Dear Environment Michigan member,

The past year has seen a whirlwind of attacks on our state’s waters and air from polluters and their allies in government. 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 one issue.

The Great Lakes, our waterways, 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 Michigan in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler, Environment Michigan Regional Director

Jessica Surma
Field Associate

Shelley Vinyard
Federal Advocate

Joe Ready
Regional Citizen Outreach Director

“With your support, we’ll continue to fight for a cleaner, greener Michigan in the coming year.”
Healthy farms

From the first pint of strawberries in June to the last crisp red apple of fall, the abundance of a farmers 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 more than 300 local farmers markets across Michigan, we still get most of our food from huge industrial farms. Environment Michigan 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.

• With our affiliate groups, Environment Michigan released two reports that document agribusiness’ growing role 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.

Local, sustainably-managed farms avoid the excessive manure and pesticide runoff of their industrial counterparts.
Protect the Great Lakes

Whether it’s spending a day at the beach on St. Clair Shore or boating in Saginaw Bay, each of us treasures our time at the Great Lakes. But our waters are subject to increasing threats from toxic dumping, sewage overflows and agricultural runoff pollution. We’re working to clean up Lake Michigan and the rest of our waterways.

Thousands of Michiganders write EPA in support of clean water

For nearly 40 years, the Clean Water Act has protected the streams and wetlands that feed the Great Lakes and keep them clean. But a pair of poorly reasoned decisions by the Supreme Court have put our state’s waterways at risk—leaving more than half of Michigan’s streams without any protection whatsoever from pollution and overdevelopment. For the past few years, 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 Michigan’s waters. In April, the EPA announced a plan to restore protections to the small streams that feed our lakes.

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

• In Michigan and across America, our field organizers talked to hundreds of thousands of people, urging them to write their local media and local officials in support of strong clean water protections. Thanks in part to our public outcry, the Senate voted down the House bills. We sent Congress a clear message—our waterways are nobody’s dumping ground.
Another summer of beach closings

Whenever it rains, torrents of bacteria-filled, untreated sewage are released from overloaded water treatment plants into nearby waterways. Sewage in our waters can be disastrous to the health of humans and wildlife. Environment Michigan has been working to fix the problem by calling for an update to national wastewater treatment standards—and last year, the EPA started planning to do just that.

• Every year, more than 30 billion gallons of sewage are dumped into the Great Lakes, causing elevated levels of unsafe bacteria. In Michigan alone, this contributed to 363 days of beach closings or advisories last year.

• The EPA recently announced it would begin updating stormwater runoff rules to prevent sewage pollution, but it needs all the support it can get in the face of a hostile Congress bent on destroying its authority. We mobilized thousands of people to contact the EPA in support of the new rules.
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 Michigan’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.

Big move to get Michigan off oil

In July, Environment Michigan 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 tens of 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 miles-per-gallon 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.
Too much of our energy comes from coal, oil and other dirty sources that devastate our environment and cost Michiganders billions to import each year. But by using energy more efficiently and tapping Michigan’s vast renewable energy potential, we can start moving toward a clean energy economy that doesn’t pollute and never runs out.

Plug into clean energy

The cleanest source of power is the energy we don’t use in the first place. We’ve worked hard for efficiency programs that make it easy to cut down on energy usage. This summer, our advocacy helped educate the public and pass policies that will get us there.

• Our citizen outreach staff directed thousands of people to our online “Plug Into Clean Energy” guide, which provides clear resources and helpful tips on the best ways to start using less energy.

• Working alongside our partners from across the country, we helped win a historic 30 percent improvement in efficiency for model building codes, which provide the basis for building codes in cities and states nationwide.

Here are five low- to no-cost things you can do right now to cut your energy use:

1. Replace incandescent light bulbs with CFLs to cut your lighting costs by up to 75 percent.
2. Wash your laundry using cold water only.
3. Plug appliances into power strips, and turn them off when not in use.
4. Put aluminum foil behind radiators to reflect heat back into the room.
5. Scrape—rather than rinse—dishes, and only run the dishwasher when you have a full load.
Clean air, healthy families

We should be able to breathe clean air without worrying about mercury in our bloodstreams 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.

Congressional attacks on clean air voted down

After the EPA announced it would be updating clean air standards, polluters and their allies in Congress launched a coordinated attack to block the updates. But after lobbying key senators and rallying thousands of our activists to speak out, we held the line against some of the worst attacks:

- Last March, the U.S. Senate rejected a bill that would have blocked standards for soot, mercury and carbon pollution.

- When our own Rep. Fred Upton introduced a bill that tried to block the EPA from reducing smog and global warming pollution, our members protested at his office and showed up at his public appearances in support of the 170,000 Michigan children with asthma who would be especially hurt by the bill.

- In April, our advocacy helped convince the Senate to vote down that bill—and three others that would have blocked the EPA from reducing global warming pollution.
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:

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

• We partnered with our national coalition 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.

Environment Michigan’s Jessica Surma (left) and Rep. Hansen Clark released the report “Danger in the Air: Unhealthy Air Days in 2010 and 2011,” which shows that in total, Detroit-area residents were exposed to air quality that made it dangerous to breathe on 12 days last year.