Fiscal Year 2019 Annual Report
Thanks for making it all possible
To be an environmentalist, you’ve got to wrestle with a conundrum: We need bold action on a short timeline ... with broad public support.

We need to do a lot, quickly, to preserve a livable planet. But progress has to earn and sustain the support of the people in order to last—so progress doesn’t often come in one big swooping action. It usually comes one small-ish victory at a time.

At Environment Michigan, we acknowledge the conundrum—and we embrace it. We believe in bold action on a large scale. But we work every day at the local, state and national levels to build, step by step, the support this action demands. Each college, or city or state that deploys more renewable energy helps win more people over to the possibility of a world that runs on the sun and the wind. Each company or state that phases out a single-use plastic product shows more people a way to end harm to ocean wildlife from plastic pollution.

These victories are smaller than the challenges demand. But as their pace picks up, their summary effect grows. A year ago, California became the second state to commit to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity. Now, there are six states with such commitments, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. Back in 2016, California banned single-use plastic bags. In 2019, five more states banned plastic bags, and Maine, Maryland and Vermont banned plastic foam take-out containers. Like all social changes, environmental solutions have tipping points.

Our natural world faces serious problems, and we’ve got to solve them. Our strategy is to make sure that each victory opens a door to the next. Thanks for being with us on the journey.

Sincerely,

Nathan Murphy
State Director, Environment Michigan
Clean Water & Air

Through our Clean Water & Air program, our staff and members tackled problems ranging from the Trump administration’s attempts to roll back clean water standards, to industrial discharges that violate the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. Below, you’ll find updates on our national network’s Litigation Project, and our efforts to bolster investment in Michigan’s water infrastructure.

Polluting incinerator shut down in Detroit
APRIL, 3, 2019: For the first summer in years, people in Detroit neighborhoods surrounding a municipal trash incinerator can go outside without the stench of garbage or the impacts on air quality from the facility.

This January, Environment Michigan and our coalition partners sent Detroit Renewable Power a notice of intent to file a lawsuit to force compliance with its Clean Air Act permits. Four days before we were set to file the lawsuit, the company decided to shut the facility down.

The incinerator had operated since the early 1990s, creating a strong smell of garbage in the neighborhoods around it and, according to our investigations, routinely exceeding its Clean Air Act permits for carbon monoxide. Carbon monoxide is an indicator of incomplete combustion, which also results in emissions of dangerous chemicals including benzene, toluene, dioxins and formaldehyde.

Action taken to remove lead from drinking water
JULY 15, 2019: Michigan is the Great Lakes State — we’re known for our water riches.

Sadly, our ability to ensure that the water coming out of the tap is safe for our families is increasingly in doubt. In the wake of the Flint water crisis, the public began to realize that the risk of lead in our drinking water is pervasive across the state. As more places tested for lead, more places found lead contamination from service lines and in fixtures and plumbing.

Environment Michigan continues to engage with stakeholders around the state and work with our legislators and agency personnel to update Michigan’s law and rules, allocate money to help protect our communities, and ensure that every Michigan family has safe drinking water.

John Rumpler, senior director of our national network’s Clean Water campaign, spoke to CBS This Morning about widespread lead contamination in school drinking water.
Above: Rob Sargent toured the nation’s first offshore wind farm at Block Island, R.I. (upper left). Below: Our national network campaigned for 100% renewable energy across the country, from California (left) to Florida (right).
Clean, Green & Renewable Energy

With support from Environment Michigan’s members, our national network promoted energy efficiency in our homes, educated city leaders about solar, and fostered the development of wind power. Here are updates on our network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign and our research arm’s “Shining Cities” report.

Six states are now committed to 100% clean energy

JULY 1, 2019: In 2018, only one state had committed to 100 percent clean energy. Six months ago, there were two. Now there are six.

In June, Maine and New York became the latest states to pass laws committing to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity, joining Hawaii (2015), California (2018), New Mexico (March) and Washington state (May). Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., have made similar commitments.

“Within less than a year, four states have said, ‘If California can do it, so can we,’” said Rob Sargent, director of our national network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign. “We’re urging decision-makers across the country to join the 100 percent renewable movement and put the United States back on the world map as a climate leader.”

Our network helped win the laws in California, New Mexico, Washington and Maine. We’re also advocating for 100 percent renewable energy laws in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota.

Solar power is growing fast. These cities are shining the brightest.

APRIL 9, 2019: Solar power is booming in dozens of major American cities.

“Shining Cities 2019,” researched by Environment America Research & Policy Center and released on April 9, found that solar energy capacity more than doubled in 45 of America’s 57 largest cities in the past six years. The report’s main event? The latest ranking of America’s top solar cities. Los Angeles topped the list for the second year in a row, and San Diego, Phoenix, Honolulu and San Jose rounded out the top five.

“Cities are rapidly adopting solar energy and driving the renewable energy transition across the country, bringing pollution-free power to our homes, schools and workplaces,” said Emma Searson, director of our national network’s Go Solar campaign.

The report also found that solar is not just a Sun Belt phenomenon. Other leading cities include New York City; Indianapolis; Washington, D.C.; Trenton, New Jersey; and Ypsilanti, Michigan.
Leaders of our national network’s canvass team met in Baltimore before spreading across the country to build public support for putting wildlife over waste by banning single-use plastics.
Our network’s staff and members sought to revive the country’s best conservation and recreation program, and to spare Arctic wildlife from oil and gas exploration and drilling. Below, find more on our national network’s efforts to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and save the bees from toxic pesticides.

**Bill to ban most forms of polystyrene will be introduced**

**JUNE 9, 2019:** A state representative is planning to introduce a bill to ban most forms of polystyrene.

Rep. Yousef Rabhi (Ann Arbor) plans to introduce the bill after working with Environment Michigan.

Polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam, is one of the worst forms of plastic pollution. It does not biodegrade, and instead gets into our lakes and streams where it breaks into pieces. The large items are unsightly, and as it breaks into smaller pieces, different types of wildlife may mistake it for food. Once ingested, it provides no nutritional value. It can clog their digestive tracts and leach chemicals into an organism’s bloodstream.

“We know these convenience plastics are not worth the harm they cause to wildlife. Nothing that we use for a few minutes or hours should be out there harming wildlife for centuries,” said Environment Michigan State Director Nathan Murphy. “We also know there are better alternatives, and a number of major restaurant chains have moved away from using polystyrene.”

**Dams removed to restore the Huron River**

**MAY 7, 2019:** This summer, the Ypsilanti City Council took action to restore a substantial stretch of free-flowing Huron River by removing the Peninsular Paper Dam.

Environment Michigan State Director Nathan Murphy spoke out at a public meeting in early 2019, on behalf of our members, encouraging the removal of the dam to restore the natural flow of the river and benefit the wildlife in the Huron River.

For years, the city of Ypsilanti had owned the dam, which blocked the flow of the Huron River in downtown Ypsilanti. When first built, the dam provided electricity to a paper mill. The dam has not generated power in decades and sits crumbling as it harms the river’s ecology and the wildlife that depend on flowing water. Removing the dam will go a long way toward restoring the waterway.
Above: Staff from our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center, along with their allies, delivered 350,000 public comments in support of federal Clean Car standards to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Below: Andrea McGimsey and Environment America Research & Policy Center staff hosted a tour of an electric bus facility (upper middle and bottom right).
Global Warming Solutions

Environment Michigan worked with other state groups in our network to reduce carbon emissions from power plants, transportation and other sources. Here’s more on what our network did to promote state-level action across the country and defend strong pollution standards for cars and trucks.

Wrong way for the climate: 350,000 oppose rollback of Clean Cars Standards

OCT. 26, 2018: Given the alarming ways our climate is changing, doesn’t it make sense for automakers to focus on making cars that pollute far less, if at all?

On Oct. 26, our network’s national research partner showed the Trump administration that 350,000 Americans think so. Together with coalition partners, Environment America Research & Policy Center delivered that many public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration opposing plans to roll back federal Clean Car Standards. By freezing the standards at 2020 levels, the plan would lock in more dirty air and global warming pollution.

“With the latest research telling us we’ll have a climate catastrophe on our hands if we don’t significantly slash global warming emissions, we need to move forward, not pull a U-turn,” said Andrea.

Our network is also calling on state leaders to promote zero-emission electric vehicles.

Twelve ways a governor can start tackling climate change right now

JAN. 10, 2019: As 20 new governors took office in January, a new report outlined actions all governors could take to lead the way on climate solutions.

On Jan. 10, our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center released a report titled “Climate Solutions from Day One,” which detailed 12 executive actions that governors can take immediately to help solve the climate crisis. These range from updating building codes to improve energy efficiency—as Gov. Kate Brown has already done in Oregon—to collaborating in regional climate initiatives like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative in the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic.

“With the stroke of a pen, governors can start cutting global warming pollution today by increasing renewable energy use, reducing transportation emissions and curbing energy waste,” said Andrea McGimsey, senior director of our national network’s Global Warming Solutions program.

Our network urged governors across the country to adopt these recommendations.

We need to move forward, not pull a U-turn.

Andrea McGimsey
Senior Director, Global Warming Solutions campaign,
on the federal roll back of Clean Car standards
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