Standing strong for clean water

Polluters push to roll back protection

Summertime is when our rivers are on display. Whether we head out of town for a day of canoeing or reach for a glass of cold tap water, we rely on our rivers to make it through the summer. But Iowa’s rivers are more threatened than ever. We’ve been working for the past year to restore protection to our small streams and wetlands under the Clean Water Act, and therefore ensure the health of our larger waters. It hasn’t been easy, but we’re making progress: The Environmental Protection Agency is working on new rules to protect our rivers, and they’re due to be announced this summer.

A rough year for our waters

Hundreds of thousands of Iowans rely on our rivers for drinking water, fishing and recreation. Unfortunately, they’re some of the most polluted in the country, and their health is at greater risk than ever. Legal loopholes allow polluters to dump in the streams that feed into them, and to pave over the wetlands that keep them clean and protect our cities and towns from flooding during heavy rains.

Much of the pollution in our rivers comes from agribusiness dumping and spilling manure into our streams. What’s more, 62 percent of Iowa’s streams may no longer be protected by the Clean Water Act. These smaller waters are crucial to keeping our larger rivers clean.

As polluters and their allies in Congress tied up legislation and made attack after attack on our waters, Environment Iowa’s national federation, Environment America, joined our coalition partners to fight back. We exposed the polluter influence behind the threats and showed broad public support for clean water. On Feb. 14, we presented EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson with thousands of valentines for clean water. Two weeks later, we issued a report showing the growing influence of corporate agribusiness and its systematic efforts to roll back clean water laws. We’ve held the line so far, but as the debate over the nation’s spending continues, there is little doubt that polluters and their allies in Congress will keep trying to roll back protections for our water.

take action

We delivered thousands of valentines to EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson, showing public support for protecting the rivers and lakes we love.

Go online to take action for our water. www.EnvironmentIowa.org/action
Recent action

2010 a breakthrough year for solar

In an otherwise lackluster economy the solar industry shined brighter than ever before in 2010, with a 67 percent increase in the amount of solar energy projects installed across America compared to 2009.

That means more homes and businesses powered by pollution-free solar energy, an increase made possible by strong solar policies implemented at the urging of Environment Iowa. In December, Federal Clean Energy Advocate Sean Garren led our charge in Congress to extend critical incentives for solar power.

Environment Iowa, with the rest of the Environment America federation, continues to strategize with entrepreneurs within the solar industry to hit a far more ambitious benchmark: getting 10 percent of our nation’s energy from solar by 2030.

President pushes for conservation funding

Margie Alt, the director of our national federation, joined President Obama at the White House in February for his announcement that he’d seek the renewal of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

What’s the Land and Water Conservation Fund? For the past 45 years the federal government has put a fraction of the revenue from offshore drilling into a trust fund to expand national parks, protect hunting and fishing areas, and aid local conservation and recreation projects like city parks and playing fields.

In 2010, the Land and Water Conservation Fund spent money to protect important natural places in Iowa, including the Driftless Area National Wildlife Refuge, the Northern Tallgrass Prairie National Wildlife Refuge and the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife Refuge.

Our staff is currently building support for the approval of the conservation funding in Congress.

To our members

For thousands of Iowans, summer means getting in touch with the water—whether it’s canoeing down a river in the woods, taking a weekend trip out to the lakes, or just reaching for a glass of cold water.

Many of our waterways are cleaner today than they once were, thanks in large part to the Clean Water Act and other rules set by state and federal environmental officials. Despite the progress, too many of our invaluable waterways are still not clean enough. Runoff from factory farms chokes lakes and rivers throughout the Midwest with algae and pollution, and our drinking water suffers.

As we work to strengthen our laws and ensure that all of Iowa’s and America’s waterways are safe for swimming and fishing, polluters are filing lawsuits and pushing in Congress to block the EPA from doing its job. I hope you’ll join us this summer in showing your support for clean water.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Regional Program Director
For a healthy future, update the Clean Air Act

There’s no doubt that the Clean Air Act, which turned 40 in 2010, has improved the health and well-being of millions of Americans. Its protections are credited with saving the lives of 160,000 Americans in 2010 alone.

Of course, air pollution remains a pressing health threat in this country, a stark reminder of the work still left to do. In 2010, 13,200 Americans lost their lives as a result of heart attacks, strokes, asthma attacks or other fatal conditions brought on or exacerbated by air pollution from power plants. It’s estimated that one in six women of childbearing age has enough mercury in her bloodstream (a byproduct of coal power production) to put her child at risk should she become pregnant.

Thankfully, the Obama administration has announced it will seek to strengthen and update portions of the Clean Air Act in the coming months.

An assault on our health

With some vocal opponents of the Clean Air Act throwing their weight around in Congress, Environment Iowa, our national federation, Environment America, the American Lung Association and other public health organizations are building support to make sure the administration’s proposals go through.

In January, Environment Iowa Field Associate Jennifer Buchberger released a hard-hitting examination of one of the most dangerous air pollutants: mercury. That report, “Dirty Energy’s Assault on our Health,” documented waterways that carry advisories warning against fish consumption due to mercury pollution, including the Volga and Mississippi Rivers. According to the report, power plants in Iowa emitted 2,735 pounds of mercury pollution in 2009.

A taste of things to come?
The Obama administration’s updates to the Clean Air Act face great uncertainty, with polluting industries and their allies in Congress having launched an all-out assault on the landmark environmental law.

In February, the House of Representatives attached a provision to a federal funding bill that would have blocked the Environmental Protection Agency from cutting mercury pollution from cement plants, cleaning up soot pollution, and reducing carbon dioxide from coal-fired plants.

Less than a month later, the Senate rejected the funding bill, with many senators citing the environmental and public health attacks within the bill as one of the reasons for their opposition.

Yet, with some members of Congress still trying to block the EPA from doing its job, Environment Iowa is continuing to work for clean air and a healthier future.

Is nuclear power worth the risk?

Our hearts go out to the people of Japan who, after seeing a massive earthquake and tsunami strike their country, were forced to contend with an escalating nuclear crisis.

At press time, the consequences were still unfolding: Drinking water samples in Tokyo were contaminated with radioactive iodine at a level dangerous to infants. The sale of a dozen types of produce from the Fukushima region were banned due to potentially dangerous levels of radioactivity. Hundreds of thousands of people were evacuated from the area around the reactors. And high radiation levels were found in the nearby ocean waters.

Should we be concerned about America’s 104 nuclear plants, especially the Duane Arnold plant near Palo, posing similar risks to our children’s health and our environment? Based on our analysis, yes. At the most basic level, Mother Nature proved stronger than the best safeguards that Japan could design. Why would we be different?

Environment Iowa is urging the Obama administration and others to improve the safety of existing nuclear plants, declare a moratorium on new plants, and begin to responsibly phase out our use of nuclear power in favor of clean, renewable energy, like wind and solar power.

“Dirty Energy’s Assault On Our Health: Mercury”

To read the full report visit: www.EnvironmentIowa.org/reports

Duane Arnold nuclear power plant near Palo.
This spring, Environment Iowa Research & Policy Center released a report that details why big agribusiness remains one of the biggest roadblocks in the fight for clean water—the staggering scale of factory farms’ operations, and the depth of their wallets.

The report, “Growing Influence,” analyzes campaign contributions and lobbying expenditures from agribusiness interests—finding, for example, that ten large agribusiness interests gave $35 million to candidates for Congress over the past decade. The American Farm Bureau alone gave $16 million.

“Giant agricultural companies are throwing around millions of dollars to fight to continue polluting our rivers, lakes and streams,” said Environment Iowa federal Field Associate Jessica Buchberger.

In 2010 alone, Monsanto and the American Farm Bureau sent 80 lobbyists to Washington, D.C., to push for factory farm-friendly policies.

Check out our report online at: www.EnvironmentIowa.org/reports