Annual Report

Recapping our work in 2014 for our members
To our members

“With your support, we’ll keep working to translate our simple formula into positive change in our lives, in the quality of the environment, and in the world we leave to future generations.”

At Environment Georgia, we live by a simple formula: Mobilize grassroots action, build strong and diverse coalitions, and conduct tough-minded advocacy that yields tangible results for our environment, and in our lives.

This past year was full of action, new challenges, and more than a few signs of real progress—and I’m proud to share with you the work you’ve helped us do.

In 2014, we celebrated huge steps forward in our efforts to protect Georgia’s rivers and reduce global warming pollution. We advocated for a new proposal from the Environmental Protection Agency to restore the Clean Water Act to full strength by closing loopholes in the law that have left 2 million miles of streams across the country at risk of pollution. And, after millions of Americans called for tougher limits on global warming pollution, the Obama administration answered with a new plan to limit carbon pollution from dirty power plants.

We also confronted repeated attacks to our environment from lobbyists for polluting industries and their allies in Congress who have vowed to block these commonsense proposals. But we rose to the challenge, rallying support from citizens, elected officials, and business owners, and presenting the facts to back these vital protections.

In this report, you can read more about our efforts on these top priority issues, as well as learn about our work to achieve bold solar power goals in Georgia, and protect Chattahoochee parks from development.

In the year to come, we’ll strive to keep making a difference on all of these issues. With your support, we’ll keep working to translate our simple formula into positive change in our lives, in the quality of the environment, and in the world we leave to future generations.

Yours,

Jennette Gayer
State Director

Margie Alt
Federal Director
With the Land and Water Conservation Fund facing funding cuts year after year, and set to expire altogether as early as 2015, we worked this past year to show decision-makers that the public wants to protect Chattahoochee Parks and other open spaces from pollution and development. In 2014, Environment Georgia and our national federation rallied more than 50,000 people to join our call on Congress to make preserving our special places a priority.

Grassroots efforts defended Chattahoochee Parks

The parks along the Chattahoochee provide an oasis for runners, birdwatchers, anglers and anyone looking to enjoy nature. They also play an important role in protecting the river from pollution. In 2014, Environment Georgia worked in communities around Atlanta to advocate for critical conservation funding that helped create, and recently, expand parks along the Chattahoochee River,

- After years of advocating for funding to expand the Chattahoochee National Recreation Area from 6,500 acres to 10,000 acres, the park was able to use funds from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) in 2014 to purchase nearly 50 acres of greenspace at risk of development.

- In 2014, the LWCF, our country’s most successful conservation program, was put on the funding chopping block, threatening to leave the outdoor places we love in Georgia and across the country with less protection.

- Environment Georgia partnered with our national federation to collect nearly 50,000 signatures and more than 250 photo petitions calling for full conservation funding.

- We also worked with local youth through summer camps and communities to educate young people about the importance of protecting parks and engage them in writing letters and drawing pictures urging Georgia’s senators to support Chattahoochee Parks.
Clean Water for America: Protect Georgia’s rivers

Polluters shouldn’t be allowed to treat Georgia’s rivers like their own personal sewer. That’s the message Environment Georgia and our state affiliates took to hundreds of thousands of people in 2014, as part of a renewed call to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act. Together with our allies, we delivered more than 800,000 public comments to the EPA, and built a coalition of businesses, elected officials and farmers to restore protections to all America’s waterways.
The EPA agreed to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act

After a chemical spill in West Virginia, a toxic algae bloom in Ohio, and other pollution disasters, it’s more obvious than ever that restoring protections to America’s waterways is long overdue. On March 25, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a rule to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act that have left 2 million miles of our nation’s streams, and the drinking water for 117 million Americans, at risk for more than a decade. Powerful members of Congress, however, redoubled their efforts to block the move. In 2014, Environment Georgia went to work to get the EPA’s proposal over the finish line.

39,986 miles of Georgia streams to gain protection
The EPA’s proposal would restore protections to 39,986 miles of Georgia’s streams. From Georgia’s rivers to our smaller streams, our waterways are part of our heritage and make Georgia a great place to live. We’ve worked hard to protect our waters, and should do all we can to keep polluters from turning back the clock to the days when rivers, like Ohio’s Cuyahoga, were so polluted they caught on fire.

Yet, on the heels of the EPA’s announcement, opposition from polluting industries intensified. Large agribusinesses, which generate millions of pounds of animal manure, much of which ends up as runoff in local waters, were among the industries lobbying the U.S. House of Representatives to block the EPA. Their allies in Congress even threatened to shut down the government if the EPA didn’t back off.

As 2014 drew to a close, Environment Georgia worked to refute industries’ false claims from their well-funded lobbyist efforts and smear campaigns.

800,000 comments called for action on clean water
In June, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center released “Wasting Our Waterways,” a report that revealed 10.1 million pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped into Georgia waterways in 2012 alone, highlighting the risk the loopholes in the Clean Water Act pose to waterways across the country.

In November, Environment Georgia, together with our allies, delivered 800,000 supportive comments to protect these vital places. Outdoor outfitters, river guides, brewers and restaurant owners were among the hundreds of businesses that added their voices to the call for cleaner water.
Global Warming Solutions

Together, we took bold steps to reduce global warming pollution. Working with a broad coalition, we helped educate the public and collect 8 million comments from Americans to urge President Obama to limit power plant carbon emissions—America’s number one source of global warming pollution. In 2014, the president proposed just such a plan—one that would cut power plant pollution by 30 percent within the next decade.
A historic plan to tackle global warming

From severe storms to wildfires and drought, the consequences of global warming are becoming increasingly clear. Scientists say climate change could tip toward catastrophe if we don’t do more and act faster. The good news is that in 2014, the president took decisive action to address this threat, in part, by moving forward with what the New York Times called, “the strongest action ever taken” by an American president to tackle global warming: The Clean Power Plan.

Limits placed on America’s #1 carbon polluters
In 2014, Environment Georgia worked to build support for the president’s Clean Power Plan, which would limit, for the first time, carbon emissions from America’s number one source of global warming pollution: dirty power plants.

- According to “America’s Dirtiest Power Plants,” a report released by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center in September, our country’s coal-fired power plants produced more carbon pollution than the entire economies of Russia, India, Japan, or any other nation besides China.

- The Clean Power Plan would reduce power plant pollution by 30 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, making it instrumental in fulfilling the country’s commitment with China to reduce global warming emissions by at least 26 percent in the next decade.

- The Clean Power Plan is a huge deal—but it’s not a done deal. The proposal has been the subject of fierce attacks by the coal industry, some utilities and their allies in Congress, who have vowed to do everything in their power to block the plan.

8 million strong for the Clean Power Plan
In 2014, Environment Georgia, together with our national federation, launched our Global Warming Solutions campaign, which sought to connect the dots between the consequences of global warming that are already being felt across America and the meaningful impact of the Clean Power Plan.

- In June, the Environmental Protection Agency held hearings on the Clean Power Plan in Pittsburgh, Atlanta and Washington, D.C. Our staff helped turn out citizen climate defenders to show our support for the plan.

- Throughout the year, together with our national federation and a broad coalition, we collected 8 million comments of support for limiting carbon pollution from dirty power plants, which we delivered to the EPA on Dec. 2, as the public comment period for the plan ended.
Go Solar, Georgia

2014 was a breakout year for solar power in America. Another home or business in the United States went solar every four minutes, and the rate keeps getting faster. In 2014, we urged our leaders to go big on solar and leave dirty energy behind. By crafting and promoting state and local policies, Environment Georgia and our national federation have played a major role in the clean energy boom and continue to work to defend and expand pro-solar initiatives.

▲ Releasing the “Shining Cities” report in April
Ambitious goals for solar power now seen as readily achievable

It’s time for Georgia to go big on solar. According to research released in 2014, solar power is growing so fast across the country that goals once considered ambitious are now seen as readily achievable. By tapping the power of the sun, we can break our dependence on fossil fuels and move to clean energy that’s virtually limitless, local and independent. In 2014, Environment Georgia called on our decision-makers to embrace solar power and enact policies and programs to help repower our state.

Smart policies led solar to triple in three years

Nationwide, the amount of solar power tripled from 2011 through 2013, thanks in part to policies that Environment Georgia and our national federation helped win.

- In August, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center released a report, “Lighting the Way,” which found that just 10 states are responsible for 89 percent of the solar currently installed in the United States. This research recommended that the key to success is strong policies that are enabling increasing numbers of homeowners, businesses, communities and utilities to go solar.

- In order to facilitate strong solar policies, Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center’s report “Shining Cities,” released in April, recommended that states set ambitious goals for solar and commit to them, let the government lead by example by installing solar panels on public buildings, encourage communities to invest in solar, and more.

Let’s get to 15 percent solar power by 2030

Solar is growing so rapidly that the nation is on pace to achieve a goal of 10 percent solar by 2030, with huge benefits for the environment. According to “Star Power,” a report released in November by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center, achieving this goal would cut 280 million metric tons of carbon by 2030, the equivalent of taking 59 million cars off the road.

In 2014, Environment Georgia urged Gov. Nathan Deal to commit to generating 15 percent of Georgia’s energy from the sun by 2030.

Together with our national federation, Environment Georgia worked to build support for solar-friendly policies to realize this goal. Nearly 400 civic leaders have signed letters, and more than 20,000 citizens have signed petitions calling on governors across the country to go big on solar, while more than 500 solar industry leaders have urged the Obama administration to make renewable energy a top priority.
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