A summer spent fighting for clean water

Closing polluter loopholes with grassroots action
Late this spring, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a rule to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act that have left more than 30,500 miles of streams, which feed our lakes, and the drinking water for nearly 400,000 Wisconsinites at risk for more than a decade.

On the heels of the EPA’s announcement, this summer, Wisconsin launched a grassroots campaign to build the public support necessary to get the rule across the finish line. Over the course of several months, our staff talked to thousands of people across the state, collecting hundreds of public comments to the EPA, and built a coalition of small business owners, local elected officials, and farmers.

2.8 million pounds of chemicals
Shortly after the EPA’s announcement, big polluters ramped up their efforts to block the rule, lobbying in Congress, spreading misinformation, and threatening “legal warfare.”

But we debunked their claims when we released the report, “Wasting Our Waterways,” which found that nearly 2.8 million pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped in Wisconsin’s waterways in 2012 alone.

“America’s waterways shouldn’t be a polluter’s dumping ground,” said Ally Fields, federal clean water advocate. “If we want our waterways to be clean for future generations to enjoy, we must restore Clean Water Act protections to our waterways now.”

Businesses, farmers joined us
And when polluters launched a misinformation campaign targeting farmers and lobbied in Congress saying the rule would negatively impact small businesses, we hit the streets and, together with our national federation, gathered the signatures of 300 small business owners and collected comments from more than 200 farmers to call on the EPA to restore protections.

The fight is far from over, but we’re closing in on the finish line. With the public comment period coming to a close soon, we’re ramping up our efforts to show Congress the widespread support for clean water.

more online
Federal Clean Water Advocate Ally Fields working to protect Wisconsin’s waterways.

We can win the biggest victory for our waterways—but only if enough of us speak out. Visit our website to take action: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org.
To our members

This past summer was a whirlwind. Our citizen outreach staff talked to people across the state and collected thousands of petition signatures to protect Wisconsin’s lakes. We’ve made so much progress and we owe that success to members like you.

Now, as fall gets underway, it’s important to remember another important aspect of the movement for a cleaner, greener Wisconsin: Electing leaders who will do the right thing for our environment. Elections can have huge implications and if our elected officials are willing to stand up for clean air, clean water and our open spaces, we stand a far better chance of winning lasting improvements.

So, if you haven’t already, I encourage you to make plans to vote, and to bring family and friends with you to the polls. It’s our environment and our future—let’s get out there and vote!

Sincerely,

Megan Severson
State Advocate

Electric vehicles put the brakes on pollution

More than 190,000 electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles are on America’s roads today, delivering real benefits for our health and our environment, according to a new report released by our national affiliate. In just the last two years, annual sales of electric vehicles in the United States have increased by 500 percent.

The report, “Driving Cleaner: More Electric Vehicles Mean Less Pollution,” shows that electric vehicles could prevent more than 125 thousand metric tons of climate-changing carbon pollution annually in Wisconsin by 2025. That’s the equivalent of saving more than 14 million gallons of gasoline per year, or eliminating tailpipe pollution from more than 26,000 of today’s cars and trucks.

“It’s time to charge ahead,” said Megan Severson, Wisconsin Environment state advocate. “It’s not just because electric vehicles are speedy, quiet and cool-looking—they are also one of the most important tools we have to break our dependence on oil, clean up our air, improve our health and protect our climate.”

Solar capacity grew 17% in Wisconsin last year


Wisconsin’s progress on solar has helped fuel a tripling of solar energy nationwide between 2011 and 2013—the United States now has enough solar capacity to power more than 2.2 million homes. While Wisconsin has made progress, it still has room to grow. We’re working to advocate for net-metering programs and leasing of solar by parties other than electric utilities to further fuel solar growth in Wisconsin. “Wisconsin officials deserve tremendous credit for recognizing the environmental and economic benefits of solar and taking action to make it a reality,” said Rob Sargent, Energy Program Director with Environment America. “As more people see the benefits of solar energy, we’re confident that clean, limitless energy from the sun will be a growing part of Wisconsin’s plan to reduce pollution from power plants.”
Toxics in Wisconsin waters threaten health and environment

We should be doing everything we can to protect our beautiful lakes, but in 2012, industrial facilities dumped more than 2.8 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Wisconsin’s waterways, according to our report, “Wasting Our Waterways: Industrial Toxic Pollution and the Unfulfilled Promise of the Clean Water Act.”

Industrial pollution is a major contributor to water degradation in the United States, with some of our most iconic waterways shouldering the burden. More than 8 million pounds of chemicals were discharged into the Great Lakes alone, and the Environmental Protection Agency has assessed 53 percent of rivers and streams across the country to be too polluted for swimming, fishing or drinking, along with 67 percent of lakes, ponds and reservoirs.

Our health at risk

Only a small percentage of chemicals in use in the U.S. have been thoroughly tested for safety in humans. Of the chemicals released into local waterways, more than 16,870 pounds were cancer-causing, 1,336 pounds were harmful to development, and more than 602,226 pounds could cause reproductive harm—ranking Wisconsin third in the nation for this last type of toxin.

The Castle Rock Flowage watershed in Adams County was the hardest hit in the country by reproductive toxic discharges, receiving more than 560,000 pounds of the industrial solvent methanol—which can affect the way children learn, grow, and behave—from a facility called the Water Quality Center in Wisconsin Rapids, which is owned by a paper company. The Flowage also received 3,400 pounds of methanol from another paper plant. More than two-thirds of the reproductive toxics released nationwide came from pulp, paper and paperboard mills.

Preventing water pollution

The continued discharge of millions of pounds of toxic chemicals to our rivers and streams clearly demonstrates the need for stronger action to protect our water and health.

That’s why we’re recommending that the United States should prevent pollution by requiring industries to reduce their use of toxic chemicals and restore and strengthen Clean Water Act protections for all of Wisconsin’s and America’s waterways, which would prevent polluters from being able to avoid reporting toxic releases. We’re also calling for Wisconsin to implement its own policies to phase out toxic chemicals and require the use of safer alternatives.

“Looking at the data, you can see why polluters might oppose any efforts to protect our waters,” said Ben Knuth with Wisconsin Environment Research & Policy Center. “That’s why we’re working with farmers, small businesses, and hundreds of Wisconsinites to make sure our voices are heard for clean water. The future of the lakes we love hangs in the balance.”

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To read the full report, visit: www.WisconsinEnvironmentCenter.org
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.

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A groundbreaking step on global warming

This June, the Environmental Protection Agency proposed a Clean Power Plan that sets targets for states to reduce global warming pollution from dirty power plants by investing in renewable energy and cleaning up existing power plants. Shortly after the announcement, Wisconsin Environment and its affiliates across the country launched a campaign to educate Americans about the consequences of global warming and the meaningful impact of the Clean Power Plan. The Clean Power Plan would be the biggest step the U.S. has ever taken to cut global warming pollution.

“This is a huge deal,” said Wisconsin Environment State Advocate Megan Severson. “But it’s not a done deal. Polluters are spending millions to oppose these actions, so we’re working to ensure that people understand the threats posed by global warming and the opportunity the EPA’s plan presents for a cleaner environment, more efficient economy, and healthier families.”

more online

Take action and join our fight against global warming at:
www.WisconsinEnvironment.org

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy announced the Clean Power Plan, an historic step to limit pollution from power plants.