



Winter Report

Promise of Clean Water Act unfulfilled

More protections needed for Iowa's waterways

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 interpretation it does not protect many of the smaller streams and rivers that feed these waterways.

In October, Environment Iowa 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 nearly 3.5 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Iowa waterways in 2007—the most recent data available.

In particular, Tyson Fresh Meats at Columbus Junction was the largest reported toxic-chemical polluter in the state that year, releasing almost 1.4 million pounds of the waste into the Iowa and Cedar Rivers. Tyson dumped 391,000 pounds into the Raccoon River, as well.

Among the toxic chemicals discharged by facilities are lead, mercury and dioxin. When dumped into waterways, these toxic chemicals contaminate drinking water and



▲ Recent interpretations of the Clean Water Act leave smaller streams and rivers unprotected.

are absorbed by the fish that people eventually eat. Exposure to these chemicals is linked to cancer, developmental disorders and reproductive disorders.

Nitrates account for 90 percent of the volume of all Toxics Release Inventory discharges. These are the same compounds, typically associated with farm runoff that less than a month ago contributed to an

algae bloom which prompted the city of Des Moines to stop drawing from the Raccoon for drinking water.

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.



Doug Niemela

more online

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

◀ State Associate Eric Nost releases an Environment Iowa report on energy efficiency measures.



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, at the state level as well as in Washington.

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 this work possible.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Regional Program Director

Recent action

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. They’re seeking a permanent funding source to prove that parks don’t have to be sacrificed in the next budget battle in any state.

Getting On Track

Transportation is responsible for more than two-thirds of our dependence on oil, and about one-third of our carbon dioxide pollution. That’s why Environment Iowa continues to push our leaders to make a strong investment in public transit—and that’s why the growing public trend of using transportation options other than driving is making a big difference.

This fall, Environment Iowa released “Getting On Track,” a transportation report that analyzed the environmental benefits of record-high transit ridership across the country in 2008.

Driven by high gas prices, people drove less and replaced many car trips with public transit in 2008. In fact, Iowans reduced the miles they drove by a percentage higher than any other state. By doing so, we saved nearly 9 million gallons of gasoline—the equivalent of taking more than 15,300 cars off the road.



How do you want to be remembered?

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

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



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▲ Dolliver State Park

New light in the search for climate solutions

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 Iowa'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 of the nation's governors, including California's Arnold Schwarzenegger, Colorado's Bill Ritter, Wisconsin's Jim Doyle and Illinois's Pat Quinn. Dan Jacobson and Courtney Abrams, federal advocates for Environment Iowa, 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.

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Report highlight: Generating Failure

In November, an Environment Iowa 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 Iowa's federal global warming program director.



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3209 Ingersoll Ave., Ste. 210
Des Moines, IA 50312
(515) 243-5835

Environment Iowa

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Environment Iowa

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 Iowa. We focus exclusively on protecting Iowa'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.

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 Iowa’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 in Connecticut, Illinois and Maryland, as well as at the 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.”



Lisa F. Young (Shutterstock.com)

◀ *New policies will result in four gigawatts of new solar power by 2020.*

➡ Visit www.EnvironmentIowa.org and click on “New Energy Future” to read about our efforts to bring more clean energy to Iowa.