Annual Report

A recap of our work for our members in 2012
These are crucial times for our environment. Polluters and their allies in government are intent on rolling back protections for our lakes, air and special places. In addition, over the past year, we’ve suffered through some of the worst effects of global warming: record-high temperatures, severe storms and a devastating drought that hurt farmers here in Wisconsin and across the Midwest.

Yet I’m optimistic: Despite the attacks and the culture of corporate cronyism in Madison and Washington, D.C., we are making progress. For example, in late August, we celebrated as the Obama administration announced a clean cars standard that requires new cars to get an average of nearly 55 miles per gallon by 2025—the single biggest leap toward solving the global warming crisis the United States has ever taken. This victory is the culmination of years of hard work by Wisconsin Environment and our allies across the country to mobilize thousands of citizens to convince the Obama administration to set tough national standards for fuel efficiency.

When citizens mobilize and demand solutions, we can beat the polluters and win real results for our lakes, our open spaces and the air we breathe. With your support, we will continue to fight for a cleaner, greener and healthier Wisconsin in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Megan Severson, Wisconsin Environment Advocate

To our members

“Our lakes, open spaces and the air we breathe deserve the strongest protections possible.”
Healthy Farms, Healthy Planet

Most of the food we eat comes from factory farms that pollute our air and water. But it doesn’t have to be this way—sustainable farms all across the state produce food that’s healthy for our families and our planet. That’s why Wisconsin Environment is working to promote sustainable farms through programs such as the Farm to School program.

Farm to School helped local farms

Fresh, local food shouldn’t be hard to find. There are 227 farmers’ markets across the state, but we can do more to expand opportunities for sustainable farmers. In the past year, we stepped up our campaign to encourage sustainable farm expansion.

- Factory farms abuse our environment to fill shelves with low-quality food. Agriculture currently consumes nearly one-fifth of all fossil fuels used in America—contributing to air pollution and global warming.

- Industrial agriculture has made more than 100,000 miles of rivers and streams too polluted for swimming, fishing or drinking.

- Lawmakers can help change this by funding Wisconsin’s Farm to School program, which connects schools with nearby farmers. That’s why we’ve been mobilizing thousands of Wisconsinites in support of the Farm to School program.
Save Our Lakes

Whether we’re fishing in Lake Mendota or hiking around Devil’s Lake, Wisconsinites love our lakes. Two years ago, Wisconsin Environment won strong, science-based standards to protect our lakes. But despite our progress, serious problems still threaten Wisconsin’s lakes. We’re hard at work reining in water pollution and restoring our lakes to health.

We defended protections for our lakes

Over the past decade, the number of factory farms in Wisconsin has tripled, greatly increasing the threat of runoff pollution to our lakes.

- Runoff pollution from factory farms and other sources threatens a whopping 90 percent of Wisconsin’s lakes.

- Wisconsin Environment helped win strong runoff protections that prevent excessive manure spreading near waterways, ensure that cities control their runoff, and prevent toxics from flowing into waterways.

- But Gov. Scott Walker and his allies are trying to weaken the enforcement of these rules, roll back pollution protections, and let polluters off the hook.

- In May, it was discovered that the waste management company Herr Environmental was spreading human waste on agricultural fields, potentially contaminating drinking wells. Rather than prosecute the company to the fullest extent, Walker’s appointed staff let it off the hook with a fine of less than $5,000.
Thousands urged lawmakers to stand up to governor

We refuse to stand by while Gov. Walker and his anti-environment allies undermine important runoff standards and allow polluters to wreak havoc on our lakes. Wisconsin Environment is hard at work building the support it will take to make sure our lakes are properly protected from runoff pollution.

• Over the summer and fall, Wisconsin Environment continued to build overwhelming public support for tough pollution standards to protect Wisconsin’s lakes. Our staff mobilized thousands of Wisconsinites to submit petitions to their legislators, urging them to stand up to Gov. Walker and enforce the protections that Wisconsin’s waters deserve.

• We also worked to keep the issue in the spotlight, and made sure that key stakeholders like tourism businesses, public health officials and fishermen spoke out. We can’t let Gov. Walker turn our lakes into personal sewers for industrial polluters.

Clockwise from left: Wisconsin Environment volunteers thank Rep. Tammy Baldwin for standing up for our lakes; industrial pollution in Green Bay; our citizen outreach team enjoying a Wisconsin lake.
Go Solar, Wisconsin

Wisconsin Environment is continuing to push for clean, renewable energy sources that don’t pollute and never run out. In the face of the dangers posed to our health and environment by dirty coal and oil, we must embrace clean energy. That’s why we’ve made solar power a top priority for Wisconsin.

Goal set for 10% solar

Wisconsin’s environment is at risk because of our dependence on fossil fuels—dirty energy pollutes our air and water with toxic chemicals like mercury, fuels global warming, and endangers our health. But we have a solution at our fingertips: Clean energy, and solar in particular, can replace fossil fuels for a wide range of purposes, from generating electricity to providing industrial heat.

• By incentivizing in-state solar energy usage and development, we can get 10 percent of Wisconsin’s energy from clean, renewable solar power by 2030. But polluters and their allies don’t want to let this happen.

• To achieve this goal, Wisconsin Environment is working to help pass innovative financing options in 2013, specifically the Power Purchase Agreement model, which will spur the growth of solar energy in Wisconsin.

Wisconsin Environment has set a goal of reaching 10 percent solar by 2030.
Wisconsin Wind Power

Right now, Wisconsin generates enough wind energy to power 150,000 homes, lessening our dependence on dirty energy and avoiding 800,000 metric tons of carbon emissions a year. But if Congress lets critical incentives die, the wind industry could come to a screeching halt. In 2012, we worked hard to prevent that from happening.

Wind incentives defended

Wind energy now powers the equivalent of nearly 13 million homes across the country, reducing our dependence on coal and oil. In addition, wind energy supports 75,000 American jobs, including 3,000 in Wisconsin. But the continued success of wind power is at risk if Congress fails to renew these critical incentives.

- Critical federal tax credits for wind power are set to expire at the end of 2012. If Congress does not renew them, the wind industry expects to lose 37,000 American jobs, and we will lose hard-won momentum on clean energy.

- Special interests like the coal and oil industries have been lobbying against these incentives in Washington, D.C. In 2012, we fought back by mobilizing massive grassroots support for wind power. As of this writing, the wind tax credits were still being debated.
Clean Air, Healthy Families

Wisconsin will reap the benefits of two Wisconsin Environment-backed decisions announced by the Obama administration in late 2011 and 2012. As a result of these decisions, existing power plants will slash their emissions of toxic mercury by 90 percent, and new power plants will emit far less carbon pollution.

A pair of historic victories for clean air

Power plants emit mercury pollution that can seriously endanger our health. They also pump massive amounts of global warming-causing carbon pollution into our air. In the last year, we focused our clean air campaign on cutting these two dangerous sources of pollution from power plants—and won a pair of unprecedented results.

First-ever nationwide mercury standards

Every year, coal-fired power plants spew hundreds of thousands of pounds of toxic mercury into our air, which fall to earth in the form of rain, contaminating rivers, lakes and streams. Last year, reducing mercury and other air pollution was one of Wisconsin Environment’s top priorities.

- In 2011, 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.

- The Obama administration responded by announcing the first-ever nationwide standards for mercury pollution from power plants. Then, in June 2012, the Senate rejected a bill that would have overturned these mercury standards and put 11,000 lives at risk. Now, power plants must emit 90 percent less mercury.
EPA proposed carbon pollution standards

In addition to President Obama’s mercury pollution standards, the past year saw another historic victory for clean air: On March 27, 2012, the EPA proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

• At the time of this writing, the EPA is expected to finalize these carbon pollution standards for new power plants by the end of 2012, and begin developing standards for existing coal-fired power plants in the near future as well.

• Through paid ads and armies of lobbyists within Congress, the coal industry and other corporate polluters are trying to prevent the implementation of these commonsense standards. To counter these special interests, Wisconsin Environment and our allies collected a record-smashing 3 million comments in support of the carbon standard.

Along with our national federation and our allies across the country, Wisconsin Environment helped submit a record-breaking 3 million public comments in support of the Obama administration’s proposed carbon standards.