Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2012
To our members

“We have you to thank for our victories, as well as for our continued ability to take on polluting special interests and protect our air, our water and the places we cherish.”

Over the past year, your support helped us win a number of landmark victories, both here in Illinois and nationwide.

Here at home, we celebrated a big win for our rivers, lakes and streams when the General Assembly passed a bill that strengthens the state’s ability to enforce pollution limits for factory farms. This important victory for our waterways is the culmination of a hard-fought campaign—we’ve been pushing the state to address agricultural runoff for years.

Together with our national federation, we helped build support for a number of historic victories for clean air and clean water. Thanks in part to our efforts, President Obama announced the first-ever nationwide limits on toxic mercury pollution from power plants. And in June, we rallied support for these limits and defeated a proposal to overturn them in the Senate. Now, new power plants will release 90 percent less mercury into our air and water.

But as we look back on the victories of the past year, it’s important to remember that we have so much more to do. Congress is threatening to let critical clean energy incentives die, and the coal industry is spending millions to stop the Environmental Protection Agency from finalizing limits on global warming-causing carbon pollution from power plants. We’re fighting back—already, we’ve helped mobilize a record-shattering 3 million people in support of the carbon standards.

We have you to thank for these victories, as well as for our continued ability to take on polluting special interests and protect our air, our water and the places we cherish. With you by our side, we will continue to fight for clean energy, a healthier planet and a brighter future.

Thanks for making our work possible.

Max Muller
Program Director
Environment Illinois
Get Illinois off Oil

What will an oil-independent Illinois look like? Cities with expanded public transit and a friendlier attitude toward walking and biking. High-speed rail and electric cars rather than oil-burning vehicles. This is not a distant dream—the technologies necessary to accomplish these goals already exist. All we need is the right combination of policies to build a cleaner, stronger Illinois.

Plan unveiled to reduce state’s oil dependence

Oil dependence is our number one cause of global warming. It’s a major source of smog and soot pollution, which causes asthma attacks and other health problems. It drains our wallets while leaving us vulnerable to global instability. This is the 21st century. It’s time to get off fossil fuel and transition to renewable energy and non-polluting transportation. And we’ve got a plan to make it happen.

- We have a plan to reduce Illinois’s oil consumption 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050. Recently, we released a report showing that these targets are well within our reach. Now we need the state Legislature and the governor to make reducing oil consumption an official state policy, and we need them to create a plan to meet specific reduction targets.

- In February 2012, a bill to reduce Illinois’s dependence on oil, SB 3527, was introduced and quickly opposed by Big Oil. The bill, spearheaded by Environment Illinois, Sen. Toi Hutchinson, and Rep. Art Turner, sets ambitious goals to cut Illinois’s oil use 30 percent by 2030 and 50 percent by 2050. It also tasks the state with developing a comprehensive plan to achieve the goals. This past summer, we pounded the pavement, talking to thousands of Illinoisans and raising support for our plan to get off oil.
Protect Lake Michigan

Whether it’s spending a day south of Chicago at Rainbow Beach or an afternoon sailing up north, we all treasure our time at Lake Michigan. But the lake is subject to increasing threats from toxic dumping, sewage overflows and agricultural runoff pollution, while the invasive Asian carp threatens to replace local fish populations. We’re working to protect Lake Michigan and the rest of our waterways from these threats, and keep our waters clean and beautiful for future generations.
Support built for restoring Clean Water Act protections

Whether we’re fishing off a dock, swimming at Oak Street Beach or sailing along the coast, we should be able to enjoy Lake Michigan without worrying about toxic dumping and irresponsible development. But in the last decade, polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions put over half of the streams and wetlands that feed the Great Lakes at risk. Luckily, the Obama administration has an Environment Illinois-backed plan to restore protections to all our waterways.

68 million pounds of toxic pollution reported

Lake Michigan’s importance to Illinois can’t be overstated. Millions of Illinoisans spend their summers swimming in its cool water and basking on the lakeshore, and many more rely on the lake’s thriving fishing industry for their livelihoods. Yet despite its beauty, immense popularity and importance to Illinoisans, the lake continues to be treated like a personal sewer for the region’s largest polluters.

- Two recent U.S. Supreme Court decisions left 55 percent of the streams and wetlands in the eight Great Lake states at risk of more pollution. Even worse, in 2010, 68 million pounds of toxic pollution were dumped into waterways in these states—much of which made its way into the Great Lakes, including Lake Michigan.

- President Obama is on the verge of taking the first major step in decades to protect the Great Lakes by setting new guidelines that will reduce pollution to the smaller waterways that feed and filter the lakes. But already the coal and oil industries, big agribusinesses, and their allies in Congress are doing everything they can to pull the rug out from under him. That’s why we’re mobilizing Illinoisans to take a stand for Lake Michigan.

President was poised to act

- Environment Illinois played a critical role in getting the administration to act. Along with our national federation, we talked to more than half a million people, gathered 88,000 public comments, and mobilized more than 500 elected officials, farmers and recreational businesses in support of the proposed guidelines.

- Once the guidelines are final, this will be the biggest victory for Lake Michigan in a decade. But our work is not done. Many in Congress are working to stop the president from finalizing these guidelines. That’s why we’ve been knocking on doors and talking to tens of thousands of Illinoisans across the state, building massive public support for Lake Michigan. Environment Illinois is committed to finalizing these new protections so that all Illinoisans can enjoy clean water.
Healthy Illinois Farms

For years, factory farms have been allowed to discharge excessive amounts of livestock waste and other pollutants into Illinois’s waterways—not because rules for agricultural pollution haven’t been in place, but because the state has been unable to enforce them. Until now. This summer, Environment Illinois celebrated an important victory for our rivers, lakes and streams when the General Assembly passed a bill that will strengthen the state’s ability to enforce pollution limits for factory farms.

Victory on water pollution from factory farms

All factory farms in the U.S. that discharge pollutants into waterways must obtain a pollution permit from the EPA. These permits regulate the amount of pollutants that facilities can discharge. By requiring large industrial polluters to obtain pollution permits, the EPA ensures that any pollution from industrial facilities is limited and regulated. But in recent years, the Illinois EPA wasn’t enforcing permits for factory farms. And our waterways were paying the price: As of 2008, agriculture pollution was responsible for 73% of Illinois’s waterway impairments.

The problem? The Illinois EPA had inadequate funding for the factory farm permit program. Every type of industrial polluter in Illinois was required to pay a small fee for their pollution permits—except for factory farms. These fees, from which factory farms were uniquely exempt, allowed the EPA to enforce the pollution permits; without them, the Illinois EPA had no resources with which to monitor farm pollution. That’s why we filed a complaint with the U.S. EPA against the Illinois EPA in 2008. And in 2010, the U.S. EPA ordered Illinois to fix the pollution permit program. Soon after, we worked on a bill that would grant the Illinois EPA the resources it needed to enforce pollution permits. This past summer, a version of our bill finally passed into law. The bill requires factory farms to pay a small fee for pollution permits, as is typical with all other industries. These fees will allow the Illinois EPA to enforce pollution permits and ensure that factory farms aren’t abusing our waterways. And that’s something we can all celebrate.
Wind Power for Illinois

Illinois has the fourth-most installed wind power in the country, and enough wind potential to power our state many times over. Wind power lessens our dependence on dirty energy and allows us to avoid nearly five million metric tons of carbon emissions a year. And it’s good for our economy, too: The wind industry employs roughly 7,000 Illinoisans. But if Congress lets critical incentives die, the wind industry could come to a screeching halt. In 2012, we worked hard to prevent that from happening.

Critical wind power incentive defended

American wind energy is a true environmental and economic success story. Wind energy now powers the equivalent of nearly 13 million homes across the country, reducing our dependence on coal and oil and creating a cleaner, healthier future for Illinois and America as a whole. In addition, wind power supports 75,000 Americans jobs. But the continued success of wind power is at risk if Congress fails to renew these critical incentives.

• Critical federal tax credits for wind power are set to expire at the end of 2012. If Congress does not renew them, the wind industry expects to lose 37,000 American jobs and we will lose hard-won momentum on clean energy. Powerful polluting interests like the coal and oil industries have been lobbying against these incentives. With their influence in Washington, D.C., they have worked to build opposition and political stalemate on clean energy advancements, putting our progress at risk.

• In 2012, we did everything in our power to extend these crucial wind incentives. Along with our national federation and our allies across the country, we mobilized massive grassroots support for wind. Wind power has strong bipartisan appeal, so we worked hard to show our elected officials that the public supports the incentives. As of this writing, the wind tax credits were still being debated.

Installed wind turbines in Illinois generate enough non-polluting, renewable energy to power 660,000 homes, avoiding nearly five million metric tons of global warming—fueling carbon pollution every year. The wind industry also employs 7,000 Illinoisans, and 75,000 people nationwide. But if Congress fails to extend critical tax credits for the wind industry, our progress on wind would be lost—along with an estimated 37,000 jobs. In 2012, we built broad grassroots support for wind energy to convince our leaders to renew these wind tax credits.
Clean Air, Healthy Families

We should be able to breathe clean air without worrying about mercury in our bloodstream or soot in our lungs. And we should be able to power our homes without contributing to global warming. Yet coal-fired power plants and other industrial polluters spew hundreds of thousands of tons of dangerous pollutants and global warming-causing carbon into our atmosphere every year. We need to protect our families’ health by requiring polluters to clean up their act—and in the past year, we’ve taken two giant steps toward that goal.
Obama administration announced a pair of historic victories for clean air

Air pollution has made its way into every part of our lives. Power plants emit mercury pollution and other toxics that can seriously endanger our health. They also pump massive amounts of carbon pollution into our air—the same pollution that causes global warming. In the last year, Environment Illinois focused its clean air campaign on cutting these two dangerous sources of pollution from power plants—and won a pair of unprecedented results.

First-ever nationwide mercury standards set

Every year, coal-fired power plants spew into our air hundreds of thousands of pounds of toxic mercury, which fall to earth in the form of rain and contaminate rivers, lakes and streams. Last year, reducing mercury and other air pollution was one of Environment Illinois’s top priorities.

• In 2011, we partnered with our national coalition of allies to help motivate more than 800,000 people across America to send the EPA public comments in support of strong action on mercury—no other single EPA rule had ever received so much support.

• In April, our advocacy helped convince the Senate to vote down three other bills that would have blocked the EPA from reducing pollution that causes global warming.

EPA moved to cut carbon pollution from power plants

In addition to President Obama’s mercury pollution standards, the past year saw another historic victory for clean air: On March 27, 2012, the EPA proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

• The EPA is expected to finalize these carbon pollution standards for new power plants by the end of 2012, and begin developing standards for existing coal-fired power plants in the near future as well.

• However, through paid ads and armies of lobbyists within Congress, the coal industry and other corporate polluters are trying to prevent the implementation of these commonsense standards. To counter these special interests, Environment Illinois and our allies collected a record-smashing 3 million comments in support of the carbon standard.

Mercury emissions from power plants threaten the health of our children. This year, we won a major victory when President Obama finalized standards to cut mercury pollution from power plants by 90 percent.