



Winter Report

Repowering America with clean energy

Ambitious goals in 2009 and beyond

The clean energy tax credits that Environment Michigan and our national federation, Environment America, pushed in 2008 finally became law in October. Now we have turned our attention to making sure that the new president and Congress pass a comprehensive energy plan that will cut dependence on oil and reduce global warming. Together with our allies, we're getting behind a bold plan to repower America. We're calling for 100 percent renewable electricity and reducing America's dependence on oil 50 percent.

Saving energy through high-performance and even zero-energy homes and businesses can cut energy use by at least 30 percent. Energy efficiency is the fastest and cheapest way to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, but we also need new sources of clean, renewable homegrown energy.

Even with existing technology, solar power in the Southwest and in cities across America and wind power offshore and on land could provide the power to meet our electricity needs. There'd even be some power left for transportation. And new breakthroughs are being made every day that extend the reach of today's systems.

Political momentum

Environment America worked to persuade then President-elect Barack Obama and incoming members of the 111th Congress to commit to the following principles: use 100 percent renewable electricity; cut global warming pollution 80 percent by 2050; and cut oil use in half. We laid the groundwork by going door-to-door and activating our



▲ Now that clean energy incentives are renewed, we're focusing on a plan to achieve 100 percent renewable electricity.

e-mail list to build support for the plan. Our staff in Washington, D.C., identified the number of votes we could count on in Congress. Right after the election, we released "Renewing America," a report laying out a blueprint for how to rebuild our economy on a sound foundation of clean energy. We enlisted the support of scientists, business leaders and entrepreneurs to stand

up to the opposition from the oil, gas and coal industries.

Politically, the winds of change are blowing in our direction. President Obama pledged during his campaign to invest \$150 billion in clean, renewable energy, while many candidates for Senate made investment in clean energy a centerpiece of their campaigns.



more online

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/newsletters/winter09

◀ Environment America staff and volunteers rallied at the Capitol to support clean energy incentives.



To our members

What a breath of fresh air.

After eight years of a president with the worst environmental record, we find ourselves poised to make great strides in 2009 and beyond.

Our last president censored climate scientists. Our new president has pledged to do what it takes to prevent the worst effects of global warming. Our last president pushed for tax breaks for big oil. Our new president has promised to push forward a plan to end our dependence on Middle East oil in 10 years.

Perhaps more importantly, the last Congress needed eight tries to simply renew critical incentives for clean energy. The new Congress is populated by environmental leaders like Reps. Debbie Halvorson (Ill.) and Steve Kagen (Wis.), both of whom pledged to support clean, renewable energy.

It's cause for celebration, but also a call to put our nose to the grindstone so that we take advantage of the incredible opportunities that your support makes possible.

Sincerely,

Margie Alt, For Environment Michigan

Recent action

Making homes more energy efficient

In September, state building code officials from across the country approved the largest improvement in building codes in recent history. The move will increase the energy efficiency of new homes by as much as 20 percent. Environment Michigan and our national federation, Environment America, called for making building codes 30 percent more efficient—a goal that our research showed was feasible with current technology. To make the case we released a white paper in July titled, “Building an Energy-Efficient America.” Later that month, our sister organization Environment Maryland’s Brad Heavner testified before a key congressional committee, urging the federal government to support efforts to improve building efficiency.

“Much work needs to be done to move America toward a future of super-efficient and, better yet, zero-energy buildings,” said Rob Sargent, our federal chief energy advocate. “But this step signifies progress, and we’re happy to see it.”

Historic regional agreement to protect Great Lakes

In late September, our two-year campaign to protect the Great Lakes culminated in Congress approving the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact, a multi-state agreement to ensure more sustainable use of Great Lakes water. Millions of Americans depend on the Great Lakes for drinking water and recreation, and although vast, the lakes are vulnerable. When too much water is taken out of the Lakes, everything from shoreline wildlife to fishing and boating is disrupted.

The Great Lakes Compact will help prevent this threat by prohibiting nearly all new or increased out-of-basin water diversions and by requiring Great Lakes states to develop water conservation and efficiency programs. Over the last two years, Environment Michigan, Environment Illinois, Wisconsin Environment and other state members of the Environment America federation worked to pass the Great Lakes Compact in their respective states, and our staff in Washington, D.C., advocated its passage in Congress.

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▲ Lake Huron in winter.



States continue to set bar for action on global warming

In October, Environment Michigan released “Feeling the Heat,” a report that identified 2007 as one of the warmest years on record. The report demonstrates once again that we’re in a race against time to reduce the carbon pollution that causes global warming. In recent months, our national federation, Environment America, has helped make progress putting policy solutions in place at the state and regional levels—progress that provides building blocks for long overdue action on global warming at the federal level.

Environment Michigan believes that an effective national program will require three elements. First, a national global warming plan will require a cap on carbon emissions that’s strong enough to prevent catastrophic effects of global warming. The program also must accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy. Lastly, companies must pay to pollute, providing an incentive to reduce emissions and fund new technology to cut global warming pollution.

Northeast, Western states’ plans

On Sept. 25, 10 Northeast and Mid-Atlantic states announced the nation’s first auction of pollution permits under a global warming emissions cap. The historic move was a culminating step of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a program that caps global warming emissions from power plants.

Our federation of organizations fought to make RGGI the first program to sell all pollution permits rather than give them to polluters for free. The states will use the revenue to promote energy conservation and renewable energy.

On Sept. 23, seven Western states announced the details for implementing the Western Climate Initiative, which builds on the regional approach taken by RGGI, but extends it to economy-wide emissions. The plan will reduce global warming pollution by at least 15 percent below 2005 levels by 2020.

And in the Midwest, six governors signed on to the Midwestern Green House Gas Reduction Accord, including Michigan’s Gov. Jennifer Granholm. The accord aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by creating goals, incentives and cap-and-trade system.

Effecting a national approach

Science-based emission caps, applied to the entire economy (power plants, transportation manufacturing and everything else that emits carbon dioxide), with the right incentives and penalties should serve as the model for national action.

Our progress in the states provides valuable lessons and much needed momentum toward a federal approach to global warming legislation. In early October, we helped organize 152 members of Congress to send a letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, laying out strong principles for action on global warming.

“This letter, and the support we can count on in the new Congress, sets the stage for action on global warming,” said Federal Global Warming Program Director Emily Figdor.



Feeling the Heat

Rising temperatures

Environment Michigan’s new report documents rising temperatures across Michigan. Read the full report on our Web site.



Parting shots at national forests

Right now, 16,000 miles of roads traverse our national forests, dividing critical habitat for wildlife and opening the door for chainsaws to follow. In 2001, our national federation, Environment America, and our allies halted this onslaught with the enactment of the Roadless Area Conservation Rule, which placed nearly 60 million acres of pristine forest land off-limits to road-building, mining and virtually all logging.

Unfortunately, the Bush administration has sought to undermine and circumvent these protections ever since. Already, they have consigned the entire Tongass National Forest to any logging and road-building the state of Alaska deems appropriate. And in its final months, the administration rushed to change the implementation of the Roadless Rule to allow logging, mining and drilling in Idaho’s pristine backcountry—the largest wilderness area in the continental United States.

Since the beginning of 2008, Environment America members have sent nearly 10,000 public comments to Forest Service Chief Gail Kimbell, demanding that she retain protections for all of our national forests. This public outcry will serve as a stark reminder to the next administration and Congress that America wants its most treasured forests permanently protected.



Read more about our work to protect forests at www.EnvironmentMichigan.org. Click on “Public Lands Protection.”



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Environment Michigan

Mission Statement

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.

Credits:

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Contributors: Anna Aurilio, Emily Figdor, Christy Leavitt, Rob Sargent, Jim Amspacher, Justin Boyles, Zach Cullimore, Matthew Curtis, Sara Landis, Ethan Lavine, Jenna Perry Leschuk, Jesse Littlewood, Ryan Moeckly, Leana Nordstrom, Dan Platt, Kate Powers, Nathan Proctor, Heather Shute, Jenne Turner. Publications Director: Richard J. Hannigan. Design: Public Interest GRFX (215) 985-1113.
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Funding for open space

Between 1992 and 2003, America lost an area larger than the state of Maine to development. Unfortunately, as states face tight budgets in 2009, history has shown that open space funding is often one of the first programs on the chopping block. To stem this tide, research by our national federation, Environment America, showcased the work of 15 states to secure reliable funding for open space preservation programs.

The report, "Preserving America's Natural Heritage," highlights the programs set up by states to buy up remaining open space. The report recommends several measures to solve the problem of permanently funding land conservation programs—including multi-year bonds to create long-term stability and tax incentives for conservation easements. Michigan's Natural Resources Trust Fund was featured in the report as an example of a successful conservation funding program.



Michigan's efforts to protect public lands, such as Hartwick Pines State Park, is featured in our research.



Download "Preserving our Natural Heritage" from the reports section of our Web site.