To be an environmentalist, you’ve got to wrestle with a conundrum: We need bold action on a short timeline ... with broad public support.

We need to do a lot, quickly, to preserve a livable planet. But progress has to earn and sustain the support of the people in order to last—so progress doesn’t often come in one big swooping action. It usually comes one small-ish victory at a time.

At PennEnvironment, we acknowledge the conundrum—and we embrace it. We believe in bold action on a large scale. But we work every day at the local, state and national levels to build, step by step, the support this action demands. Each college, or city or state that deploys more renewable energy helps win more people over to the possibility of a world that runs on the sun and the wind. Each company or state that phases out a single-use plastic product shows more people a way to end harm to ocean wildlife from plastic pollution.

These victories are smaller than the challenges demand. But as their pace picks up, their summary effect grows. A year ago, California became the second state to commit to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity. Now there are six states with similar commitments, and a similar proposal has over 100 cosponsors in the Pennsylvania legislature. Back in 2016, California banned single-use plastic bags. In 2019, five more states banned plastic bags, and here in Pennsylvania, towns like Narberth and West Chester have banned them, and as I write this, a proposal is pending in Philadelphia City Council. Like all social changes, environmental solutions have tipping points.

Our natural world faces serious problems, and we’ve got to solve them. Our strategy is to make sure that each victory opens a door to the next. Thanks for being with us on the journey.

Sincerely,

David Masur
State Director, PennEnvironment
Clean Water & Air

Through our Clean Water & Air program, we tackled threats to the air we breathe and the water we drink, including by taking polluters to court to protect Pennsylvania’s waterways.

Legal action leads to historic clean water victory

AUG. 1, 2019: On July 31, PennEnvironment joined the Lower Susquehanna Riverkeeper Association, Waterkeeper Alliance and the Environmental Integrity Project to announce a historic agreement to reduce toxic pollution leaking from coal ash dumps at the Brunner Island power plant along the Susquehanna River. Each year, the plant generates 442,000 tons of ash and other coal combustion waste.

For years, Talen Energy has disposed of coal ash waste along the Susquehanna River, Black Gut Creek, and Conewago Creek south of Harrisburg. Pollutants including arsenic, boron and lithium have been seeping into groundwater, the Susquehanna River and Black Gut Creek from the site. The plant’s industrial waste ponds are not lined to prevent leakage. In the event of a breach, there is nothing but an earthen berm to keep over three million tons of ash and related coal wastes from entering the Susquehanna River and Black Gut Creek.

“This enforcement action is one of historic proportions. It’s the largest penalty ever assessed at a coal ash pollution site in Pennsylvania history,” said David Masur, executive director of PennEnvironment. Specifically, the consent decree requires Talen to pay a $1 million civil penalty and contribute an additional $100,000 to fund supplemental projects to reduce local water pollution.

The settlement requires Talen Energy to undertake significant actions at coal ash disposal areas, including addressing seeps, evaluating local water quality, excavating waste from one basin and undertaking work in others, and ensuring that all discharges fully comply with the Clean Water Act.

“We could not let the Brunner Island power plant run roughshod over our cornerstone environmental laws,” said PennEnvironment Executive Director David Masur. “Hopefully our suit sends a loud and clear message to illegal polluters: that it won’t pay to illegally dump in Pennsylvania.”

The Brunner Island power plant generates 442,000 tons of ash and other coal combustion waste each year.
Above: PennEnvironment’s Climate Defender Campaign Director Flora Cardoni spoke at our rally for 100% renewable energy. Below: This year, our staff generated support for 100% renewable energy through lobbying and educating officials (above) and hosting events for the public (below).
Pennsylvanians are ready for clean energy. And we know that if we’re going to truly tackle climate change, we need to get off of the dirty fossil fuels that create the pollution that is causing this planet-wide catastrophe in the first place.

**Making progress toward a 100% renewable Pennsylvania**

On May 7, we kicked off our campaign with a news conference at the state Capitol to announce that a bipartisan group of nearly 90 state representatives and senators in the Pennsylvania General Assembly were reintroducing legislation to require Pennsylvania to get 100 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2050. The legislation would commit the state to a set of crucial benchmarks in the fight against climate change: 50 percent renewable energy and 100 percent renewable electricity by 2030, 80 percent renewable energy by 2040, and 100 percent renewable energy economy-wide by 2050.

Pennsylvania state Rep. Chris Rabb (Philadelphia) reintroduced the state House version of the bill, which he also proposed in last year’s session. The state Senate version of this legislation, sponsored by state Sen. Tom Killion (Delaware County), is believed to be the first 100 percent renewable energy legislation in the nation with a Republican legislator as its lead sponsor.

“The vast majority of scientists agree: Climate change is real. And you don’t have to be a scientist to notice its effects, which have been caused by human activity,” Rep. Rabb said. “By transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy in the commonwealth, we can help to slow this change or face the ongoing irreparable damage and its detrimental consequences.”

**Citizens lobby for 100% renewable**

On June 19, PennEnvironment turned out nearly 400 Pennsylvanians to the Capitol for our annual Citizen Lobby Day, the largest environmental lobby day in the state. Concerned residents from 37 Pennsylvania counties traveled to Harrisburg, and state legislators held nearly 100 face-to-face meetings with constituents supporting 100 percent renewable energy. After a day of action, meetings and a massive rally, six more state representatives and senators added their names as cosponsors to our legislation.

**100% renewable energy legislation hits 100 cosponsors**

Only seven months into the current two-year legislative session, state Rep. Wendi Thomas (Bucks County) added her name as a cosponsor in late July to become the 100th cosponsor. Our 100 percent renewables legislation enjoys bipartisan support in both chambers, and is now only a handful of cosponsors away from having a majority of legislators’ support in both the House and Senate.
This year, PennEnvironment set out to protect wildlife from plastic pollution, including hosting river cleanups (top). PennEnvironment Executive Director David Masur spoke at the announcement of the Zero Waste PA legislation package (bottom left).

Photo credits: (clockwise from top) Jere Paolini, Cup Of Spring via Shutterstock, PA House of Representatives, BruceEmmerling via Pixabay
Conservation

This year, PennEnvironment and our members have taken major steps to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and revive the country’s best conservation and recreation program. Below, find more on our efforts to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and revive the country’s best conservation and recreation program.

**PennEnvironment teams up with legislative leaders to announce ‘Zero Waste PA’ package**

**APRIL 12, 2019:** “Nothing we use for a few minutes should pollute our environment, neighborhoods, rivers and oceans for centuries to come.”

That was the message behind a new package of bills introduced by state legislators and PennEnvironment on April 10, aimed at tackling the environmental issues caused by our “throwaway” society. Legislation in the “Zero Waste PA” package targets single-use plastic straws, plastic bags, plastic foam cups and containers, and electronic waste, and would increase funding for Pennsylvania’s recycling programs.

> “Every day, unwitting Pennsylvanians are barraged with products that we’re expected to purchase and use and then throw away. Only, there is no ‘away,’” said PennEnvironment Executive Director David Masur. “Instead, it ends up in landfills where it can cause water pollution, in incinerators that cause air pollution, or blowing around in our neighborhoods in the form of litter.”

In the coming months, PennEnvironment and lawmakers will build co-sponsorship support for the measures.

**National conservation program renewed**

**MARCH 13, 2019:** After allowing one of the nation’s cornerstone conservation programs to expire in the fall of 2018, Congress came together in rare bipartisan fashion and renewed the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) program in February 2019.

Since the program’s inception more than 50 years ago, LWCF has funded thousands of critical conservation programs across the U.S., including more than 1,500 in Pennsylvania, totaling more than $315 million. LWCF has funded iconic parks such as Gettysburg, Valley Forge and the Flight 93 National Memorial.

PennEnvironment worked hard to convince the state’s congressional delegation to press for the speedy renewal of LWCF and vote in its favor, collecting thousands of petition signatures and phone calls to legislators, and garnering dozens of media stories about the program’s successes. When the dust settled, every member of Pennsylvania’s congressional delegation except Rep. Scott Perry and Sen. Pat Toomey voted to renew LWCF.
Our No Bees, No Food campaign calls on the public to urge state legislators to restrict the worst uses of bee-killing pesticides.
No Bees, No Food

This year, PennEnvironment joined our national network in calling on state leaders to save the bees from toxic pesticides.

Some good news for bees: EPA bans 12 bee-killing pesticides

**JUNE 4, 2019:** On May 20, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) canceled the registration of a dozen neonicotinoid-based pesticides known to harm bees—effectively banning them.

The cancellation came as part of a settlement agreement the EPA reached in December in a lawsuit brought by the Center for Food Safety. While many forms of neonic pesticides will remain on the market, the settlement also requires the EPA to examine the effects of all neonics on endangered species.

“The lawsuit and the EPA’s decision recognize the linkage between neonic pesticides and bee die-offs,” said PennEnvironment Water and Conservation Advocate Stephanie Wein. “Pulling 12 of these pesticides off the shelves should create a buzz about what still needs to be done. Connecticut and Maryland have already restricted these pesticides, and we need other states to prohibit the most common and problematic uses of all neonics.”

To that end, our No Bees, No Food campaign is calling on the public to urge our state lawmakers to restrict bee-killing pesticides.

USDA to resume key bee research after thousands of members object to cuts

**SEPT. 19, 2019:** If we want to save the bees, we need science that documents their decline and illustrates the nature of the problem.

That’s why, when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) stopped collecting data for its crucial Honey Bee Colonies report this summer, 16,000 members and supporters from across our national network made their objections known to the department. On Sept. 16, the USDA announced it would resume data collection on Oct. 1, the beginning of its next fiscal year.

“The bee die-off is truly a crisis, and it would have been pure folly to think we shouldn’t study the situation,” said Stephanie Wein, PennEnvironment’s water and conservation advocate “While the gap in data is a loss, we’re glad that scientists will regain access to this important research.”

To that end, our No Bees, No Food campaign is organizing the public to urge our state lawmakers to restrict bee-killing pesticides.
Above: U.S. Steel’s Clairton Coke Works plant. Below: PennEnvironment Western Pennsylvania Director Ashleigh Deemer spoke at the press event announcing the lawsuit against U.S. Steel for violating the Clean Air Act at three of its Pittsburgh-area plants (left).
Clean Air

PennEnvironment is protecting our clean air by taking on a major industrial polluter in Pittsburgh.

**PennEnvironment sues three Pittsburgh-area U.S. Steel facilities for ongoing illegal air pollution**

MAY 7, 2019: On April 29th, PennEnvironment and Clean Air Council announced our environmental lawsuit against U.S. Steel for violating the Clean Air Act at three of its Pittsburgh-area plants. These include Clairton Coke Works, the largest coal refining facility of its kind in North America, as well as the company’s Edgar Thomson Plant and Irvin Plant facility.

Violations occurred after U.S. Steel decided to operate the plants for more than three months after a fire destroyed critical pollution control equipment. Our lawsuit alleges that U.S. Steel’s three facilities, located south of Pittsburgh along the Monongahela River, showered residents with unlawful pollution including emissions of sulfur dioxide (a respiratory irritant) at levels many times higher than the legal maximum. The plants likely also emitted higher levels of volatile organic compounds such as benzene, a carcinogen.

“It is unacceptable that U.S. Steel ran these plants without essential pollution controls, claiming there was no safe alternative,” said Ashleigh Deemer, the Western PA director with PennEnvironment.

**Report highlights need for better Clean Air Act enforcement in Pittsburgh**

AUG. 18, 2019: On Aug. 15, as part of our ongoing effort to address chronic air pollution problems in the Pittsburgh area, PennEnvironment released a new report recommending best practices for local officials at the Allegheny County Health Department (ACHD), which is responsible for addressing the region’s air pollution.

The report, entitled “Cutting Through the Smoke,” was written in conjunction with Frontier Group. It details recent case studies of pollution enforcement in the Pittsburgh area.

“When the ACHD finds a health problem at a restaurant, it shuts the restaurant down. But when it comes to major air polluters, the ACHD has too often allowed them to go right on harming our health,” said Zachary Barber of PennEnvironment Research & Policy Center. “There are time-tested enforcement practices used across the country that, if implemented consistently in Allegheny County, could go a long way toward reining in dangerous pollution.”

The report does note that the ACHD has recently shown signs of improvement — including joining PennEnvironment in a lawsuit against U.S. Steel — and recommends best practices to follow moving forward.
Above: John Rumpler, senior director of our national network’s Clean Water campaign, spoke to CBS This Morning about states’ failure to protect school drinking water from contamination. Below: Our Healthy Schools campaign is working to keep children in schools safe from lead in their drinking water and paint.
Healthy Schools

Schools are places where our kids go to learn, achieve, build lifelong friendships and grow up to be productive citizens in society. Unfortunately, there’s growing evidence that our school buildings are plagued with environmental hazards like lead in paint and drinking water, asbestos, and mold.

PennEnvironment presses for lead in drinking water legislation

MARCH 13, 2019: Since the start of the 2019-2020 legislative session in Harrisburg in last January, PennEnvironment has been working with our elected officials to reintroduce some of our top policy priorities that stalled in the previous session.

This includes our efforts to build support for bipartisan legislation to tackle the threat of lead in drinking water at Pennsylvania schools.

Since the Flint, Michigan, drinking water disaster, PennEnvironment has pushed for policies to ensure we have safe, clean drinking water for our most vulnerable population (children), in the place where they spend most of their waking hours (in our schools). We partnered with state Rep. Karen Boback as she reintroduced House Bill 930 to set stringent standards to address lead in Pennsylvania’s school buildings. We asked legislators to become original cosponsors of this bill and earned statewide media coverage about the threat of lead in schools.

Philadelphia acts to remove lead paint from schools

JAN. 8, 2019: At one point, the six-year-old Philadelphia boy could do simple math in his head. Then he couldn’t.

His mood changed. His stomach hurt. Only when a teacher noticed him eating paint chips, which had fallen to his desk from the classroom ceiling, did anyone suspect the cause: The boy’s blood contained nine times the level of lead known to cause permanent brain damage.

“Most parents are shocked to learn how few measures are in place to protect children from lead paint in the place where they spend most of their waking hours: school buildings,” said David Masur, PennEnvironment executive director, member of Philadelphia Healthy School Initiative, and parent of two Philadelphia school district students.

Thanks in part to our work, the Philadelphia City Council on Dec. 4 set standards for the removal of lead paint in schools. Experts are praising the action as the most comprehensive in the country. Mayor Jim Kenney is expected to sign the measure.

Most parents are shocked to learn how few measures are in place to protect children from lead paint in the place where they spend most of their waking hours: school buildings.

David Masur
Executive Director

Photo credits: (left top) CBS; (left bottom, left to right) Duplass via Bigstock, Staff, Jerry Roisman
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