



Will we get the change we need on energy?

Senate debates plan to repower America

As the U.S. Senate considers historic energy legislation, we're building support to ensure that we pass a bill that sets us on the path to repower America with clean energy.

The House's approval of the American Clean Energy and Security Act this summer marked a clear break from the inaction that characterized the federal government's response to global warming during the past eight years. If the Senate follows suit this fall, we'll see billions of dollars invested in energy efficiency and renewable power, and significant reductions in carbon pollution.

It's not perfect

Still, the energy bill passed by the House doesn't do all that's necessary. In order to win enough votes for passage, the bill's sponsors agreed to compromises that benefit oil and coal companies and other interests at the expense of taxpayers and the environment. But we can't wait any longer to get started fighting global warming. And this bill has the potential to transform our energy systems. That's why we decided to support and work extremely hard for passage of the bill.

Building support for change

Despite the concessions, the vote in the House was close, with just a seven-vote margin in favor of the legislation. Eight members of Michigan's delegation voted in favor of the bill.

Working along with other members of our national federation, Environment



▲ A wind turbine on the shore of Lake Superior in Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

America, we focused much of our energy on building support among citizens and key constituencies that could influence the deciding votes.

We educated citizens and lawmakers on the consequences of inaction or further delay. Our research showed that lower crop yields resulting from climate change could cost corn growers in Michigan \$32 million

each year. We released our findings in Lansing along with Keith Bolin, president of the American Corn Growers Association and Dr. David Skole, a professor of global change science at Michigan State University. We also gathered more than 5,000 petition signatures during one-on-one conversations with citizens across the state and from supporters and members who took action online.



more online

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/newsletters/fall09

Visit www.EnvironmentMichigan.org to sign the petition to repower America.



To our members

Seven votes. That was the slim margin by which the House of Representatives approved legislation this June to repower our country with clean energy and cap the pollution responsible for global warming. It goes to show you that even with a pro-environment president in the White House, and the largest block of pro-environment members of Congress in recent memory, we still have our work cut out for us.

From Michigan, Reps. John Dingell, John Conyers, Mark Schauer, Gary Peters, Sander Levin, Dale Kildee, Bart Stupak, and Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick voted in favor of the energy legislation.

The way Michigan's delegation votes will almost certainly have an effect as Congress considers legislation to restore our country's waters, protect our national forests, and clean up toxic sites in Michigan and across the country. Take action on our Web site to let your representative know you're standing up in support of Michigan's environment.

Sincerely,

Shelley Vinyard
Environmental Associate

Recent action

Cheap coal? Not quite

The coal and oil industries argue that, despite the damage fossil fuels do to our environment, their products remain the economical energy choice.

Not so, according to a study, "The High Cost of Fossil Fuels," released in June by Environment Michigan. Under a business-as-usual scenario, America will spend \$30 trillion on fossil fuels between 2010 and 2030. By transitioning to a clean energy economy that would save money through efficiency and the switch to renewable energy, we'll spend \$1.7 trillion less during that time while reducing the pollution that causes global warming.

"And it's not just about lowering our energy bills," says Environment Michigan's Environmental Associate Shelley Vinyard. "We'll save even more when you factor in the health care costs due to fossil fuel-related air pollution and other social costs."

A \$25 billion question

Will one of the best provisions of the American Clean Energy and Security Act survive the legislative process? If it does, it will keep 250 million tons of carbon pollution out of our atmosphere—the equivalent of taking 50 million cars off the road—while saving Americans an estimated \$25 billion per year.

The legislation, approved by the House in June (see Page 1), requires that all new buildings must be twice as energy-efficient as required by today's standard within seven years. After 2016, the standard ratchets up by 5 percent every three years. The efficiency gains would be achieved through better insulation, more energy-efficient lighting, and more efficient heating and cooling systems, among other steps.

The National Association of Homebuilders and the National Association of Office and Industrial Parks are lobbying to weaken the provision or strip it out of the Senate's version of the bill. We're urging the Senate to keep it in.

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Alex Snyder/Wayne National Forest

▲ Do you live in a green building? We could use your help as we work to keep new building efficiency standards in the Senate's version of the clean energy legislation. Contact Shelley Vinyard (svinyard@environmentmichigan.org) to get involved.



Reclaiming America's natural treasures

Akva (Shutterstock.com)

There's progress to report on our efforts to protect some of our most treasured natural places. This past summer, officials in the Obama administration issued a temporary halt to several Bush-era policies that put the interests of mining and logging industries before our country's natural heritage.

Time out on logging

In the early months of the Obama administration, our staff discovered that Bush administration holdovers within the Forest Service were still moving ahead with plans to approve logging, mining and roadbuilding in national forests in Colorado, Alaska, Idaho and Oregon.

In April, we documented these findings in a report, "Quietly Paving Paradise," and urged Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, who oversees our national forests, to put a stop to this major threat to our wild forests.

Thanks in part to the visibility we brought to the issue, Secretary Vilsack called a "time-out" on these destructive activities. Applications for logging, mining, drilling or road-building in nearly 50 million acres of our most pristine national forests will now require his personal approval.

And in August, a U.S. appeals court decided that Bush-era rollbacks of protections in roadless forests should be overturned. That's good news for America's 155 national forests, including Huron-Manistee National Forest.

But nothing's settled until a permanent moratorium on mining, logging and roadbuilding is enacted.

That's why we're calling on Secretary Vilsack to officially declare our national forests once again off limits to these destructive activities, a call echoed by Environment Michigan supporters and thousands of online activists from our sister organizations across the country in e-mails to Secretary Vilsack this spring and summer.

Mining reprieve at the Grand Canyon

As we've reported, mining companies have staked more than 1,000 claims within just five miles of Grand Canyon National Park. The toxic chemicals used in hardrock mining—including arsenic and cyanide—pose a major threat to the health of the Colorado River, which cuts through the Grand Canyon, and also to the well-being of the canyon's tourists and wildlife. (Hardrock mining has degraded approximately 40 percent of the headwaters that provide drinking water to communities across the West, according to EPA estimates.)

In July, President Obama's secretary of the interior, Ken Salazar, announced a two-year hold on any new mining leases within an area of more than 1,000 acres of public land surrounding the Grand Canyon.

We celebrated the announcement; now we're joining forces with the rest of our national federation, Environment America, to call for a permanent ban and to push Congress to protect all of America's treasured natural areas from destructive mining practices.



SNEHT (Shutterstock.com)

take action

Ban logging and drilling

Visit our Web site, where you can send a message asking Secretary Vilsack to place a permanent ban on logging and drilling in the national forests.



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Offshore drilling: Still dirty, still risky

Along our nation's coasts, the oil industry continues its push to expand offshore drilling, seizing on state-level budget pressures to convince lawmakers to allow this destructive activity.

The oil industry claims drilling technology has improved, which it has, but the process still pollutes our oceans and beaches at every stage from exploration to extraction. And the risk of catastrophic spills remains—an environmental nightmare that can cost millions to local economies and do irreparable harm to wildlife, as Florida residents were reminded after two oil spills in the Gulf of Mexico earlier this year. In response, our sister organizations in California and Florida jumped into action to save our waters and coasts from the threats of offshore drilling.

This summer, after Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger announced he was reversing his long-standing opposition to drilling, thousands of Environment California members and activists contacted officials in Sacramento. The state Assembly rejected the governor's plan, but our work isn't done since oil interests and some legislative leaders are still pushing to drill. Just two months earlier, Environment Florida helped stop a proposal in Tallahassee that would have opened Florida's coast to drilling. But with pro-drilling interests working on a ballot measure to not just allow, but mandate, drilling, we're still organizing to protect the coast.

 Find out more at www.EnvironmentMichigan.org.

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Environment Michigan

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 Environment Michigan. We focus exclusively on protecting Michigan'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.

Restoring the Great Lakes

Into every great body of water flows a series of smaller streams and wetlands. If the smaller upstream waters are fouled or impaired, the larger waters, such as the Great Lakes, pay the price—as do the wildlife and fish that depend on them. Now polluters and developers are free to dump into these streams and pave over our wetlands.

Yet, a pair of misguided Supreme Court decisions put the Great Lakes and more than 900,000 acres of wetlands and thousands of small streams in Michigan at risk by declaring them beyond the scope of the federal Clean Water Act.

In June, we won our first victory when a Senate committee approved the Clean Water Restoration Act. Now, with Capitol Hill hearings coming up, Environment Michigan is building support to ensure that our congressional delegation acts to restore protections to all our waters.

Henryk Sadura (Shutterstock.com)



◀ *Lake Michigan from Zion State Park.*



*To learn more about the Clean Water Restoration Act and our program to protect the Great Lakes, please visit our Web site:
www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/great-lakes.*