



Winter Report

Sam Sefton (istockphoto.com)

Calling for a stronger Clean Water Act

More protections needed, report reveals

We've come a long way since 1972, when the Clean Water Act promised clean, safe water for all Americans. Yet the promise is still unkept.

A recent investigation by The New York Times found sewage overflowing treatment systems, farm runoff polluting wells, and scores of illegal polluters escaping punishment. While the Clean Water Act works to protect drinking water and iconic waterways such as the Great Lakes, under a recent Supreme Court decision it does not protect many of the smaller streams and rivers that feed these waterways.

In October, Environment Michigan released a report, "Wasting Our Waterways: Industrial Toxic Pollution and the Unfulfilled Promise of the Clean Water Act." In it, we showed that industrial facilities dumped more than half a million pounds of toxic chemicals into Michigan waterways in 2007, the most recent data available.

Among the toxic chemicals discharged by facilities are lead, mercury, and dioxin. When dumped into waterways, these toxic chemicals contaminate drinking water and are absorbed by the fish that people eventually eat. Exposure to these chemicals is linked to cancer, developmental disorders, and reproductive disorders. Polluters discharged toxic chemicals into 1,900 waterways nationwide. Lake Erie was one of the 20 waterways which received the most developmental toxicants, chemicals that have been linked to impeded development of fetuses and children.



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▲ Holloway Reservoir in Columbiaville.

While nearly half of the rivers and lakes in the United States are considered too polluted for safe fishing or swimming, our report showed that polluters continue to use our waterways as dumping grounds for their toxic chemicals.

To protect the waterways we treasure for their beauty, recreational use and drinking water, we need to make sure all of Michi-

gan's surface waters are protected. Tougher enforcement, money to upgrade sewage plants, and steps to prevent pollution at the source are common-sense ways we can turn the tide against toxic pollution. We're working to make sure Congress passes the Clean Water Restoration Act, which would restore the act to its original scope, and make sure all our waters are protected for the next 30 years and beyond.



Staff

more online

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentMichigan.org/newsletters/winter10

◀ Environmental Associate Shelley Vinyard calls for increased energy-efficiency measures in Michigan.



To our members

“This progress did not come easily and we know that this progress alone is not enough,” said President Obama, about the Copenhagen Accord.

I share the president’s sober assessment. Unless we do more and do it quickly, temperatures and sea levels will keep rising.

That’s why we continue to urge strong action in cities and at the state level and federal levels.

Yet the profound challenge we face on global warming also brings opportunity—to clean our air and water, end our dependence on oil, and rebuild our economy. The vested interests on the other side remain strong, but I’m putting my faith in the millions of Americans who understand that the time for a new energy future is now.

Thank you, as always, for making our work possible.

Sincerely,



Shelley Vinyard
Environmental Associate

Recent action

Here comes the sun

New policies advanced by our advocates and activists across the country will result in more than four gigawatts of new solar power by 2020—more than five times the amount generated today.

“We’re just getting started,” said Rob Sargent, Environment Michigan’s federal energy program director. After winning approval of expanded rebates in California and new solar home options in Colorado and New Jersey, our federation is teaming up with the Solar Alliance and the Solar Energy Industries Association to win more pro-solar policies at both the state and federal level.

“We’re ready to make solar power the centerpiece of America’s new clean energy economy,” said Sargent. “If we can make it easier for more people to go solar now, we’ll reap the benefits for decades to come.”

Toxic chemicals on tap

America’s enormous potential to run on clean energy is being undermined by recent interest and investments in more dangerous forms of energy. Hydraulic fracturing, a type of gas drilling that injects a mix of water, chemicals and sand underground at high pressure to extract gas, is catching on in Michigan and other states. The practice—which uses more than 260 chemicals that stay in the ground long after gas companies move on—has been linked to residential drinking water contamination and the potential for explosive gas leaks. Michigan is home to one of the largest natural gas fields in the country, the Antrim shale, which is near many of our treasured waters.

Our November report, “Toxic Chemicals on Tap,” recommended ways to make sure that, if fracturing is done, it is done in a way that poses less of a threat to our environment and drinking water by: replacing dangerous chemicals with safer alternatives, better disposing of the fluids used in the process, drilling in areas distant from drinking water, holding drillers accountable for the costs involved, and making sure residents know the extent of drilling near their homes.



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How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment Michigan.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or e-mail PlannedGiving@EnvironmentMichigan.org.



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New light in the search for climate solutions

S.Borisov (Shutterstock.com)

As America's leaders searched in recent months for the right responses to global warming, Environment America Research and Policy Center, a project of our national federation, released four studies illuminating the paths forward—and at least one dead end.

Our first report looked at America's carbon pollution since 1990. The national trend is troubling, with emissions rising by nearly a fifth. Yet we found that in 17 states and in Washington, D.C., emissions peaked by 2005 and began to decline thereafter.

Why the decline? A key factor is the decision by state and local governments to improve energy efficiency programs and invest in clean energy.

"These findings suggest that the pollution reduction goals being debated in Congress are modest and achievable," said Emily Figdor, Environment Michigan's federal global warming program director.

America on the move

We further examined state initiatives in another report, released on the eve of the global summit on climate change in Copenhagen. While most of the world views the United States as a laggard on the issue, and rightly so, our report found state initiatives having a significant impact: By 2020, they should reduce carbon emissions by 536 million metric tons. That's more global warming pollution than is currently emitted by all but eight of the world's nations.

The report won praise from many different states' leaders, including California's Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger, Wisconsin's Gov. Jim Doyle, and Michigan's director of the Department of Energy, Labor, and Economic Growth, Stanley "Skip" Pruss. Dan Jacobson and Courtney Abrams, federal advocates for Environment Michigan, traveled to Copenhagen to trumpet the report's findings.

Further reductions are, of course, both possible and necessary, and a third report

suggests where we can achieve them. "America's Biggest Polluters" found that power plants released 2.56 billion tons of carbon pollution in 2007, a whopping 42 percent of the country's total.

We found the nation's oldest plants to be the dirtiest. Less than half of all plants were built before 1980, but these coal-fired clunkers emit nearly three quarters of the industry's carbon.

Finally, our research team also released a report taking a critical look at nuclear power's role in solving global warming (see sidebar, at right).

As our advocates lobbied senators to strengthen and pass national global warming legislation, we also sought to build support for a series of Obama administration initiatives. In November, Figdor testified at an EPA hearing in favor of strong action to hold power plants accountable for their carbon emissions.

Our citizen outreach staff, organizers and online activists helped demonstrate public support for the proposal. Together with our allies, we helped mobilize tens of thousands of people to send official comments to the EPA.



report

America's Biggest Polluters

Our research revealed that power plants released 2.56 billion tons of carbon pollution in 2007, 42 percent of the country's total carbon pollution.



James Marvin Phelps (Creative Commons)

Report highlight: Generating Failure

In November, an Environment Michigan report, entitled "Generating Failure," investigated whether nuclear power can help solve the climate crisis. The nuclear industry is seeking tens of billions of dollars in new federal subsidies, on top of hundreds of billions of dollars in existing subsidies. Yet our research indicates this massive investment is more likely to set America back in the race to solve global warming.

While scientists recommend deeper cuts, members of Congress have called for a 20 percent reduction in global warming pollution by 2020. However, planning and constructing a new nuclear plant takes time. As the *Los Angeles Times* reports, "The last time there was a wave of nuclear construction in the United States, it took an average of nine years to build a plant." Even if work began today on the estimated 100 plants envisioned by the industry, the first plants wouldn't come online until 2019—too late to make a significant dent in the 20 percent goal.

Building the plants would cost at least \$600 billion. Yet a similar investment in energy efficiency and renewable power would deliver twice the carbon reduction by 2030. "The nuclear option would deliver too little, too late to matter, while diverting money from safer, faster alternatives," said Emily Figdor, Environment Michigan's federal global warming program director.



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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 space. 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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Keeping our parks open

Beautiful, pristine parks are a welcome and treasured escape from everyday life for millions and millions of Americans. But across the country, state officials are slashing budgets for a wide array of programs and services, including state parks. With the nation's largest budget deficit, California recently flirted with the most extreme such step to date—closing most of the state's 278 state parks, among the nation's most scenic.

Environment California, our sister group, moved to keep the parks open. As their 150,000-strong activist network inundated Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger with letters, calls and e-mails, their advocates pointed out that the parks, as in many states, generate more revenue than they cost.

In September, the governor relented, announcing that all of the parks will stay open. There's still work to do, though. We're seeking a permanent funding source at the federal level to prove that parks don't have to be sacrificed in the next budget battle in any state.



◀ *Onaway State Park.*



Visit www.EnvironmentMichigan.org and click on "Preservation" to learn more about our efforts to protect Michigan's state parks and public lands.