Ambitious goals in 2009 and beyond

In 2006, Wisconsin Environment’s efforts to increase investments in clean energy helped pass a law requiring 10 percent of the state’s energy to come from renewable sources by 2015. Since then, we’ve continued our work for a new energy future by advocating the renewal of federal tax credits for renewable energy. In October, the Wisconsin Environment-backed clean energy tax credits finally became law.

Now we’ve turned our attention to making sure that the new president and Congress pass a comprehensive energy plan that will cut dependence on oil and reduce global warming. Together with our allies, we’re getting behind a bold plan to repower America. We’re calling for 100 percent renewable electricity and reducing America’s dependence on oil 50 percent.

Saving energy through high-performance, and even zero-energy, homes and businesses can cut energy use by at least 30 percent. Energy efficiency is the fastest and cheapest way to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, but we also need new sources of clean, renewable homegrown energy.

Even with existing technology, solar power in the Southwest and in cities across America, and wind power offshore and on land, could provide the power we need to meet our electricity needs. And new breakthroughs are being made every day that extend the reach of today’s systems.

Political momentum

With the help of our national federation, Environment America, we worked to persuade then President-elect Barack Obama and incoming members of the 111th Congress to commit to the following principles: use 100 percent renewable electricity; cutting global warming pollution 80 percent by 2050; and cutting oil use in half.

We laid the groundwork by going door-to-door and activating our e-mail list to build support for the plan. And we enlisted the support of scientists, business leaders and entrepreneurs to stand up to the opposition from the oil, gas and coal industries.

Politically, the winds of change are blowing in our direction. President Obama pledged during this campaign to invest $150 billion in clean, renewable energy. And many candidates for Senate seats made investment in clean energy a centerpiece of their campaigns.

Now that clean energy incentives are renewed, we’re focusing on a plan to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity.
To our members

What a breath of fresh air.

After eight years of a president with one of the worst environmental records in history, we find ourselves poised to make great strides in 2009 and beyond.

Our last president censored climate scientists. Our new president has pledged to do what it takes to prevent the worst effects of global warming. Our last president pushed for tax breaks for Big Oil. Our new president has promised to push forward a plan to end our dependence on Middle East oil in 10 years.

Perhaps more importantly, the last Congress needed eight tries to simply renew critical incentives for clean energy. The new Congress includes leaders like Wisconsin Rep. Steve Kagen, who pledged to support clean, renewable energy.

It’s cause for celebration, but also a call to work harder than ever to take advantage of all the incredible opportunities that your support makes possible.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Director

Recent action

Making homes more energy efficient

In September, state building code officials from across the country approved the largest improvement in building codes in recent history. The move will increase the energy efficiency of new homes by as much as 20 percent.

Wisconsin Environment, with our national federation, Environment America, called for making building codes 30 percent more efficient—a goal that our research showed was feasible with current technology. To make the case, we released a white paper in July, titled “Building an Energy-Efficient America.”

“Much work needs to be done to move America toward a future of super-efficient and zero-energy buildings,” said our federal chief energy advocate, Rob Sargent. “But this step signifies progress.”

Historic regional agreement to protect Great Lakes

In September, our two-year campaign to protect the Great Lakes culminated in Congress approving the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, a multi-state agreement to ensure more sustainable use of Great Lakes water. Millions of Americans depend on the Great Lakes for drinking water and recreation, and although vast, the lakes are vulnerable. When too much water is taken out of the lakes, everything from wildlife to fishing is disrupted.

The Great Lakes Compact will help prevent this threat by prohibiting nearly all new or increased out-of-basin water diversions and requiring Great Lakes states to develop water conservation programs. Over the last two years, Wisconsin Environment and other state members of the Environment America federation worked to pass the Great Lakes Compact in their respective states, and our staff in Washington, D.C., advocated its passage in Congress.

Wisconsin Environment applauds Wisconsin’s congressional delegation and other members of Great Lakes congressional delegation for helping to pass the compact.

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Lake Michigan in winter.
In October, Wisconsin Environment released “Feeling the Heat,” a report that identified 2007 as one of the warmest years on record. The report demonstrates once again that we’re in a race against time to reduce the carbon pollution that causes global warming. In recent months, Environment America, our national federation, helped make progress putting policy solutions in place at the state and regional levels—progress that provides building blocks for long overdue action on global warming at the federal level.

Wisconsin Environment believes that an effective national program will require three elements. First, a national global warming plan will require a cap on carbon emissions that’s strong enough to prevent the catastrophic effects of global warming. The program must also accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy. Lastly, companies must pay to pollute, providing an incentive to reduce emissions and fund new technology to cut global warming pollution.

Northeast, Western states’ plan
In Sept. 2008, 10 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states announced the nation’s first auction of pollution permits under a global warming emissions cap. The historic move was a culminating step of the Environment America-backed Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a program that caps global warming emissions from power plants.

Environment America, our national federation, fought to make RGGI the first program to sell all pollution permits rather than give them to polluters for free. The states will use the revenue to promote energy conservation and renewable energy.

On Sept. 23, seven Western states announced the details for implementing the Western Climate Initiative, which builds on the regional approach taken by RGGI, but extends it to economy-wide emissions. The plan will reduce global warming pollution by at least 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020. Environment America worked to strengthen the states’ plan. We also helped win statewide caps on global warming pollution this year in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Washington state. In late August, our sister organization in Maryland helped convince Gov. Martin O’Malley to issue a bold plan for addressing global warming.

Effecting a national approach
Science-based emission caps, applied to the entire economy (power plants, transportation, manufacturing and everything else that emits carbon dioxide), with the right incentives and penalties should serve as the model for national action.

Our progress in the states provides valuable lessons and much needed momentum toward a federal approach to global warming legislation. In early October, we helped organize 152 members of Congress to send a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, laying out strong principles for action on global warming.

“This letter, and the support we can count on in the new Congress, sets the stage for action on global warming,” said Federal Global Warming Program Director Emily Figdor.

Right now 16,000 miles of roads traverse our national forests, dividing critical habitat for wildlife and opening the door for chainsaws to follow. In 2001, Environment America, our national federation, and our allies halted new road construction with the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which placed nearly 60 million acres of pristine forest land off-limits to road-building, mining and virtually all logging.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has undermined and circumvented these protections ever since. Already, they consigned the entire Tongass National Forest to any logging and road-building the state of Alaska deems appropriate. In its final months, the administration rushed to change the implementation of the Roadless Rule to allow logging, mining and drilling in Idaho’s pristine backcountry—the largest national forest in the continental United States.

Since the beginning of 2008, Environment America members sent nearly 10,000 public comments to former Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell, demanding that she retain protections for all of our national forests. This public outcry will serve as a stark reminder to the next administration and Congress that America wants its most treasured forests permanently protected.

Read more about our work to protect roadless forests on our website. Click on “Preserving Wisconsin.”
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.

Funding for open space
Since 1950, Wisconsin has lost approximately one-third of its farmland and retains less than one percent of its original grasslands. Unfortunately, as states face tight budgets in 2009, history has shown that open space funding is often one of the first programs on the chopping block. To stem this tide, research from our national federation, Environment America, showcased the work of 15 states to secure reliable funding for open space preservation programs.

The report, “Preserving America’s Natural Heritage,” recommends several measures to solve the problem of permanently funding land conservation programs—including multi-year bonds to create long-term stability and tax incentives for conservation easements. Wisconsin’s Knowles-Nelson Stewardship program was featured in the report as an example of a successful conservation funding program.

Wisconsin’s efforts to protect acres of open space include a campaign to preserve the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest.

Download “Preserving our Natural Heritage” from the reports section of our Web site.