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

“Behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts.”

The challenges we face in protecting our environment are formidable and daunting. But this past year also gave me a lot of hope for the future. At Environment Georgia, 2015 was all about people power. And, together, we have a lot to be proud of.

In August, our sister research and education organization, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center, celebrated a long-awaited victory when the beautiful Conasauga River was designated the first “Outstanding River” in Georgia. Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center started this project in 2006 when research found that Georgia was one of only two states in the Southeast that had never used this important river protection tool. Staff collected more than 6,000 comments in favor of this new designation from Georgians all over the state.

Earlier in the year Environment Georgia won the biggest step for clean water in a decade. Since 2006, a pair of polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions have left 2 million miles of streams without guaranteed protection under the Clean Water Act. After nine years of advocacy, and 800,000 comments from people like you, we saw these protections restored.

And, finally, Environment Georgia acted on climate. After Americans submitted 8 million comments of support for limiting carbon pollution from power plants, President Obama finalized the Clean Power Plan, which will do just that for the first time ever. Georgians’ voices helped advance the policy and build the political will to win this victory, which will make a major dent in our country’s global warming emissions and set a precedent for other nations to follow.

As you’ll read in the following pages, behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener, and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts. And working together, I am optimistic about our prospects for the future.

Thanks,

Jennette Gayer
Director
Georgia’s first “Outstanding” river

The Conasauga River is one of the most breathtaking places in Georgia, and its headwaters support one of the most biodiverse ecosystems in the country. In 2015, your support helped us celebrate a long fought victory when Georgia designated the Conasauga as an “Outstanding National Resource Water” (ONRW), the highest level of protection identified in the Clean Water Act.

You won the highest level of protection for the Conasauga River

In 2015, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center won our campaign calling on the Department of Natural Resources (DNC) to finalize its proposal to designate the Conasauga as an ONRW, protecting the river from point and non-point sources of pollution.

- More than 6,000 of our supporters signed petitions in favor of designating the Conasauga an ONRW, which Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center delivered during the DNC’s public comment period in June.
- Whole counties—Murray, Gilmer and Fannin—as well as nearly 100 businesses, groups of outdoor enthusiasts and non-profits also joined us in voicing their support for the Conasauga’s designation.
- The Conasauga supports outstanding trout fishing, as well as 90 different fish species and 25 species of freshwater mussels. Twelve of these fish and mussel species are federally designated as endangered or threatened species.
Global Warming Solutions

You helped Environment Georgia and Environment Georgia 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 educate the public, engage elected leaders, and deliver an overwhelming 8 million comments of support for limiting power plant pollution—paving the way for President Obama and the EPA to finalize the historic Clean Power Plan.
You helped get the historic Clean Power Plan over the finish line

From record-breaking drought 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 Clean Power Plan: the first-ever limits on carbon emissions from power plants—America’s largest source of global warming pollution.

Thousands of supporters like you took action

Environment Georgia 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.

• Environment Georgia’s national citizen outreach team had face-to-face conversations with more than 47,000 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, our national team, including Environment Georgia’s members and supporters, submitted more than 713,000 comments in support of a strong plan.

• Nationwide, hundreds of elected officials and solar businesses, and nearly 1,000 health professionals joined the chorus of support for limits on power plant pollution.

Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center showed need to limit carbon pollution

In 2015, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center analyses shone a spotlight on the threat of global warming and the meaningful impact of limiting carbon pollution from power plants.

• The report “America’s Dirtiest Power Plants” found that coal-fired power plants are America’s number one source of global warming pollution. Curbing this pollution will be essential to tackling the threats of climate change.

• The report “Dangerous Inheritance” revealed that the current generation is experiencing hotter temperatures and more intense storms than their predecessors did 40 years ago—and without urgent action to curb carbon pollution, global warming will continue to contribute to dangerous heat waves, severe storms, rising sea levels and more.

Why the Clean Power Plan matters...

It tackles America’s #1 source of global warming emissions: dirty power plants.

The plan will reduce these emissions 32 percent by 2030.

You called for action

More than 713,000 supporters like you stood up for action on climate.
Clean Water for America
Protect Georgia’s Rivers

In 2015, Environment Georgia and Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade! In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waters across the country. Our public education and outreach efforts, bolstered by action taken by our members, allies, and a diverse coalition of businesses, elected officials and farmers, built the momentum necessary to get the Clean Water Rule past polluter opposition and signed into law.
Winning the biggest step forward for clean water in a decade

For nearly a decade, Environment Georgia has gone toe-to-toe with powerful polluters and their allies in Congress to restore the Clean Water Act and protect our waters—permanently. And in 2015, our efforts finally paid off when President Obama restored federal protections to more than half the nation’s streams, which feed drinking water sources for one in three Americans.

Nearly 40,000 miles of streams in Georgia regained protection

The Clean Water Rule closed loopholes in the Clean Water Act, ensuring protection to nearly 40,000 miles of streams in Georgia. You gave Environment Georgia the resources to advocate in Congress, recruit and mobilize a diverse and powerful coalition, and rally the grassroots to demand action.

- We helped our national team gather more than 800,000 comments and held more than half a million face-to-face conversations about the need to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act.
- With the rule under threat, our national team held meetings with more than 50 congressional offices, urging them to champion the voice of the public and stand up for 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. Last year, together with our affiliated state groups across the country, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center’s research on the threats facing Lake Michigan and the impact of the Clean Water Act earned nearly 1,000 media hits nationally.

- 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 dumped 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.
Go Solar, Georgia

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

Strong policies fuel solar’s success

With another panel or project installed every four minutes in 2013 and the rate only getting faster, solar power is on the rise across the country.

- Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center’s report “Lighting the Way” found that the top 10 states for solar, which hold 87 percent of the nation’s total installed solar electric capacity, have implemented strong policies that are enabling increasing numbers of homeowners, businesses and communities 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. Atlanta ranked 8th in the region in our report.

Let’s get to 10 percent solar—and beyond

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.
No Offshore Drilling

Our coasts and wildlife are too precious to risk with an oil spill—but that’s exactly what’s at stake if we open our oceans to oil and gas drilling. In 2015, you supported Environment Georgia’s work to call attention to these threats and build the public support necessary to stop reckless proposals to open huge swaths of the Atlantic Ocean and the Arctic Ocean to offshore drilling.

Calling attention to risks of offshore drilling

In 2015, you helped us send a clear message: Our coasts and wildlife are too precious to put at such high risk. In March, as federal officials vetted the Obama administration’s Atlantic Coast drilling plan, Environment Georgia released an analysis and published a letter in the New York Times that demonstrated that offshore drilling puts birds at risk, disrupts the food chain, endangers whales and dolphins and makes oceans and coasts vulnerable to pollution.

Our state affiliates helped turn out hundreds to a Bureau of Ocean Energy Management meeting on offshore drilling on North Carolina’s Outer Banks. More than 250 businesses in Florida, North Carolina, Georgia, New Jersey and New York also signed on to our campaign to oppose the drilling plan.

Stopping the reckless Arctic drilling proposal

We also called on President Obama to halt plans to allow Shell Oil to drill in the Arctic Ocean, where bad weather and floating ice increase the risk of accidents. And, in September, in the face of mounting opposition from Environment Georgia and our allies, Shell announced it would halt its plans. But the fight isn’t over. In the coming year, we’ll continue shining a national spotlight on the risks associated with offshore drilling to show strong opposition to the practice.
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