Program Report

Recapping our work in fiscal year 2015 for our members
To our members

“Behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts.”

From record-breaking wildfires to severe storms, it has become abundantly clear that global warming is happening now and requires bold action.

Unfortunately, opposition from the fossil fuel industry and their allies in Washington, D.C., stands in the way of meaningful action, from tackling global warming to realizing the full potential of solar power.

The challenges we face in protecting our environment are formidable and daunting. But this past year also gave me a lot of hope for the future. At Environment Connecticut, 2015 was all about people power. And together, we have a lot to be proud of.

We took the biggest step for clean water in a decade: Since 2006, a pair of polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions left 2 million miles of streams without guaranteed protection under the Clean Water Act. After nine years of advocacy, and 800,000 comments from people like you, we saw these protections restored.

And, finally, we acted on climate: After Americans submitted 8 million comments of support for limiting carbon pollution from power plants, President Obama finalized the Clean Power Plan, which will do just that for the first time ever. Connecticuters’ voices helped advance the policy and build the political will to win this victory, which will make a major dent in our country’s contribution to global warming pollution and sets a precedent for other nations to follow.

As you’ll read in the following pages, behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts. And working together, I am optimistic about our prospects for the future.

Thanks,

Chris Phelps
Environment Connecticut State Director

Margie Alt
Environment America Executive Director
No Bees, No Food

Millions of bees are dying off, with alarming consequences for our environment and our food supply. This past fiscal year, Environment Connecticut mobilized grassroots support for protecting these vital pollinators. With your support, we called on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to declare a nationwide moratorium on neonicotinoids—a class of bee-killing pesticides.

Fighting to give bees a chance

We rely on bees to pollinate everything from almonds and strawberries to the alfalfa used to feed dairy cows. Yet, beekeepers report losing on average 30 percent of all honeybee colonies annually in recent years.

Scientists point to several causes behind the problem, including a class of bee-killing insecticides known as neonicotinoids, or neonics. Your support helped us call on the EPA to ban this dangerous class of pesticides.

4 million urged President Obama to save the bees

In March 2015, Environment Connecticut and our national team, along with a coalition of beekeepers, farmers and others, delivered more than 4 million petitions calling on the Obama administration to issue strong protections for pollinators.

In May, the White House issued a new plan to stem the deaths of pollinators, but it fell short of banning neonics. Now, we’re calling on federal officials to ban the use of neonics on farms and in garden stores.
Global Warming Solutions

You helped Environment Connecticut and Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center win the greatest step the United States has ever taken to address the climate crisis. Working with a broad coalition, we helped educate the public, engage elected leaders, and deliver an overwhelming 8 million comments of support for limiting power plant pollution—paving the way for President Obama and the EPA to finalize the historic Clean Power Plan.
You helped get the historic Clean Power Plan over the finish line

From record-breaking drought and devastating wildfires to extreme downpours and flooding, Americans are feeling the impacts of global warming now. Scientists predict that without drastic cuts in global warming emissions, these effects will become catastrophic. In 2015, President Obama took decisive action to address this threat by moving forward with the Clean Power Plan: the first-ever limits on carbon emissions from power plants—America’s largest source of global warming pollution.

Millions of supporters like you took action

Environment Connecticut and our members came together to help build the momentum necessary to finalize the Clean Power Plan and push past strong opposition from the fossil fuel industry and climate-deniers in Congress.

• Environment Connecticut’s national citizen outreach team had face-to-face conversations with more than 47,000 people about the threat of global warming and the solutions the Clean Power Plan offers.

• During the public comment period for the Clean Power Plan, our national team, including Environment Connecticut’s members and supporters, submitted more than 713,000 comments in support of a strong plan.

• Nationwide, hundreds of elected officials and solar businesses and nearly 1,000 health professionals joined the chorus of support for limits on power plant pollution.

Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center showed need to limit carbon pollution

In 2015, Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center analyses shone a spotlight on the threat of global warming and the meaningful impact of limiting carbon pollution from power plants.

• The report “America’s Dirtiest Power Plants” found that coal-fired power plants are America’s number one source of global warming pollution. Curbing this pollution will be essential to tackling the threats of climate change.

• The report “Dangerous Inheritance” revealed that the current generation is experiencing hotter temperatures and more intense storms than their predecessors did 40 years ago—and without urgent action to curb carbon pollution, global warming will continue to contribute to dangerous heat waves, severe storms, rising sea levels and more.
In 2015, Environment Connecticut and Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade! In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waters across the country. Our public education and outreach efforts, bolstered by action taken by our members, allies, and a diverse coalition of businesses, elected officials and farmers, built the momentum necessary to get the Clean Water Rule past polluter opposition and signed into law.
Winning the biggest step forward for clean water in a decade

For nearly a decade, Environment Connecticut has gone toe-to-toe with powerful polluters and their allies in Congress to restore the Clean Water Act and protect our waters—permanently. And in 2015, our efforts finally paid off when President Obama restored federal protections to more than half the nation’s streams, which feed drinking water sources for one in three Americans.

More than 3,000 miles of streams in Connecticut regained protection

The Clean Water Rule closed loopholes in the Clean Water Act, returning protection to more than 3,000 miles of streams in Connecticut. You gave Environment Connecticut the resources to advocate in Congress, mobilize a diverse and powerful coalition, and rally the grassroots to demand action.

• We helped our national team gather more than 800,000 comments and held more than half a million face-to-face conversations about the need to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act.
• With the rule threatened, our national team held meetings with more than 50 congressional offices, urging them to champion the voice of the public and stand up for clean water.
• Disappointingly, at press time, a federal appeals court blocked the new protections we just won for our waters. We’ve put together a legal strategy to defend the Clean Water Rule, and given its strong legal and scientific basis, the courts should ultimately reject all efforts to weaken it.

Research highlighted the legacy of the Clean Water Act

Our waterways provide drinking water, essential habitat for wildlife, and treasured destinations for fishing, swimming and boating. Last year, together with our affiliated state groups across the country, Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center’s research on the threats facing Long Island Sound and the impact of the Clean Water Act earned nearly 1,000 media hits nationally.

• The report “Wasting Our Waterways” documented toxic pollution entering our waterways and threatening our health and drinking water supplies. It found that 206 million pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped into America’s waterways in 2012 alone.
• The report “Waterways Restored” presented 15 case studies that show how the Clean Water Act restores and protects waterways—like the Cuyahoga River, which was once so polluted it caught fire, but today is clean enough for canoeing.

Polluting industries carved loopholes in the Clean Water Act, leaving 2 million miles of streams across the country open to pollution.

With a resounding call from supporters like you and our allies nationwide, we worked to protect America’s waterways.

800,000 comments to the EPA
1 million took action online
1,000 letters to the editor
1,000 business owners, farmers and elected officials

On May 27, 2015, the Clean Water Act was restored.
Go Solar, Connecticut

Solar power is growing so fast across the country that goals once considered ambitious are now seen as readily achievable. Spurred by pro-solar policies, we’re getting more of our energy from the sun, putting us on the road to 100 percent clean energy. In 2015, Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center presented hard-hitting research and made the case for setting bold solar goals.

Strong policies fuel solar’s success

With another panel or project installed every four minutes in 2013 and the rate only getting faster, solar power is on the rise across the country.

• Environment Connecticut Research & Policy Center’s report “Lighting the Way” found that the top 10 states for solar, which hold 87 percent of the nation’s total installed solar electric capacity, have implemented strong policies that are enabling increasing numbers of homeowners, businesses and communities to “go solar.”

• “Shining Cities,” a report we released in March, found that cities are also playing a crucial role in growing national solar capacity. Hartford ranked 7th in the region in our report.

Let’s get to 10 percent solar—and beyond

To continue solar’s growth, the whole nation must follow the lead of cities and states that have prioritized solar in their energy policies and set bold goals for solar.

• Across the country, nearly 600 civic leaders, 500 businesses and more than 20,000 citizens signed onto a goal of 10 percent solar by 2030.

• If this goal were achieved nationally, the United States would generate enough clean energy to replace half our coal-fired power plants.
No Offshore Drilling

Our coasts and wildlife are too precious to risk with an oil spill—but that’s exactly what’s at stake if we open our oceans to oil and gas drilling. In 2015, you supported Environment Connecticut’s work to call attention to these threats and build the public support necessary to stop reckless proposals to open huge swaths of the Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic Ocean to offshore drilling.

Calling attention to risks of offshore drilling

In 2015, you helped us send a clear message: Our coasts and wildlife are too precious to put at such high risk. In March, as federal officials vetted the Obama administration’s Atlantic Coast drilling plan, Environment Connecticut released an analysis that demonstrated that offshore drilling puts birds at risk, disrupts the food chain, endangers whales and dolphins and threatens oceans and coasts with pollution.

Our national team helped turn out hundreds to a Bureau of Ocean Energy Management meeting on offshore drilling on North Carolina’s Outer Banks. More than 250 businesses in Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey and New York also signed on to our campaign to oppose the drilling plan.

Stopping the reckless Arctic drilling proposal

We also called on President Obama to halt plans to allow Shell Oil to drill in the Arctic Ocean, where bad weather and floating ice increase the risk of accidents. And, in September, in the face of mounting opposition from Environment Connecticut and our allies, Shell announced it would halt its plans. But the fight isn’t over. In the coming year, we’ll continue shining a national spotlight on the risks associated with offshore drilling to show strong opposition to the practice.

Top: Oil spills, one of the risks of offshore drilling, threaten marine life like brown pelicans.
Bottom: Members and supporters submitted photo petitions to show they oppose offshore drilling.
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