Another step toward restoring the Great Lakes

Momentum builds to protect our great waters

Environment America helped bring the Great Lakes a step closer to restoration this summer, when a key Senate committee approved a measure to inject new resources and energy into efforts to restore the Lakes.

The Great Lakes are an unparalleled national treasure. Stretching across eight states to form the largest fresh water ecosystem on Earth, they provide drinking water for more than 33 million Americans. In addition, millions of visitors flock to the Lakes each summer to swim. But with 24 billion gallons of sewage discharged into their water each year, more Great Lakes beaches are closed due to pollution than beaches in any other region of the country. Fishing on the Lakes is also threatened. Recently, voracious Asian carp, which can grow up to six feet long and weigh 100 pounds, reached the Great Lakes. If we don’t stop the invasion, the carp will starve native fish populations and devastate the ecosystem.

To address these challenges, Sen. Carl Levin (Mich.) and Rep. Vern Ehlers (Mich.) introduced the Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act. The bill, approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee on June 30, would help to restore Great Lakes ecosystems and stop invasive species like the Asian carp.

Building grassroots support

This summer our state affiliates in the Midwest built support for restoring the Great Lakes. Staff with Environment Illinois, Environment Michigan and Environment Ohio talked to nearly 70,000 people across the region.

Meanwhile, we are supporting similar bills to restore other waterways across the nation. Piper Crowell, our clean water advocate, researched and wrote “America’s Great Waters,” a report highlighting the steps needed to restore great waterways such as the Great Lakes, Long Island Sound and Chesapeake Bay. Our staff released the report nationwide, winning wide media attention. In Hartford, Environment Connecticut staff released the report with state Sen. Edward Meyer, calling on Congress to clean up Long Island Sound. The event was covered by local newspapers, as well as Fox News.

On June 30, the same Senate committee also advanced legislation to protect Long Island Sound, Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound and other waterways. This fall, we will continue our work to get the Great Lakes measure and these other clean water bills through Congress and on to the president’s desk.

more online

Visit our website to read our “America’s Great Waters” report.

Links to additional content are posted in the online version of the newsletter: www.EnvironmentAmerica.org/newsletters/fall10
BP's Deepwater Horizon finally stopped gushing—but we don’t know what long-term damage the disaster will cause for the ecosystem and communities of the Gulf. There’s no better reason to push toward a future in which Americans use as little oil as possible, protecting our oceans and beaches and reducing global warming pollution as well.

My staff continues to ensure BP is held fully responsible for the disaster, while calling for a permanent ban on new drilling off our shores. But we must do more to prevent future tragedies.

Thus, Environment America is launching a major program to reduce our dependence on oil. Our work in the states, Congress, and with the Obama administration will slash oil consumption and move America toward a clean energy future.

Sincerely,

Margie Alt
Executive Director

To our members

Recent action

Thousands join call to protect America’s great outdoors

This summer, Environment America launched a campaign to revitalize our national parks. Hailed as “America’s best idea,” many of our national treasures face neglect and pollution. For example, Glacier National Park, known for its jagged peaks and pristine waters, is threatened by plans to drill for oil nearby.

In April, President Obama launched the America’s Great Outdoors Initiative to strengthen protections for our nation’s special places. In response, Environment Montana educated thousands of Montanans about the threats facing Glacier. When the administration held a listening session in Missoula, we mobilized hundreds of activists to urge the Obama administration to cancel drilling leases near Glacier.

Beyond Glacier, we are focused on protecting parks from Virginia’s Shenandoah and Maine’s Acadia to Washington’s Mount Rainier. The administration is expected to consider our recommendations this fall.

400,000 strong against new offshore drilling

In the wake of the Gulf oil disaster, Environment America launched a national campaign to save America’s shores. With our allies, we rallied nearly half a million people to speak out against offshore drilling.

Heather Emmert, our Gulf states field organizer, monitored BP’s response to the disaster on-site. From Santa Monica to Miami, our members participated in Hands Across the Sand—the largest demonstration against coastal drilling in history. Executive Director Margie Alt joined Sens. Bob Menendez (N.J.) Frank Lautenberg (N.J.) and Bill Nelson (Fla.) in calling to increase oil companies’ liability for major spills.

Our work is paying off. The Obama administration cancelled drilling leases near Virginia, and Environment North Carolina won legislation to slow drilling off the beloved Outer Banks. As the president’s commission on deepwater drilling convenes this fall, we will continue working to permanently protect America’s shores.

How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment America.

For information, call 1-800-841-7299, or e-mail PlannedGiving@EnvironmentAmerica.org.
This past summer, our nation suffered the greatest environmental disaster in our history.

More than 200 million gallons of oil poured into the Gulf of Mexico after BP’s Deepwater Horizon drill rig exploded on April 20—the equivalent of more than 10 Exxon Valdez spills. Oil contaminated 580 miles of coastline from Texas to Florida, with catastrophic results for wildlife—from oil-soaked pelicans to dolphins choking on fumes. Also suffering are shrimpers, fishermen, and those working in the Gulf’s $20 billion tourism industry, all of whom face an uncertain future. It may take decades for the ecology and the economy of the Gulf Coast to recover.

We know that our dependence on oil is environmentally unsustainable. Our addiction to oil pollutes our air, causing millions of asthma attacks every year. Oil—primarily used in the transportation sector—produces one-third of our global warming pollution. And, oil spills leak millions of gallons of crude into our waters annually—from big spills like the Gulf disaster, to smaller accidents like the 800,000 gallons of oil dumped into the Kalamazoo River in Michigan. It’s time to end our oil addiction.

We can get off oil permanently

Environment America is launching a new program to free America from our dependence on oil. Instead of oil spills and air pollution, we can have clean transportation, efficient public transit, and vehicles powered by renewable energy. We are bringing together a coalition of environmental groups, public health organizations, consumer advocates, national security groups and others to end America’s addiction to oil.

Investing in clean transportation

In May, President Obama announced historic new clean cars standards which are expected to cut gasoline consump-

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Questions for Sen. Merkley

Our Washington, D.C., office director, Anna Aurilio, spoke with Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon, who has proposed legislation to help reduce America’s dependence on oil.

What are the keys to cutting oil use?

The great news is that we can eliminate our need for overseas oil by the year 2030 by taking advantage of existing technology.

Key strategies include increased fuel efficiency for vehicles, development of electric vehicles, better transit options for families and businesses, improved modes of shipping, development of alternative fuels, and increased energy efficiency for buildings.

To coordinate these efforts, we need to establish a National Council on Energy Security made up of top experts on energy and the economy as well as the Secretaries of Energy, Transportation, Commerce and Defense, and the Administrator of the EPA. Such a council will keep the federal government focused on achieving oil independence, regardless of who is in the White House.

Why is it taking so long for Congress to act to cut oil use?

Politicians have been calling for American oil independence since Richard Nixon was president, but for decades nothing has happened because we haven’t had a clear plan or policy structure to focus the nation. My plan lays out a clear path for action, not just talk. My hope is that Congress can act quickly to move us toward oil independence.
Environment America

Our mission
We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That’s the idea behind Environment America. We focus exclusively on protecting America’s air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Defending the environment at the ballot box

In 2008, the American people helped usher in dramatic change in the leadership in Washington, D.C.—and Environment America did our part to help. We’ve won some significant victories since then, from open space protections to new investments in clean energy. But despite this progress, the pace of change has been frustratingly slow. The main culprit? Opposition driven by powerful coal and oil interests.


This November, voters will decide whether those champions continue to represent their constituents in Congress or fall victim to Big Oil and King Coal. We are working to highlight the stakes and support candidates who will stand for the environment when the going gets tough.

Rep. Joe Sestak (right) speaking with PennEnvironment Director David Masur.

Visit our website to learn more about the candidates we endorsed and how you can get involved: www.EnvironmentAmerica.org