More protections needed for Wisconsin’s waterways

We’ve come a long way since 1972, when the Clean Water Act promised clean, safe water for all Americans. Yet the promise is still unkept.

A recent investigation by The New York Times found sewage overflowing treatment systems, farm runoff polluting wells in Wisconsin and scores of illegal polluters escaping punishment. Following this national attention on our state’s water quality problems, Wisconsin Environment released a report in October showing that industrial facilities dumped 4.1 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Wisconsin waterways.

“Wisconsin’s rivers, lakes, and drinking water need to be protected, not polluted,” said Dan Kohler, director of Wisconsin Environment. “This report shows that polluters continue to use our waterways as dumping grounds for their toxic chemicals.”

The Wisconsin Environment report, “Wasting Our Waterways: Industrial Toxic Pollution and the Unfulfilled Promise of the Clean Water Act,” documents and analyzes the dangerous levels of pollutants discharged in waters in Wisconsin by compiling toxic chemical releases reported to the U.S. EPA’s Toxics Release Inventory for 2007, the most recent data available.

The report found that the Wisconsin River received the most toxic discharges in the state, with 1.5 million pounds discharged in 2007, ranking it 38th in the nation for most toxic discharges. Industrial facilities discharged approximately 10,475 pounds of chemicals linked to cancer and 683 pounds of chemical linked to developmental disorders into the Wisconsin River. The Wisconsin River has suffered from frequent fish kills and a fish consumption advisory for walleye, white bass and lake sturgeon due to the high levels of mercury and PCBs.

Wisconsin Environment called on industrial facilities to reduce their toxic discharges and for tougher enforcement from the EPA. We also called for policies to ensure the Clean Water Act applies to all of our waterways, including thousands of headwaters and small streams for which jurisdiction under the Clean Water Act has been jeopardized in recent court decisions.

more online

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org/newsletters/winter10

Gov. Jim Doyle signs legislation that will reduce runoff pollution in Wisconsin’s lakes.
“This progress did not come easily and we know that this progress alone is not enough,” said President Obama, about the Copenhagen Accord.

I share the president’s sober assessment. Unless we do more and do it quickly, temperatures and sea levels will keep rising. That’s why we continue to urge strong action in cities, at the state level as well as in Washington.

Yet the profound challenge we face on global warming also brings opportunity—to clean our air and water, end our dependence on oil, and rebuild our economy. The vested interests on the other side remain strong, but I’m putting my faith in the millions of Americans who understand that the time for a new energy future is now.

Thank you, as always, for making this work possible.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Director

Recent action

Here comes the sun

New policies advanced by our advocates and activists across the country will result in more than four gigawatts of new solar power by 2020—more than five times the amount generated today.

“We’re just getting started,” said Rob Sargent, Wisconsin Environment’s federal energy program director.

Our national federation, Environment America, is teaming up with the Solar Alliance and the Solar Energy Industries Association to win more pro-solar policies here in the midwest, as well as in Connecticut, Maryland and at the federal level. These efforts come on the heels of success in other states: our national federation already won approval of expanded rebates in California and new solar home options in Colorado and New Jersey.

“We’re ready to make solar power the centerpiece of America’s new clean energy economy,” said Sargent. “If we can make it easier for more people to go solar now, we’ll reap the benefits for decades to come.”

Toxic chemicals on tap

Julie Saunter used to have clean drinking water on tap. Today, the Dimock, Pa., resident has 10 water purification tanks in her basement, a methane gas vent in her front yard, and drinking water trucked in daily, all because of a new and dangerous form of drilling taking place nearby.

With new technology and government incentives spurring a move to expand “hydraulic fracturing” in Pennsylvania, New York and other states, Environment America Research and Policy Center, a project of our national federation, released “Toxic Chemicals on Tap.” The report is a thorough examination of the growing threat to waterways, and recommends solutions, including an end to the drilling’s exemption from the Safe Drinking Water Act.

How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Wisconsin Environment.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or e-mail PlannedGiving@WisconsinEnvironment.org.
The United States, long considered a laggard in addressing global warming, is poised to achieve large reductions in global warming pollution thanks to clean energy policies adopted over the past decade by state governments, including Wisconsin, according to a report released in December by Wisconsin Environment.

“While there’s no doubt that Congress must pass a comprehensive climate bill, and that Wisconsin must continue to do more, our research shows that the states have already delivered a down payment on pollution reductions,” said Dan Kohler, director of Wisconsin Environment.

The new report, “America on the Move,” released just days before world leaders convened in Copenhagen to attempt to negotiate an international agreement on global warming, found that state policies will reduce global warming pollution by approximately 536 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent per year by 2020 compared to business as usual—more global warming pollution than is currently emitted annually by all but eight of the world’s nations.

“This report provides further evidence that Wisconsin can play an important role in the effort to cut greenhouse gas pollution that causes global warming,” said Rep. Spencer Black, Chair of the state Assembly Committee on Natural Resources. “We must join the other states and lead the way to avoid the damage that climate disruption will cause to our future well-being.”

“Responsibility for the kind of world our children, grandchildren and future generations will inherit is in our hands today,” said Peter Bakken, Public Policy Coordinator of the Wisconsin Council of Churches. “If we fail to take strong and decisive action to curb climate change, we will betray our calling to be good caretakers of creation.”

In 2005, Wisconsin lawmakers committed the state to get at least 10 percent of its electricity from clean, renewable energy sources such as wind and solar power, while using energy more wisely. That legislation is credited with increasing Wisconsin’s energy independence, and spurring new economic opportunities in manufacturing and installation of clean energy technologies such as wind turbines, as well as biomass and solar energy systems.

A new bill based on recommendations from Gov. Doyle’s Global Warming Task Force is expected to be considered by the legislature this spring. The Clean Energy Jobs Act, if adopted, would increase the state’s commitment to renewable energy and advance the state’s transition to a clean energy economy.

Wisconsin Environment encouraged the state Legislature to move forward with strong clean energy jobs legislation that will require 25 percent of Wisconsin’s energy to come from clean, renewable sources, along with new investments in energy efficiency programs. It also urged the federal government to require reductions in global warming pollution in the United States consistent with the reductions science tells us are necessary to prevent the worst impacts.

In another report, our research revealed that power plants released 2.56 billion tons of carbon pollution in 2007, a whopping 42 percent of the country’s total carbon pollution.

In November, a Wisconsin Environment report, entitled “Generating Failure,” investigated whether nuclear power can help solve the climate crisis. The nuclear industry is seeking tens of billions of dollars in new federal subsidies, on top of hundreds of billions of dollars in existing subsidies. Yet our research indicates this massive investment is more likely to set America back in the race to solve global warming.

While scientists recommend deeper cuts, members of Congress have called for a 20 percent reduction in global warming pollution by 2020. However, planning and constructing a new nuclear plant takes time. As the Los Angeles Times reports, “The last time there was a wave of nuclear construction in the United States, it took an average of nine years to build a plant.” Even if work began today on the estimated 100 plants envisioned by the industry, the first plants wouldn’t come online until 2019—too late to make a significant dent in the 20 percent goal.

Building the plants would cost at least $600 billion. Yet a similar investment in energy efficiency and renewable power would deliver twice the carbon reduction by 2030. “The nuclear option would deliver too little, too late to matter, while diverting money from safer, faster alternatives,” said Emily Figdor, Wisconsin Environment’s federal global warming program director.

“America’s Biggest Polluters”

In another report, our research revealed that power plants released 2.56 billion tons of carbon pollution in 2007, a whopping 42 percent of the country’s total carbon pollution.

Rosendale Dairy near Oshkosh has sparked controversy with its proposed plan to build the largest factory farm in Wisconsin. If approved by the Department of Natural Resources, the dairy would house more than 8,000 cows, producing over 90 million gallons of untreated manure each year which would be spread on the land.

Wisconsin Environment has joined local farmers and concerned citizens to oppose the plan because of the significant risk that toxic pollution from the dairy could end up in area waterways and threaten drinking water. Wisconsin Environment submitted written testimony to the DNR outlining major environmental concerns, along with a petition signed by 1,800 citizens.

The Dairy Business Association is lobbying hard to gain approval of the plan, despite environmental concerns. The DNR is expected to come to a decision soon.

Wisconsin Environment
Our mission
We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. 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 spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Wisconsin decision pending
Rosendale Dairy near Oshkosh has sparked controversy with its proposed plan to build the largest factory farm in Wisconsin. If approved by the Department of Natural Resources, the dairy would house more than 8,000 cows, producing over 90 million gallons of untreated manure each year which would be spread on the land.

Wisconsin Environment has joined local farmers and concerned citizens to oppose the plan because of the significant risk that toxic pollution from the dairy could end up in area waterways and threaten drinking water. Wisconsin Environment submitted written testimony to the DNR outlining major environmental concerns, along with a petition signed by 1,800 citizens.

The Dairy Business Association is lobbying hard to gain approval of the plan, despite environmental concerns. The DNR is expected to come to a decision soon.

Visit www.WisconsinEnvironment.org and click on “Clean Water” to learn more about our efforts to protect Wisconsin’s waterways.