Waterkeeper's citizen suit against Styropek USA Inc alleged that Styropek had contaminated the area around their Monaca, Pennsylvania plant with plastic pellets. Ultimately, Styropek was penalized with a \$2.6 million fine, and required to redesign its treatment and stormwater collection systems to capture pellets and install technology to monitor any future pollution. Most of the fine will be used to clean up plastic pellets.

Congree Riverkeeper recently filed a citizen suit against Alpek Polyester and Eastman Chemical Company for their unlawful release of plastic pellets, as well as a toxic carcinogen, 1,4-dioxane, into the Congaree River near Columbia, South Carolina. The suit alleges that the alleged pollution by Alpek-Eastman is a flagrant violation of the federal Clean Water Act and Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. Congaree Riverkeeper has found significant plastic pellet pollution as far as 26 miles downstream of the plant, including at Congaree National Park.

Charleston Waterkeeper is facing microplastic and plastic pellet pollution in the Charleston Harbor. The organization is undertaking sampling efforts, in which over 25,000 plastic pellets have been found scattered across beaches, marshes, and the Cooper River. Even after a 2020 lawsuit over plastic pellet pollution by Frontier Logistics, in which a \$1 million settlement was reached, the problem persists. Now, they have turned their attention to the SC Ports Authority, where the issue is profound.

San Diego Coastkeeper recently settled with the BNSF Railway Company over the release of plastic pellets from railcars, which then dispersed along the coastline, making their way into the ocean and other local waterways. The settlement requires new inspection procedures and enhanced protocols to prevent plastic pellet leakage.

These lawsuits underscore the clear danger microplastics and plastic pellets pose to ecosystems across the United States, and the urgent need for EPA to act. Specifically, Waterkeeper Alliance calls on EPA to require federal zero-discharge permits for plastic pellets.

Against this backdrop, public reports indicate that EPA terminated an employee who objected to the agency striking a requirement for a fish farm to track microplastics. EPA also recently declined to require nationwide monitoring for microplastics in the proposed sixth edition of the Unregulated Contaminant Monitoring Rule. These actions are at odds with the agency's April 2026 claim that it was taking action to "address microplastics contamination, one of the most urgent and growing public health challenges facing Americans."

Given the urgency of these well-documented public health and environmental concerns, we reextend the standing invitation for EPA Office of Water personnel to visit the aforementioned plastic pellet pollution sites to observe this issue firsthand.

Sincerely,

Waterkeeper Alliance