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

“Behind these accomplishments, and more, were engaged and committed individuals like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener future. I’m grateful for the power you bring to these fights; let’s keep up the great work together.”

Seven years after Hurricane Katrina decimated the United States’ southern coast, Pennsylvania and the mid-Atlantic were bombarded by Superstorm Sandy. This catastrophic weather event wreaked massive destruction and tragedy on Pennsylvania and the east coast.

Across the country, evidence is mounting that global warming is happening now and requires bold action. And massive opposition from powerful industries stands in the way of meaningful action on everything from clean water to fracking to growing solar power. We have our work cut out for us.

But this past year also gave me a lot of hope for the future. At PennEnvironment, 2015 was all about people power.

We took the biggest step for clean water in a decade: Since 2006, a pair of polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions left more than 49,000 miles of Pennsylvania streams without guaranteed protection under the Clean Water Act. After nine years of grassroots advocacy, and 75,000 comments from people like you, we saw these protections restored.

We acted on climate: With 8 million comments of support backing him, President Obama finalized the historic Clean Power Plan, which will set limits on carbon pollution from dirty power plants for the first time ever.

Behind these accomplishments, and more, were engaged and committed individuals like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener future. I’m grateful for the power you bring to these fights; let’s keep up the great work together.

Thanks,

David Masur
PennEnvironment Executive Director
Go Solar, Pennsylvania

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, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center presented hard-hitting research and made the case for setting bold solar goals.

Strong policies fueled solar’s rapid growth

With another panel or project installed every four minutes in 2013 and the rate only getting faster, our research showed Pennsylvania has a lot of ground to make up as a solar leader.

- PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center’s report, “Lighting the Way,” found that Pennsylvania is not in the top 10 states for solar, and has not implemented strong policies that enable homeowners, businesses, communities and utilities 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: Just 20 cities accounted for 6.5 percent of total installed solar. Philadelphia ranked 26th out of 65 major cities in our report.

Let’s set bold goals for solar, locally and nationally

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.
PennEnvironment Field Director Adam Garber (center) led a news conference on the banks of the Schuylkill River to celebrate the clean water victory.

Shawn Garvin, EPA Region III administrator, briefed the Philadelphia office on the Clean Water Rule.

Clean Water for Pennsylvania
Protecting our rivers and streams

In 2015, PennEnvironment and PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade. Last spring, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) restored Clean Water Act protections to more than 49,000 miles of rivers and streams in Pennsylvania. Our advocacy and grassroots organizing, bolstered by action taken by our members and coalition partners, built the momentum necessary to get the Clean Water Rule past polluter opposition and over the finish line.
Winning the biggest step forward for clean water in a decade

For nearly a decade, PennEnvironment has gone toe-to-toe with powerful polluters and their allies in Congress to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act that left more than 49,000 miles of streams and untold acres of wetlands across the state vulnerable to pollution. And in 2015, our efforts finally paid off when President Obama restored the Clean Water Act to full strength, returning protection to these waterways, which help provide drinking water for over 8 million Pennsylvanians.

More than 49,000 miles of streams in Pennsylvania regained protections

To win this fight for the Schuylkill and other waterways, we had to pull out all the stops. You gave PennEnvironment the resources to advocate in Congress, recruit and mobilize a diverse and powerful coalition, and rally the grassroots to demand action.

• We helped gather more than 75,000 comments and had nearly 200,000 face-to-face conversations with citizens across state about the need to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act.
• With the rule under threat in Congress, our national team held meetings with more than 50 congressional offices, urging them to champion the voice of the public and protect 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 legacy of Clean Water Act

Our waterways provide drinking water, essential habitat for wildlife and treasured destinations for fishing, swimming and boating. PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center’s research last year on the threats facing our waterways and the impact of the Clean Water Act earned more than 50 media hits.

• 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 dumps in 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.
Keep Pennsylvania Safe From Drilling

When it comes to protecting Pennsylvania’s environment and health, few threats loom as large as fracking. From destroying the places we love, to releasing harmful air and water pollution, the fracking industry has shown that they are unable or unwilling to operate safely. PennEnvironment and PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center are working to defend our state against this dangerous and shortsighted drilling practice.
The fracking industry’s growing web of threats

Pennsylvanians from all walks of life are realizing that threats from fracking expand beyond the drilling site—into the growing web of fracking activity spreading throughout our communities. One such threat is oil trains—a danger most recently highlighted by the massive West Virginia explosion this past year.

Uncovering the threat of oil trains

To expose the danger posed by oil trains, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center teamed up with FracTracker to release a new study, “Danger Around the Bend.” The report determined which Pennsylvania communities are at the greatest risk for an oil train accident—and highlighted policies that are necessary to aggressively tackle these risks.

Our organizers teamed up with health experts, local elected officials and first responders to hold news conferences all across the state and release the report’s findings in affected communities. All told, more than 100 news stories covered the conclusions of the report, including national outlets like the Associated Press and Al-Jazeera America.

Working to ban fracking ponds

Another insidious part of fracking’s web is the use of massive, football field-sized holding ponds for toxic wastewater created in the drilling process. Often known to rupture, leak, overflow, and in some cases even explode, these holding ponds pose a significant risk to the communities and the environment around them.

Thanks to our members, PennEnvironment kept the heat on state officials. Thousands of PennEnvironment members and other concerned citizens submitted comments and petition signatures, which we delivered to regulators at the Department of Environmental Protection, requesting that they halt the practice of fracking ponds.

State officials heard your cry, and early in 2015, announced a far-reaching plan that is expected to phase out this dangerous practice in Pennsylvania.
Millions of bees are dying off, with alarming consequences for our environment and our food supply. This past fiscal year, PennEnvironment 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 wildflowers and peaches to the alfalfa used to feed dairy cows. Yet, in recent years, beekeepers have reported losing on average 30 percent of all honeybee colonies annually.

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 Obama to save the bees
In March 2015, PennEnvironment 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.

Later that spring, 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 their sale in garden stores.
Clean Air, Healthy Families

Air pollution from industrial facilities threatens the health of communities across the state, and Pennsylvanians are fed up. That’s why PennEnvironment has made it a top priority to protect everyday Pennsylvanians from illegal pollution, working in places from Pittsburgh to Philadelphia.

Standing up to illegal air polluters

It doesn’t matter where you’re from in Pennsylvania; everyone knows a neighbor or has a family member who suffers from asthma or another debilitating respiratory ailment. Too many Pennsylvania facilities violate their permits on a regular basis, or release massive amounts of contaminants that can cause severe health problems—even though the Clean Air Act has been around for 45 years. In 2015, PennEnvironment took on some of the worst illegal air polluters in our state.

Clean air for Pittsburgh

Nowhere is the threat of air pollution more apparent than Pittsburgh, which received an air quality grade of “F” from the American Lung Association. To inform local residents and elected officials about the threats of air pollution, PennEnvironment held a town hall meeting in Pittsburgh, where more than 150 concerned citizens came out to learn about the issues and voice their opinion. Attendees were shown a neighborhood-by-neighborhood analysis of air pollution in Pittsburgh and given opportunities to become more engaged in our effort to stand up to the region’s worst air polluters.
Global Warming Solutions

You helped PennEnvironment and PennEnvironment 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 present the facts, educate the public, engage elected leaders, and deliver 8 million comments of support for limiting power plant pollution—paving the way for President Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to finalize the historic Clean Power Plan.
You provided the support to push the Clean Power Plan over the finish line

From record-breaking droughts 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 first-ever plan to limit carbon emissions from power plants—America’s #1 source of global warming pollution.

Millions of supporters like you took action

PennEnvironment 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.

• Our national organizers had face-to-face conversations with more than 100,000 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, PennEnvironment’s members and supporters helped submit more than 400,000 comments in support of a strong plan.
• PennEnvironment organized nearly 500 academics and scientists in the state in support of limiting global warming pollution, and garnered media attention across the state.

A historic step to limit carbon pollution

In 2015, PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center analyses shone a spotlight on the threat of global warming and the meaningful impact of the Clean Power Plan.

• Our report, “America’s Dirtiest Power Plants” found that reducing carbon emissions from dirty power plants—America’s #1 source of global warming pollution—is essential to addressing global warming.
• The report “Dangerous Inheritance,” released in March, found that the current generation is experiencing hotter temperatures and more intense storms than their predecessors did 40 years ago—highlighting the urgent need for action to curb carbon pollution.
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