Progress in restoring the Clean Water Act

Working to protect all of Iowa's waterways

In 1969, the abuse of America's waterways hit a new level. Ohio's Cuyahoga River—already infamous for the black oil that floated on its surface, the trash that lined its banks, and the complete absence of animal life within its waters—caught fire. The incident, along with a Time magazine article that covered the fire and called the Cuyahoga the river that “oozes rather than flows,” helped spur the modern environmental movement, which resulted in the passage in 1972 of the Clean Water Act. For decades, government officials and citizen activists used the Clean Water Act to reduce industrial discharges into our waterways, large and small. When polluters balked, the EPA imposed tough penalties, compelling companies to clean up their act.

Progress at risk

Today that progress is at risk due to two poorly reasoned court decisions that have, in the words of a recent report published by Environment Iowa and other groups, “shattered the fundamental framework of the Clean Water Act” and placed thousands of polluters beyond the law’s reach. In the decisions, reached in part at the behest of private developers, a slim majority of justices ignored the Clean Water Act’s promise to protect all “waters of the United States.” Instead, the judges seized upon a single word—“navigable”—to call protections into doubt for a fifth of the nation’s wetlands and more than half of our streams. “We are, in essence, shutting down our Clean Water programs in some states,” said one EPA lawyer. “When companies figure out the cops can’t operate, they start remembering how much cheaper it is to just dump stuff in a nearby creek.”

In Iowa, hundreds of streams and thousands of acres of wetlands could now be open to unregulated dumping. These streams feed major waterways, such as the Iowa River, and the wetlands provide vital protection from flooding.

Environment Iowa is calling on our congressional delegation to restore Clean Water Act protections to all of our waters. Yet a coalition of powerful industries is pushing back. To counter the polluters’ lobby and join us in our call to restore clean water protections to all of Iowa’s waterways, big and small, we’ll need the help of Iowans across the state.

more online

Links to more information are posted at www.EnvironmentIowa.org

Environment Iowa State Associate Eric Nost, with U.S. Sen. Tom Harkin in April.
To our members

In political circles, questions about what steps we should take to protect our environment are almost always contentious and often divisive.

Yet with most of the people I meet as I travel around the state, politics takes a back seat when it comes to the places we love, whether it’s our clear lakes, our vital rivers, or even a local patch of woods.

We don’t question whether they’re worth protecting—most of us struggle to understand how anyone could see it any other way.

This summer, Environment Iowa is working to defend our lakes, rivers and streams by restoring their protection from pollution under the Clean Water Act.

We have a chance to make big progress this summer, but we need all the support we can get to make sure our lawmakers act. I hope you’ll join us as we push for real solutions for all of Iowa’s waters, big and small.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Regional Program Director

Recent action

New auto emissions standards build on states’ work

New fuel economy and auto emission standards approved on April 1 by the Obama administration will reduce the nation’s oil dependence by 11.6 billion gallons by 2016, an amount equal to half the oil we import from Saudi Arabia each year.

The standards were made possible thanks in part to the grassroots advocacy and action of our national federation, Environment America, especially in the 14 states where our staff and members helped win approval of state emission standards over the last decade—victories that set the stage for the president’s plan.

Still, the new Clean Cars standards face at least one last hurdle. Big Oil and its allies in Congress—led by Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—have pushed to block the Obama administration’s efforts to limit carbon pollution, including the new Clean Cars standards. Visit our website to take action and help fight back against these attacks in Congress.

More evidence against offshore drilling

At the time of writing this newsletter, the oil slick emanating from BP’s Deepwater Horizon rig had spread over 3,200 square miles of the Gulf. That’s more than three times the size of Rhode Island.

It’s hard to overstate the likely ecological damage. Already, as much as 200,000 gallons of oil per day are bubbling up through waters populated with endangered bluefin tuna and sperm whales. The Breton Island National Wildlife Refuge—established 100 years ago by Teddy Roosevelt and home to thousands of brown pelicans—stands right in the oil slick’s path. As the oil oozes toward the shore, Louisiana’s famed seafood—fish, shrimp, oysters—will be hit hard as well.

This is the catastrophe that the oil industry has been telling us is impossible. We can expand drilling, they’ve told us, because new technology has made drilling “clean and safe.” The spill is proof that this is untrue. That’s why we called on President Obama to reverse his recent support for expanding offshore drilling and are working to prevent future oil spills on our nation’s coasts.

Green Century Funds

AN INVESTMENT FOR YOUR FUTURE
TO LEARN ABOUT ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE MUTUAL FUNDS
CALL 800-93-GREEN OR VISIT WWW.GREENCENTURY.COM

Before investing, carefully consider the Funds’ investment objectives, risks, charges and expenses. Contact Green Century for a prospectus that contains this and other information. Please read it carefully before investing. Investments are not FDIC insured, nor are they deposits or guaranteed by a bank or any other entity, so they may lose value.
Distributed by UMB Distribution Services, LLC. 4/10

President Obama announces new Clean Cars standards.
Making the Great Outdoors even greater

A plan to restore national parks and more

From taking camping vacations with our families, fishing trips with our friends, hiking trips or canoe adventures, we all want our children and their children to be able to enjoy our state’s natural beauty just as we have.

Environment Iowa has a legacy of fighting for our state parks—we were there at the start of the movement to support the Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment. And now, we have a new opportunity to better protect, restore and, in a few cases, expand America’s national parks and other protected special places.

From the rolling hills, shaded streams and hidden caves of the Ozarks in Missouri, down to the desert wonders in Texas’ Big Bend mountains, all the way out west to Mt. Rainier, national parks are some of the most inspiring places in the world. Our experiences with them have helped forge our identity as Americans. In fact, they’ve been called “America’s best idea.”

President Obama’s interior secretary, Ken Salazar, who oversees the national parks, recently announced an initiative to invest new resources and energy in protecting our country’s natural legacy. Which places and projects will be on the list? That will be determined in part by public input, so we’re helping to organize thousands of citizens to make their voices heard in order to:

• Repair the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri, where eroded stream banks and beat-up trails have degraded the outdoor experience for visitors.

• Protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in Northern Minnesota and Glacier National Park in Montana. In both places, the stunning scenery, pristine waters and wildlife are threatened by toxic drilling and mining projects proposed just beyond their borders, even on waterways that flow directly into the wilderness.

• Restore Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, where park officials have been forced to close trails and scenic overlooks of the Blue Ridge Mountains due to inadequate funds.

• Expand Big Bend National Park in Texas to include the stunning Christmas Mountains just outside its northwest border, and Mount Rainier National Park in Washington to include the Carbon River Rainforest, one of our last remaining rainforests, to create a wildlife corridor stretching from the park to Puget Sound.

• Complete Acadia National Park on the coast of Maine by securing funding to purchase nearly 1,000 acres of land within the perimeter of the park that are currently vulnerable to private development.

To win the support of Secretary Salazar, Congress (which controls the budget of the national parks), and state officials, whose support will be critical for these projects, our citizen outreach staff will engage tens of thousands of Americans this summer.

Report Highlight: Building Better

Iowa families could save about $1,400 per year on their energy bills by 2050 if we start investing in the energy efficiency of our buildings today. Environment Iowa researchers calculated the savings as part of a report, released in March, entitled “Building Better.”

Our researchers pored over government data to estimate the reduced energy consumption, decreased fossil fuel use, money saved on energy bills, and pollution that would be prevented if we committed to dramatically improving the efficiency of new and existing buildings.

How much energy would we save across the country? Enough, we estimate, to power 235 million homes every year.

Iowa in particular has potential to drastically cut its global warming emissions—by 2050, efficiency measures could reduce Iowa’s emissions by 36 percent. That’s a bigger potential reduction as a percentage of our emissions than 47 of the 49 other states.

The Obama administration has provided $16 billion for efficiency-boosting weatherization programs and more funding and programs could be on the way soon.

And, as Environment Iowa’s Senior Energy Policy Analyst Rob Sargent points out, “most buildings last for decades, so investing in energy efficiency locks in savings for years to come.”

Learn more about our campaign for America’s national parks by visiting the website of our national federation, Environment America, at www.EnvironmentAmerica.org.

Find additional content online at www.EnvironmentIowa.org.
America could harness the power of the sun to supply 10 percent of our electricity by 2030 if we adopt a set of relatively simple policy solutions, according to a report we released this spring. What’s 10 percent? More energy than we produce at every nuclear power plant in the country.

Our report examines a wide variety of solar technologies and tools, including photovoltaics, concentrating solar power, solar water heaters, solar space heating and passive solar design. Use of these technologies, while already occurring in places from Wal-Mart stores to Boston’s Fenway Park, could be greatly expanded through new investments in research and development, stronger renewable electricity standards and incentives, and green building codes and standards—all of which are part of our Repower America agenda.