Vital clean water rules yet to be finalized

Despite overwhelming public support, the Obama administration has yet to finalize proposed clean water protections for streams and wetlands, and as a result, our lakes are still suffering the consequences of toxic pollution and development. When it comes to protecting Wisconsin's lakes, there should be no hesitation. Our waterways are too important to risk. That's why Wisconsin Environment is making an all-out push this winter to protect our lakes for good.

Righting a wrong

In the past decade, two polluter-friendly Supreme Court decisions left more than half of the streams and wetlands that feed and filter our lakes open to unlimited dumping and development. Each year, industrial facilities dump millions of pounds of toxic pollution into Wisconsin's waterways, much of which makes its way into our lakes.

In April 2011, at the urging of Wisconsin Environment and our allies across the country, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed guidelines to fix these loopholes in the Clean Water Act. Along with our national federation of state groups, we talked to half a million people and gathered more than 100,000 public comments in support of the proposed guidelines.

What's the holdup?

It's been almost two years. So why hasn't President Obama finalized these crucial guidelines?

The main culprits are big polluters and their allies in Congress. Anti-environment politicians in Congress have voted for bill after bill to weaken clean water safeguards in recent years. And ExxonMobil and other industrial polluters have even threatened legal warfare if the rules are finalized.

Pushing past the polluters

To overcome the special interests and politicians that are holding clean water protections hostage, Wisconsin Environment has talked to thousands of Wisconsinites and built a broad movement in support of our lakes. We're showing President Obama the support he needs to finalize these commonsense protections.

For Wisconsin lakes, the time is now
I believe 2013 could be a turning point for our environment. The recent rise in extreme weather—including the tragedy of Hurricane Sandy and the record-breaking drought that scorched the country last year—has made global warming impossible to ignore, and hardened my resolve to shift Wisconsin away from dirty energy and cut our carbon pollution. I know you feel the same way.

Of course, there will be challenges: Anti-environment politicians will continue to cater to the interests of big polluters. But the climate change deniers and the dirty energy lobby are losing their grip on public discourse; they’re on the wrong side of science, and the wrong side of history.

Wisconsin Environment will keep fighting the good fight. And with you by our side, we can make 2013 a year to remember.

Sincerely,

Megan Severson
State Advocate

In Sandy’s wake, urgency on global warming
Hurricane Sandy was a wake-up call on global warming for all of us across the country. Thousands of homes were damaged or lost; entire communities were submerged under water; lives were disrupted; the costs were estimated to be as high as $60 billion; and tragically, dozens of people lost their lives.

Most of us understand that more extreme weather is becoming more common, the planet is warming, and pollution is behind much of it. America can do better. We can reduce the pollution that’s behind global warming. To achieve this, Wisconsin Environment is pushing for more solar and wind power and working to reduce our dependence on coal, oil and gas.

We can no longer allow Big Oil and King Coal to hold America’s clean energy future hostage. It’s time for our leaders to heed Hurricane Sandy’s wake-up call and embrace clean energy, clean air and a safer future.

Wisconsin Environment applauds soot standards
On December 14, the Obama administration strengthened air quality standards for particulate matter or “soot” pollution. Soot pollution is the deadliest of the common air pollutants, causing thousands of premature deaths every year across the country through a variety of cardiovascular and respiratory illnesses. It also contributes to haze that hangs over many of Wisconsin’s cities, towns and parks. Sources of soot pollution include power plants and diesel trucks and buses.

The strengthened standards, which were supported by Wisconsin Environment, better reflect the latest scientific research. The new standard will outline how much soot pollution can be in the air and still be safe to breathe; overall, soot standards were strengthened by about 20 percent. Wisconsin Environment applauds the Obama administration for standing up for clean air.

As extreme weather events occur more frequently, we have to double our efforts to curb carbon emissions. Above, a satellite image of Hurricane Sandy.
Wisconsin wind power cuts carbon pollution

As if 133,000 cars stopped polluting

After last summer’s unprecedented heat and drought prompted Wisconsinites to call for action in tackling global warming and the rise in extreme weather, Wisconsin Environment released a new report in December documenting the benefits of wind power in cutting global warming pollution and shifting us away from dirty, dangerous fossil fuels.

The report, “Wind Power for a Cleaner America: Reducing Global Warming Pollution, Cutting Air Pollution, and Saving Water,” shows that Wisconsin’s current power generation from wind energy displaces as much global warming pollution as taking 133,000 cars off the road per year. The Wisconsin Environment report also shows that wind power saves enough water to meet the needs of 12,500 Wisconsinites.

Continued growth essential

The report touts wind energy’s environmental benefits to date, as well as the benefits Wisconsin will see in the future if wind power continues to grow.

“Wind power is already replacing the dirty and dangerous energy sources of the past and creating a cleaner, healthier future for Wisconsinites,” said Megan Severson of Wisconsin Environment.

If wind development continues at a pace comparable to that of recent years through 2016, Wisconsin would reduce global warming pollution by the equivalent of taking 108,000 cars off the road, and save enough water to meet the needs of an additional 10,200 Wisconsinites.

Nationwide, wind energy now displaces about 68 million tons of global warming pollution each year—as much as is produced by 13 million cars. If construction of new wind energy projects continues from 2013 to 2016 at a pace comparable to that of recent years, the United States could reduce global warming pollution by an additional 56 million metric tons in 2016—equivalent to the amount produced by 11 million passenger vehicles. These projects would also save enough water to meet the annual water needs of 600,000 people.

Wind has health benefits, too

The report also highlighted the fact that today’s wind energy in Wisconsin is delivering results for public health, by avoiding 600 tons of smog-causing pollution and 1,030 tons of soot pollution.

Despite the benefits of wind power and widespread public support for federal policies to promote renewable energy, fossil fuel interests and their allies in Congress have vigorously opposed programs that promote wind production. But in January, President Obama and Congress agreed to extend wind power tax credits as part of the deal reached to avert the fiscal cliff.

“As our state heals from the summer’s unprecedented droughts, we must invest wisely in a future with cleaner air, fewer extreme weather events, and smart use of our water resources,” said Severson.

Wisconsin wind power cuts carbon pollution

Frac sand mining threatens communities

A drastic rise in mining for silica sand—nicknamed “frac sand” for its use in the process of hydraulic fracturing for natural gas—poses a number of threats to Wisconsin.

The recent boom in hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” has made headlines across the country. The practice, which is used to extract natural gas, has threatened water supplies, worsened air quality and marred rural landscapes in states such as Pennsylvania, New York and Ohio.

But fracking has had another, less publicized consequence, and this one hits close to home: Demand for frac sand, used in the hydraulic fracturing process, has gone through the roof. As a result, large-scale frac sand mining operations have descended on Wisconsin—and our waterways, landscapes and public health could suffer the consequences.

Accidents from these mining operations are already making headlines. Last summer, a wastewater pond at a frac sand mine in Grantsburg burst and sent polluted water and sediment flowing into a protected section of the St. Croix National Scenic River.

Frac sand mining also poses threats to wildlife habitat, air quality and groundwater, as well as public health—silica sand dust from mining can cause silicosis, a respiratory disease.

To read our latest report, “Wind Power for a Cleaner America,” visit us online at:

WisconsinEnvironment.org/reports.
Wisconsin Environment has been talking to thousands of Wisconsinites across the state about the benefits of local, sustainable agriculture and building support for the Farm to School program. The program connects Wisconsin schools with local farmers to provide healthy food for schoolchildren and promote sustainable agriculture.

Local farms provide an alternative to industrial agriculture, which degrades our water with runoff pollution and pollutes our air by shipping food long distances. By helping to expand markets for local, sustainable agriculture, Wisconsin Environment is working to reduce the impact our food system has on our environment and improve the health of our air, land and water.

This winter, we’re mobilizing broad support for Wisconsin’s Farm to School program. By showing our legislator’s overwhelming public support for healthy farms, we’re pushing for full funding for the program.

To learn more and take action, visit www.WisconsinEnvironment.org.