Report highlights global warming solutions

State, federal leaders urged to cap pollution

This summer, Wisconsin Environment released “Global Warming Solutions That Work,” a new report that details many cutting-edge policies and practices that communities, states and countries are using to reduce global warming pollution.

Global warming presents a major threat to the Great Lakes and to Wisconsin’s farms and wildlife. And the extreme rainfall and flooding we’ve seen this summer are expected to increase unless we act to reduce global warming emissions.

“Global warming is the defining challenge of our time,” said Dan Kohler, director of Wisconsin Environment. “The latest climate science tells us that we need to reduce global warming pollution quickly and dramatically if we hope to avoid the most catastrophic effects of global warming.”

Wisconsin Environment will be using this research to help shape debate in Wisconsin’s Legislature during the 2009-2010 legislative session. The report also helps to support our call for policies to limit global warming pollution—policies that are currently being considered by Gov. Doyle’s Global Warming Task Force.

A chance for Wisconsin to lead the way

“Wisconsin is well positioned to be a leader in the fight against global warming because we are already producing and using renewable energy,” said Sen. Pat Kreitlow of Eau Claire.

The report cites Wisconsin’s Focus on Energy program—which helps individuals and businesses invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy technologies—as a model policy. Focus on Energy has saved enough electricity to cut 200,000 metric tons of carbon emissions annually.

“As a small business owner, I know that we can protect our environment and grow our economy,” said Chad Speight, owner of Chad’s Carpentry and member of the Monona City Council. “State policies that promote global warming solutions can help my customers install renewable energy and high-efficiency technologies, save them money, and grow our businesses.”

In the coming months, Wisconsin Environment will be urging state leaders to take the next steps by joining other states that have adopted a cap on global warming pollution and by continuing to support Wisconsin’s clean energy economy.

more online

Wisconsin Environment’s Dan Kohler speaks to the press about our blueprint for climate action here in Wisconsin.

Links to additional content are posted at: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org/newsletters/summer08.
Recent action

Will Congress protect our waterways?

As the U.S. House and Senate prepared this spring for hearings on legislation to strengthen clean water protections for smaller streams and wetlands, Wisconsin Environment enlisted 175 representatives and 21 senators to co-sponsor the Clean Water Restoration Act, which would reinstate protections for all waters.

Over the past five years, the Bush administration’s “No Protection” policy, along with decisions in favor of polluters made by the U.S. Supreme Court, has chipped away at protections for smaller streams and wetlands by narrowly defining the Clean Water Act. The Bush administration’s policy puts 59 percent of the stream miles in the continental United States at risk of increased pollution.

During our citizen lobby day in March, we worked to cultivate the leadership of the Great Lakes states’ congressional delegation, including co-sponsoring Reps. John Dingell (Mich.) and Rahm Emanuel (Ill.).

EPA urged to strengthen smog standards

Wisconsin Environment pressed for stronger smog standards that would force more polluters to clean up. On Jan. 3, Margie Alt, executive director of our national federation, Environment America, joined several of our allies in urging Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Stephen Johnson to strengthen the nation’s smog standards.

But Johnson announced in March that the agency would adopt a new smog rule that is less protective of public health than the one recommended by EPA’s own scientific advisers. In addition, under the guise of “modernizing” the Clean Air Act, Johnson called for fundamental changes to the law, including requiring implementation costs to be considered in setting air quality standards. Half of all Americans live in places where air pollution threatens public health. The EPA’s smog standards force polluters that exceed air pollution limits to clean up, but several studies show that smog standards are too low to protect public health.
Stop toxic mining: The fight for the Grand Canyon

With one of the world’s great natural treasures threatened by a modern-day gold rush, Wisconsin Environment has joined forces with other members of the Environment America federation to win new protections.

In the past five years, mining companies have staked more than 1,100 claims within five miles of the Grand Canyon—a perilously close distance, given the propensity of toxic mining waste to contaminate larger waterways. We’re urging Congress to permanently protect the Grand Canyon and other national parks by restricting nearby mining operations.

On Jan. 24, a key Senate committee held a hearing on a bill that we helped pass in the House. That legislation would protect the Grand Canyon from toxic mining waste.

A national treasure
From its jagged red cliffs to the winding Colorado River, the Grand Canyon is one of America’s most prized natural treasures. Each year, more than 4 million people come to see the Canyon’s majestic walls. They might catch a glimpse of a bobcat, a soaring bald eagle or a big horn sheep, all of which call the Grand Canyon home. It’s illegal to drill or mine within the border of the Grand Canyon because it’s protected as a national park. Unfortunately, the Grand Canyon is facing a growing threat from toxic mining—mining that could occur just outside its borders.

The rising price of gold and other metals has brought about a modern-day gold rush. Because hardrock mining uses highly toxic chemicals—like cyanide and sulfuric acid—it poses grave risks to the Grand Canyon and its wildlife. In 1992, one mine in Summitville, Colo., released toxic chemicals that killed the wildlife in a 17-mile section of the Alamosa River. If full-blown mining operations begin on even a fraction of the 1,100 claims, there’s a good chance that a similar catastrophe would befall the Colorado River that winds through the Grand Canyon. Late last year, we made some remarkable progress: We helped persuade the House of Representatives to pass the Hardrock Mining and Reclamation Act of 2007—a bill that would protect the Grand Canyon and America’s other natural treasures from the perils of toxic mining by prohibiting mining in any place where it would impair the natural resources of national parks or monuments. Wisconsin’s delegation voted unanimously for the legislation.

The mining industry’s influence
The question for 2008 is whether the Senate will have the courage to pass the same bill. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Nev.), and the two ranking members of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee—Sens. Jeff Bingaman (N.M) and Pete Domenici (N.M)—hail from states where the mining industry has considerable influence.

Thousands of members and volunteers voiced their opposition to Vane Minerals, the first mining company to try to turn a claim into an actual uranium mine—in this case, just three miles from the southern lookout point of the Grand Canyon. In an e-mail campaign that we launched in February more than 3,000 members took action and asked the director of the company to stop the mining proposals.

Staff in action
Christy Goldfuss represents Wisconsin Environment in Washington, D.C., on parks and other issues.

To boost economy, boost renewables
Last year Congress made great progress toward a new energy future by passing a Wisconsin Environment-backed increase in gas mileage standards—the first such increase in 30 years. But much remains to be done to achieve the new energy future that our country needs.

Unfortunately, power plant owners and coal interests, aided by the White House and Republican leadership in the Senate, blocked attempts to pass a renewable electricity standard as part of a package of clean energy tax incentives in the energy bill passed last year.

The next avenue for action is to convince Congress to extend existing renewable energy tax incentives, which expire at the end of 2008. The American Wind Energy Association predicts that failing to extend the tax credits could cost the U.S. economy 75,000 jobs and a wealth of investment opportunities.

“As one of the fastest-growing industries in the United States, the clean energy industry is a shining light in an otherwise lackluster economy. If Congress does not act, many promising renewable energy projects will screech to a halt,” said Wisconsin Environment Director Dan Kohler.

Get a more detailed list of ways that renewable energy helps the economy on our Web site, www.WisconsinEnvironment.org
The Great Lakes Compact will help protect the lakes from uncontrolled water withdrawals.

Go to our Web site to send an e-mail to thank Gov. James Doyle for signing the Great Lakes Compact.

Gov. signs Great Lakes Compact

In 2005, the governors of the eight states bordering the Great Lakes and two Canadian premiers signed the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Compact and Agreement, which established the first region-wide standards to govern the withdrawal and use of Great Lakes water. For the compact to take effect, however, each of the eight state legislatures needed to ratify it.

Wisconsin Environment worked with a coalition of environmental and conservation organizations to build support for the compact in the Statehouse. In May, 2008, after months of campaigning and thousands of citizens voicing their support, the Legislature approved the Great Lakes Compact with a nearly unanimous vote. On May 27, Wisconsin Environment Director Dan Kohler joined Gov. James Doyle on the shore of Lake Michigan as he signed the bill into law.