Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2011
Dear Wisconsin Environment members,

The past year has seen a whirlwind of attacks on our state’s waters and air from polluters and their allies in government. But despite the pressure, I’m happy to say we are standing strong for the protections our environment deserves.

When Congress refused to address gaping loopholes in the Clean Water Act, our advocacy moved the Environmental Protection Agency to step in and start working to update clean water standards itself. After the House of Representatives passed a series of bills designed to keep the agency from acting, we rallied public support to stop the bill in the Senate—at least for now. Meanwhile, our members helped our national coalition gather 800,000 total messages on the importance of cutting mercury emissions from power plants—the largest number of public comments ever received by the EPA on an issue.

Our lakes, open spaces, and the air we breathe deserve the strongest protections possible, but I know industry lobbyists haven’t given up yet in their battle to weaken them. With your support, we’ll continue to fight for a cleaner, greener Wisconsin in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Megan Severson, Wisconsin Environment Advocate
Healthy farms

From the first pint of strawberries in June to the last crisp red apple of fall, the abundance of a farmer’s market is unrivaled. We should be doing everything we can to encourage healthy food and responsible farming. Unfortunately, too much of the food we buy in the supermarket comes from factory farms that foul our water and pollute our air.

A food system fueled by pollution

Though there are 227 local farmer’s markets across Wisconsin, we still get most of our food from huge industrial farms. Wisconsin Environment has been working to hold agribusinesses accountable, while giving sustainable farmers the support they need to compete:

• Our members put pressure on the Environmental Protection Agency to enforce rules against manure and pesticide runoff from factory farms into streams and rivers.

• Together with our affiliate groups, Wisconsin Environment released two reports that document the growing role of agribusiness in water pollution.

• We organized a massive email and letter-writing campaign to keep Congress from ending the Know Your Farmer, Know Your Food program, which helps public schools and low-income residents gain access to fresh local produce.

Photo credits: (cover) * Earl D. Walker, (page 1 top) * Morgan Lane Photography, (page 2 top to bottom) * Nancy Gill, © Ron Wiecki, © Darin.
Protecting our lakes

From family vacations at Devil’s Lake to boating in Lake Mendota, spending time at our lakes is a legacy we want our kids to inherit and enjoy. But our lakes are threatened by runoff pollution, which chokes our favorite swimming and fishing spots with algae and weeds. We’re working to make sure our waters get the protections they deserve.

Thousands of Wisconsinites write EPA in support of clean water

For nearly 40 years, the Clean Water Act has protected the streams and wetlands that feed our lakes and keep them clean. But a pair of poorly reasoned decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court have put our nation’s waterways at risk—leaving more than half of Wisconsin’s streams without any protection from pollution and overdevelopment. We’ve been working to close the loopholes in the Clean Water Act.

• Last February, we presented EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson with thousands of signatures urging her to protect Wisconsin’s waters. In April, the EPA announced a plan that would restore protections to the small streams that feed our lakes and rivers.

• Even as the EPA announced its plan, polluting industries sprang into action. Corporate agribusiness and mining companies called upon their friends in the House of Representatives to pass a series of bills designed to cripple the EPA and prevent it from taking any action on clean water.

• In Wisconsin and across America, our field organizers talked to hundreds of thousands of people who wrote their local media and officials in support of strong clean water protections. Thanks in part to our public outcry, the Senate voted down the bills introduced by the House. We sent Congress a clear message—our waterways are nobody’s dumping ground.
Defending our lakes from more pollution

In 2008, state lawmakers wisely decided to impose limits on the phosphorus pollution that threatens our lakes. And last summer, our citizen outreach campaign built up enough public support to win another victory—strong state standards that will reduce the amount of polluted water that runs into our lakes from industrial farms, cities and developments. But this year, those new protections were thrown into jeopardy:

- Gov. Scott Walker claimed the state could wait to deal with lake pollution, and made it his mission to roll back recent clean water standards. But we called out his shortsighted proposal. Through spring and summer, we organized more than 10,000 supporters to send messages to the state legislators and the governor demanding protections for our lakes.

- The huge outcry from all corners of the state made the prospect of rolling back our lakes’ protections one that state leaders didn’t want to touch, and they chose not to even consider it in the most recent budget.
Clean air, healthy families

We should be able to breathe clean air and drink clean water—without worrying about mercury in our bloodstream or soot in our lungs. Yet coal-fired power plants and other industrial polluters spew hundreds of thousands of tons of dangerous pollutants into our atmosphere every year. We need to protect our families’ health by requiring polluters to clean up their act.

EPA to cut mercury, save 25,000 lives

In 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency moved ahead with efforts to significantly reduce mercury, soot and smog pollution from power plants. We expect these standards to save more than 25,000 lives every year. We built support across the state to ensure these rules were adopted:

• We released two reports on the health impacts of smog and mercury pollution. The reports also reveal how much pollution is emitted by specific power plants nationwide.

• We partnered with our national coalition of allies to help motivate more than 800,000 people across America to send the EPA public comments in support of strong action on mercury—no other single EPA rule has ever received so much public support.

• We held an event in Milwaukee with State Sen. Chris Larson and the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee Zilber School of Public Health to call attention to the dangerous health impacts of smog pollution from coal plants.
Congressional attacks voted down

Unfortunately, polluters and their allies in Congress launched a coordinated attack to block these critical safeguards. But after working closely with our allies in the public health community, lobbying key senators and rallying thousands of our online activists to speak out, we held the line against some of the worst attacks:

- In March and April, the U.S. Senate rejected five bills that would have blocked standards for soot, mercury and carbon pollution.

- In April, our advocacy helped convince the Senate to vote down four more bills that would have blocked the EPA from reducing global warming pollution.

- We thanked Sen. Herb Kohl for standing strong against congressional attacks on clean air legislation by holding an event at a preschool, where children and their parents presented his staff with thank you cards for protecting clean air.

Left: 10 percent of Wisconsin’s children have been diagnosed with asthma, which is heavily exacerbated by air pollution from soot and smog. Right: A Wisconsin Environment report documents mercury emissions by power plants.
As part of our campaign for strong clean air standards, we asked our supporters to share their personal stories of air pollution with lawmakers in Congress, to drive home to them how much clean air standards matter. One of our members sent in this letter from Milwaukee (reprinted below with his permission).

**How has air pollution affected you?**

Members sent personal letters to their senators as part of our Clean Air, Healthy Families campaign.

*Dear Sen. Johnson,*

*My wife suffers from asthma. Within a few seconds of being outside, she can tell how bad the air is that day. On overcast days, she is rarely able to leave the house at all. Her asthma has a profound impact on her quality of life, and on our family as a whole—my wife recently had to miss our daughter’s graduation from college because of our city’s dirty air.*

*She is hardly the only one affected. For 24 years, I’ve been an elementary school teacher—mostly in inner-city Milwaukee, where the air is some of the dirtiest in the state. I’ve seen first hand the consequences of respiratory problems for so many children. I vividly remember a mother of three students at the school where I taught telling me her children couldn’t play outside because of their asthma.*

*It would simply be cruel to the kids and adults who suffer from respiratory problems if we relinquish what laws we have to keep our air clean.*

*Thank you,*

*Robert (Milwaukee, WI)*

Do you have a story about air pollution you want your legislators to hear? Go to our website to get involved: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org
End our oil dependency

The environmental costs of our dependence on oil are out of control—from the accidents that wreak havoc from the Gulf Coast to the Yellowstone River, to the smog that pollutes our air, to the threat of catastrophic climate change. With Wisconsin’s families paying more than ever at the pump, there has never been a better time to put this country on the path to getting off oil for good.

A big move to get Wisconsin off oil

In July, Wisconsin Environment released a report that outlines a comprehensive strategy to get off oil, and reduce our state’s oil imports by 1.13 billion gallons. Meanwhile, our members joined with thousands of people across the nation to voice their support for clean cars. Our action paid off when the White House announced two big steps toward getting America off oil:

• The Obama administration announced new fuel economy standards that will make 54.5-mpg cars the norm by 2025. This is the single biggest step ever taken to reduce oil consumption and global warming pollution.

• The administration also announced the first-ever fuel economy standard for trucks, which will save more than 20 billion gallons of gasoline by 2018.

Top: Our federal global warming director, Nathan Willcox, thanks President Obama for the proposed 54.5-mpg fuel standard.