EPA urged to protect Long Island Sound

Staff pushes EPA to lead on clean water

For more than a year, big polluters and their allies in Congress have blocked legislation to restore the Clean Water Act. With action at a standstill on Capitol Hill, Environment Connecticut is pushing the Environmental Protection Agency to step in and restore full protections to the streams and wetlands that feed Long Island Sound.

108 beach closings in 2009

Recent Supreme Court decisions have weakened the Clean Water Act and called into question whether more than half of Connecticut’s streams, including waters upstream that feed Long Island Sound, are still protected. Without these protections, polluters can dump waste with impunity. Ultimately, the Sound pays the price.

And it’s a price Long Island Sound can ill afford to pay—its waters already suffer from excess pollution and sewage runoff. According to a National Resources Defense Council report we helped release last summer, Connecticut saw 108 beach closings in 2009 alone. Contaminated beach water can make swimmers vulnerable to a host of waterborne illnesses, including stomach flu, skin rashes, hepatitis, neurological disorders and other serious health problems.

Thousands support EPA action

As the health of Long Island Sound continues to worsen, it’s more important than ever that our leaders in Washington, D.C., restore the Clean Water Act. But with no Congressional action in sight, our staff and members are pushing the EPA to get involved.

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson is currently considering a new clean water initiative, saying that the EPA would “consider administrative action to restore the Clean Water Act protections to wetlands and headwater streams that provide clean water for human and ecological uses.”

But with the new Republican majority in Congress itching to hamstring the EPA, and well-connected polluters lobbying against strong protections, the EPA needs all the public support we can muster. We’ve banded together with our sister groups across the country to rally thousands of people nationwide to send the EPA a message: Americans support strong protections for our waters.

Visit our website to learn more about our work to protect the Sound, and to get involved.

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org/newsletters/winter11
Recent action

Report: March floods just the beginning

Last year’s destructive March floods caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damages in Connecticut and Rhode Island—and they were just the latest example of the strange weather that has pummeled Connecticut and the entire country for several years. Extreme weather events lead to billions of dollars in economic damage and loss of life each year, and scientists project that global warming could affect the frequency and severity of such events in coming decades. Environment Connecticut released a report, “Global Warming and Extreme Weather,” that outlines what could become “the new normal” if we see the worst effects of global warming.

Building on the attention our report won, Environment Connecticut continues our work to reduce global warming pollution. We’re pushing to strengthen efficiency standards for appliances and buildings, as well as larger-scale efforts to increase the amount of electricity we generate from renewable sources like the sun and the wind.

Solar jobs on the rise… but not in Connecticut

While other states are reaping the rewards of growth in the solar power industry, Connecticut has plenty more work to do.

A recent report shows nearly 100,000 people employed in the solar industry nationwide, with 26 percent growth projected in the coming year. But when it comes to a state-by-state comparison, Connecticut is way down on the list.

The report, produced by the Solar Foundation and Green LMI Consulting, projected that 24,000 net new jobs would be created nationwide by August 2011. We are continuing to push for legislation to spur our state’s solar industry—so we can compete to bring our share of those new solar jobs to Connecticut, and bring clean energy that doesn’t pollute and never runs out to our homes and businesses.

To our members

Once again, the political winds have shifted. New faces are in power in Washington, D.C., and while Democrats largely prevailed in Connecticut, Republicans mounted spirited challenges in a number of races.

Yet when it comes to Connecticut’s environment, the challenges and opportunities we face remain the same. We’re doing a better job of keeping pollution from running off into Long Island Sound, but we need to do much more. We have tremendous potential to harness clean energy here in Connecticut, but the policies that can make it happen are being challenged.

Regardless of who’s up and who’s down in Hartford and in Washington, we have our work cut out for us. Thanks to your support, we’re ready to meet the challenge.

Sincerely,

Christopher Phelps
Program Director

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First, the good news: In 2009 more than 150,000 more people visited Acadia National Park, the only national park in the Northeast, than in years past.

What’s the bad news? Even as the number of visitors to Acadia and America’s other national parks is on the rise, these great places face budget cuts in the coming year—leaving them with fewer resources for maintenance, upkeep and stewardship.

A new report from our national federation, Environment America, titled “The Best of America Under Threat from Underfunding,” exposed the growing threat that funding shortfalls pose to national park sites like Acadia.

“Last year, visitors poured into these great parks to go hiking, camping and kayaking,” said Nancy Pyne, from our Washington, D.C., office. “Yet just as their popularity grows, they are under threat from under-funding.”

Acadia National Park: Up 150,000 visits, down $80,000

Acadia and other special places have taken on renewed importance for Americans as the recession squeezes family vacation budgets—leading to the nearly 150,000-person increase in visits to Acadia in 2009.

But despite the growing number of visitors, the National Park Service’s proposed budget for the coming fiscal year would cut the park’s operating budget by $80,000. Acadia relies on these funds to hire park rangers, keep park facilities like the carriage roads and trails like the Beehive properly maintained, and pay for popular programs like camping—so budget cuts will make it even harder for park stewards to keep the park in good shape.

“How many turkeys can you buy at 60 mpg?

With the Obama administration considering a new round of fuel efficiency standards for cars and trucks as millions of us took to the road last Thanksgiving, Alex Wall, an associate with Environment Connecticut’s Washington, D.C., office, got to wondering: How much money would Americans save if we drove ultra-efficient cars that traveled 60 miles per gallon, instead of the current 26.4 mpg average?

After crunching the numbers, Alex came up with an answer. Cleaner cars would cut our oil use by 80 million gallons, more than five times the amount the United States imported from Saudi Arabia last year—saving American families a cool $234 million. That’s enough money to put another 13 million turkeys on holiday tables.

And that’s just one more reason—along with our desire to help get Connecticut off oil and reduce our state’s global warming pollution—that Environment Connecticut, the members of our national federation and other environmental advocates are calling for new government rules that will ensure that by 2025 the average car sold in the U.S. will go 60 miles per gallon.

Connecticut’s 2004 decision to adopt clean car standards helped spur the Obama administration to raise gas mileage standards to 35. Now it’s time to take the next step.
Drilling ban declared for 450 million acres of ocean

This December, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the Obama administration’s intentions to protect the Atlantic coast, Pacific coast and eastern Gulf of Mexico from new oil and gas drilling.

After nine months of campaigning to protect America’s shores, more than 450 million acres of our coastal waters—an area three times the size of California—are finally “off the table” for drilling from 2012 to 2017.

“Anyone who loves our beaches, fishes in the ocean, depends on a healthy coastal economy or cares about reducing our oil dependence can thank the Obama administration for protecting the Atlantic and Pacific coasts and the west coast of Florida from oil drilling,” said Margie Alt, the executive director of Environment Connecticut’s national federation.

Read more about the benefits of a sustainable coastal economy on our website:

www.EnvironmentConnecticut.org/reports