Victory for clean lakes in Wisconsin!

New bill will help prevent algae blooms

On April 14, after unanimous votes from the state Assembly and Senate, Gov. Jim Doyle signed the Clean Lakes Bill into law. Authored by Sens. Mark Miller (Monona) and Rob Cowles (Green Bay), and Reps. Spencer Black (Madison) and Garey Bies (Sister Bay), the bill was backed by numerous environmental and conservation groups, including Wisconsin Environment, as a common sense measure to help protect Wisconsin’s lakes from algae blooms.

“This is a victory for our treasured lakes,” said Wisconsin Environment Director Dan Kohler. “The state Legislature, and especially Sen. Miller and Rep. Black, deserve credit for acting decisively to protect our lakes from the phosphorus pollution that is choking our beaches and best fishing spots with algae.”

Solving our runoff pollution problem

Polluted runoff is Wisconsin’s number one water quality problem, degrading or threatening an estimated 90 percent of inland lakes. One particular runoff problem comes in the form of excess nutrients like phosphorus, which can wash into lakes and streams from lawns, streets, construction sites and agricultural sources. Even small amounts of phosphorus runoff can cause algae blooms, harm water quality, and affect recreational use.

“Along with the Wild River Bill, the Clean Lakes Bill is one of the first steps of many we will be taking this legislative session to clean and protect our water resources,” said Rep. Black, who chairs the Committee on Natural Resources and authored the bill.

Research indicates that restricting the use of phosphorus in lawn fertilizers can be an effective way to reduce the amount of phosphorous that is washed into our lakes from residential areas. Studies confirm that most lawns in Wisconsin already have more than enough phosphorus to grow healthy turf. Several counties in Wisconsin, including Dane County, have already taken action to ban phosphorus in fertilizer, with impressive results.

“We want to thank all of the citizens who supported this initiative, and the authors of the bill for taking action before Wisconsin’s lakes are further threatened,” said Kohler. “We look forward to continuing to work with all legislators to protect Wisconsin’s lakes.”

Links to additional content are posted at: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org/newsletters/summer09.
To our members

With new leadership in the state Assembly, a new President and the most environmental Congress in memory, our staff is working around the clock to enact policies to protect our waterways and transition to a clean energy economy.

Heading into the summer, we’ve already achieved some big successes.

First, we worked with Wisconsin’s congressional delegation to pass the federal economic recovery plan with historic investments in clean energy that will create green jobs, address global warming and reduce our dependence on oil.

At the state level, we helped pass the Clean Lakes Bill to restrict phosphorus in fertilizer, and we’re gearing up to pass legislation promoting a strong clean energy economy for Wisconsin.

Of course, the big polluters and special interests aren’t giving up yet. That’s what makes your support so important. Thanks for sticking with us.

Sincerely,
Dan Kohler
Director

Recent action

New bill would improve recycling in Wisconsin

With the introduction of Senate Bill 107, authored by Sen. Mark Miller (Appleton) and Rep. Penny Bernard Schaber (Monona), the Legislature has taken an important first step toward establishing a statewide recycling program for electronic waste.

Right now, old electronic equipment, such as computers and televisions—which often contain dangerous toxic chemicals—are ending up in landfills, threatening our environment and public health with heavy metals that can contaminate our waterways and drinking water.

This legislation will create a statewide program to provide easy access for consumers, with manufacturers taking responsibility for recycling the waste. The recycling initiative is based on a successful program in Minnesota.

Wisconsin Environment looks forward to working with the Legislature to pass this bill and establish a statewide program to recycle electronic waste.

Tapping Wisconsin’s surprising solar potential

What kind of potential does solar energy hold for our future? The sun provides the Earth with as much energy every hour as humans uses every year.

Wisconsin has surprising potential for solar power. Our state averages more than four peak sun hours per day. Germany, a global leader in solar energy, receives only two peak sun hours a day. If we set the right goals and incentives, Wisconsin can become a leader in solar energy development and generation, creating new green jobs in the process.

That’s why we’re working to fast-track solar development at the state and federal levels. Wisconsin Environment is supporting solar projects across the state, as well as a plan to increase Wisconsin’s renewable energy standard.
It's not all the change our environment needs, but it sure is a good start. Consider the environmental benefits of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, signed by President Obama on Feb. 17:

• A 68-million-ton reduction in the pollution that causes global warming,

• A 15-million-barrel reduction in the nation’s oil consumption each year, and

• The creation of 1.5 million green jobs.

Wisconsin Environment worked with our congressional delegation, including newly elected Rep. Steve Kagen, to strengthen the measure to these historic levels. We teamed up with our colleagues from across the country as part of our national federation, Environment America, to help increase funding for green jobs.

“This is a watershed moment for the American sustainability movement, for which we can thank the excellent work of Environment America and other pro-environment groups, which have mobilized broadly—and effectively—in support of green energy,” said U.S. Rep. Jerrold Nadler (N.Y.).

The fight for green jobs

As Congress debated the package, Wisconsin Environment staff fought off repeated attempts to cut funding for clean energy and green jobs.

In the days leading up to the vote, Wisconsin Environment worked with Environment America to coordinate a massive face-to-face persuasion effort on Capitol Hill, holding 258 meetings with members of Congress and their staff to ensure they would stand strong for a green economic recovery.

Nearly $80 billion for clean energy

Our work paid off. The final bill invests $33 billion in clean energy, $27 billion in energy efficiency, and $19 billion in green transportation, including:

• Extending and expanding “recession-proof” renewable energy incentives, which will prevent 61 million tons of global warming pollution per year and create or protect 670,000 jobs; and

• Providing $5 billion to help more than 1 million Americans weatherize their homes, a step that will prevent 2 million tons of global warming pollution and create 375,000 jobs.

Much work remains. Wisconsin Environment will be working with our delegation as Congress considers a series of major energy, climate and transportation bills, which, if properly crafted and approved, will build and expand on our progress.

Clean water funding in the recovery package

Clean energy wasn’t the only green program to benefit from the economic recovery package: the plan also includes important investments to help protect and conserve our drinking water.

Efforts to reduce water pollution and promote more efficient use of water will receive $6 billion as part of the package. Twenty percent will be earmarked for “green infrastructure”—the first time that Congress has directed funding toward such measures.

Green infrastructure includes rooftop gardens, natural buffer areas and other measures that reduce the volume of storm water that sweeps pollutants from roads, parking lots and beaches into our water supplies. By reducing the volume of storm water, these measures also reduce sewage treatment plant overflows, which have contaminated water supplies and caused beach closings across the country.

The economic recovery package also includes funding for watershed habitat restoration and the remediation of abandoned mines and wells, which threaten to contaminate our groundwater.

Wisconsin Environment’s Washington, D.C., staff helped make the case for the water infrastructure funding, and for other new initiatives to ensure that our rivers, streams and lakes remain clean and healthy.

For the latest on our clean water program, visit our Web site.
Mission Statement
We all want clean air, clean water and open space. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress. That’s the idea behind Wisconsin Environment. We focus exclusively on protecting Wisconsin’s air, water and open space. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Clean energy, green economy
This spring, Wisconsin Environment launched a campaign to pass a strong clean energy economy bill that would implement the recommendations of Gov. Jim Doyle’s global warming task force.

In March, we held a town hall forum in Oshkosh with Mayor Frank Tower, state Reps. Gordon Hintz (Oshkosh) and Richard Spanbauer (Oshkosh) and Sen. Randy Hopper (Fond du Lac), along with a number of local clean energy businesses and experts. The event was a major success, with 110 people attending.

“It’s time to repower Wisconsin and revitalize our economy with clean energy,” said Wisconsin Environment Director Dan Kohler. “Wisconsin has the potential to harness power from the wind and sun and create new fuels from our farms. Clean energy can free us from dependence on foreign oil and create new jobs in all sectors of our economy—including many jobs that can never be outsourced.”

Wisconsin Environment’s Dan Kohler joins (from left) Sen. Hopper and Reps Hintz and Spanbauer at our clean energy town hall forum in Oshkosh.

For the latest news on our energy campaign, visit our Web site.