Bringing polluters back within the law’s reach

In 1969, the abuse of America’s waterways hit a new low. Ohio’s Cuyahoga River—already infamous for the black oil that floated along its surface, the trash that lined its banks, and the complete absence of animal life within its waters—caught fire. The incident, along with a Time magazine article that covered the fire and called the Cuyahoga the river that “oozes rather than flows,” helped spur the modern environmental movement, ultimately resulting in the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972.

For decades, government officials and citizen activists have used the Clean Water Act to reduce industrial discharges into our waterways, large and small. When polluters balked, the EPA imposed tough penalties, compelling companies to clean up their act.

Progress at risk

Today, that progress is at risk due to two wrong-headed Supreme Court decisions brought forth by private developers and supported by other water polluters. In the words of a recent Environment New Hampshire study, these anti-environmental decisions “shattered the fundamental framework of the Clean Water Act” by placing thousands of polluters beyond the law’s reach.

In the decisions, a slim majority of Supreme Court justices ignored the Clean Water Act’s promise to protect all “waters of the United States.” Instead, the judges seized upon a single word—“navigable”—to call protections into doubt for a fifth of the nation’s wetlands and more than half of America’s streams.

“We are, in essence, shutting down our Clean Water programs in some states,” said one EPA lawyer. “When companies figure out the cops can’t operate, they start remembering how much cheaper it is to just dump stuff in a nearby creek.”

An estimated 55 percent of our streams could now be open to unregulated dumping, threatening the drinking water for 470,000 people across New Hampshire.

Environment New Hampshire is working to ensure that we take the necessary steps to protect Lake Sunapee—and our other great lakes—from the threat of pollution. These streams and wetlands feed and protect major lakes and rivers, including Lake Winnipesaukee and Lake Sunapee.

Environment New Hampshire is calling on our congressional delegation to restore Clean Water Act protections to all of our waters. Yet a coalition of powerful polluters is pushing back. One polluter described the strategy: “If you can get Glenn Beck to say that government storm troopers are going to invade your property, farmers in the Midwest will light up their congressmen’s switchboards.”

This summer, join us in our call to strengthen clean water protections for our lakes. Take action online: www.EnvironmentNewHampshire.org.
To our members

In circles in Washington D.C., questions about what steps we should take to protect our environment are almost always contentious and often divisive.

Yet with most of the people I meet traveling through New Hampshire, politics takes a back seat when it comes to the places we love, whether it’s a favorite state park, a beach or lake or river, or maybe even a local patch of woods. We don’t question whether it’s worth protecting these places—most of us struggle to understand how anyone could see it any other way. That’s why, this summer, Environment New Hampshire is working to strengthen protections for places we love, like our lakes.

As always, we’re documenting the problems, finding solutions and making our case to public officials. Yet we’re also banking on thousands of ordinary New Hampshire residents to speak up for the places we cherish most—a force that even Washington D.C. will find hard to resist.

Paul Burns
New England Regional Program Director

Recent action

Earth Day push for energy independence

Forty years ago, a group of Americans responded to a growing environmental crisis by organizing the first Earth Day. Roughly 20 million people took part in protests, teach-ins and rallies. And it worked. In short order, Congress passed the Clean Air Act, strengthened the Clean Water Act, and created the Environmental Protection Agency.

Since that first Earth Day, we’ve made real progress on many fronts—but we’re even more dependent on foreign oil now than we were then. So what better way to celebrate the 40th anniversary of Earth Day than to help break through the political logjam that’s holding America back from real energy independence?

This April, Environment New Hampshire and our allies across the country launched a massive petition drive, gathering 14,000 signatures for an online Declaration of Energy Independence. We delivered them to our senators on Earth Day, April 22.

New auto emissions standards build on states’ work

New fuel economy and auto emission standards approved on April 1 by the Obama administration will reduce the nation’s oil dependence by 11.6 billion gallons by 2016. This is equal to half the oil we import from Saudi Arabia each year in the United States.

Fourteen states gained approval of state emission standards over the last decade. These state-level victories for cleaner cars set the stage for the president’s announcement this spring.

Still, the new clean cars standard faces at least one last hurdle. Big Oil and their allies in Congress—led by Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—have pushed to block the Obama administration’s efforts to limit global warming pollution, including the new clean cars standard. Visit our website to take action and help fight back against these attacks in Congress.

Environment New Hampshire
www.EnvironmentNewHampshire.org/newsletters
Making the great outdoors even greater

Our national parks have been called “America’s best idea.” Unfortunately, many of our most beloved, iconic landscapes are facing shrinking funds, encroaching overdevelopment and other threats.

Fortunately, this summer we have a new opportunity to better protect and expand America’s national parks and other protected special places.

Interior Secretary Ken Salazar, who oversees the national parks, recently announced the launch of the new “America’s Great Outdoors” initiative, which will invest new resources and energy in protecting our country’s natural legacy.

Choosing the places to protect
Which places and projects will make the list? That will be determined in part by public input, so we’re helping to organize thousands of citizens to make their voices heard in order to:

- Protect Acadia National Park on the coast of Maine by securing funding to purchase 1,000 acres of land within the perimeter of the park that are currently vulnerable to private development.

- Restore Shenandoah National Park in Virginia, where park officials have been forced to close trails and scenic overlooks of the Blue Ridge Mountains due to inadequate resources.

- Expand Big Bend National Park in Texas to include the stunning Christmas Mountains just outside its northwest border. Expand Mount Rainier National Park in Washington to include the Carbon River Rainforest, creating a wildlife corridor that would stretch from the park to the Puget Sound.

- Protect Glacier National Park in Montana and the Boundary Waters Canoe Wilderness Area in Minnesota, whose waters and wildlife are threatened by toxic drilling and mining projects proposed just beyond their borders.

- Repair the Ozark National Scenic Riverways in Missouri, where eroded stream banks and beat-up trails have degraded the experience for visitors of the first national park designed to protect waterways.

New study promotes green buildings

New Hampshire families could save more than $2,800 per year on their energy bills by 2050 if we start investing in the energy efficiency of our buildings today. Environment New Hampshire calculated the savings as part of a new report released in March entitled “Building Better: How High-Efficiency Buildings Will Save Money and Reduce Global Warming.” Our researchers pored over government data to estimate the energy savings, decreased fossil fuel use, money saved on energy bills, and pollution prevented if we committed to dramatically improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings.

“Let’s not waste any more time, any more energy, or any more money on outdated buildings,” added O’Hare. “We need to invest in efficiency today so we can start building a better tomorrow.”

Keeping it protected

Our national federation is pushing for better protections for our national parks, like Acadia National Park in Maine.

New Hampshire’s Jessica O’Hare points out, “Most buildings last for decades; investing in energy efficiency locks in savings for years.”

Thanks in part to our advocacy, states such as New Hampshire have recently updated their building codes or are considering new updates. The Obama administration has provided $16 billion for efficiency-boosting weatherization programs, and more funding and programs could be on the way soon.

“A unique opportunity for our parks
To win the support of Congress, state officials and Secretary Salazar, our national federation is reaching out to people across the country to uphold and expand the protections for our national parks.

This massive effort will build the grassroots support that will be critical to convince these legislators to make the protection of our favorite parks a priority. Citizens from across the country can help tip the balance by making their voices heard.

Our national federation has been calling for better protections for our national parks, like Acadia National Park in Maine.
America could harness the power of the sun to supply 10 percent of our electricity by 2030 if we adopt a set of relatively simple policy solutions, according to a new report released by Environment New Hampshire this spring. Getting 10 percent of the nation’s power from solar energy would be more energy than we produce at every nuclear power plant in the country.

Our report examines a wide variety of solar technologies and tools. Use of these technologies, while already occurring in places from Wal-Mart stores to Boston’s Fenway Park, could be greatly expanded through new investments in research and development, stronger renewable electricity standards and incentives, and green building codes.

“Americans shouldn’t need barrels of oil from a desert half a world away—in the most unsettled and dangerous region of the earth—just to power a trip to the grocery store in Manchester,” said Environment New Hampshire’s Jessica O’Hare. “How much easier and more secure would it be to harness the heat and light that strikes our rooftops every day?”

Solar has huge potential in New Hampshire. Visit our website to read the full report.