Tell Congress: Let EPA protect our water

Biggest clean water victory in a decade

The Obama administration is closing loopholes in the Clean Water Act that have left 2 million miles of our nation’s streams open to pollution. But some in Congress are determined to block the rule to restore the Clean Water Act to full strength.

This summer, as polluters and their congressional allies turn up the pressure, Environment Georgia and our national federation are doubling down to build the support to convince our elected officials to be champions for clean water.

Pushing past our opponents

In February, a joint hearing before Senate and House committees was widely viewed as setting the stage for a vote to kill the rule, which has also faced bitter opposition from corporate agribusinesses, oil and gas companies, and developers.

But thanks in part to our advocacy, more than 250 local officials from across the nation voiced their support for the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and defenders of clean water spoke during the hearing to defend the rule. With the help of our coalition and members, we provided these defenders with photos of beloved waterways at risk to show their colleagues what this fight is all about.

Millions spent to keep loopholes

What are we up against? The same polluters that spent millions of dollars on lobbyists and lawyers to carve the loopholes in the Clean Water Act in the first place. In fact, “Polluting Politics,” an analysis by Environment Georgia, found that the 10 most polluting companies from 2012 spent more than $53 million on lobbying and contributed more than $9.4 million to candidates for federal office during the 2014 election cycle.

“Our nation’s polluters have deep pockets, but hundreds of thousands of people have raised their voices in support of protecting our waterways,” said Ally Fields, clean water advocate. “It’s time for Congress to listen to citizens, and let the EPA finish the job.”

The EPA’s proposal is expected to be finalized this summer.

Pollution by the numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>50 percent</th>
<th>206 million</th>
<th>$53 million</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than half the country’s lakes, rivers and streams aren’t safe for swimming or drinking.</td>
<td>Pounds of toxic pollution that industrial facilities reported dumping in our waterways in 2012.</td>
<td>Money spent lobbying by the 10 parent companies that reported the most toxic dumping.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Learn more about polluters’ attempts to block clean water protections at www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org
Offshore drilling proposal threatens marine life

From oil spills to seismic exploration, a new proposal to open huge swaths of the Atlantic Ocean to offshore drilling threatens precious marine life, according to a new analysis released by Environment Georgia.

The analysis, released as the Obama administration vetted their Atlantic Ocean drilling plan in March, documented the massive, routine risks oil and gas rigs pose to marine life. One example: Roughly 200,000 migratory birds, lured by light and the prospect of food, are burned, poisoned by oil or otherwise killed each year near drilling rigs in the Gulf of Mexico.

As federal officials hold public meetings along the Atlantic Coast on the drilling plan, we’re rallying elected officials, coastal businesses, anglers and thousands of our supporters together with our state affiliates to attend in force and send a clear message: Our coasts and wildlife are too precious to put at such high risk.

4 million urge President Obama to save the bees

In March, Environment Georgia along with a coalition of beekeepers, farmers, business owners and other environmental and food safety advocates rallied in front of the White House and delivered more than 4 million petition signatures calling on the Obama administration to put forth strong protections for bees and other pollinators.

Environment Georgia and our allies urged President Obama and the Environmental Protection Agency to take swift action to protect bees from a dangerous class of pesticides known as neonicotinoids.

These pesticides are linked to rapid bee decline, and in turn, threaten our food supply. With more than 90 percent of foods dependent on bees for survival, it’s imperative that we protect bees from this toxic threat.

Recent action
Cities leading the country forward on solar

The use of solar power is expanding rapidly across the country and playing a key role in meeting our energy and environmental challenges. Major cities, such as Atlanta are playing key roles, according to “Shining Cities,” a new report released by Environment Georgia Research & Policy Center. With another panel or project installed every three minutes last year, solar jobs growing at a rate faster than the economy, and plummeting costs, we’re harnessing more energy from the sun and getting closer to leaving climate-altering dirty energy behind.

Atlanta ranked #8 in region for solar
As population centers, urban areas can have an important influence on the way we power our grids across the country. The report found that, at the end of 2014, 20 cities accounted for 6.5 percent of the installed solar in the country. And the 65 cities analyzed have installed more solar capacity than was installed in the entire country at the end of 2009. In total, the United States has enough solar electricity to power 3.5 million homes—a number that will continue to grow if cities like Atlanta make strong commitments to growing solar power.

Atlanta ranked #8 in the region for total solar installed, with a huge opportunity to grow by following other cities’ examples. Leading cities owe their solar success largely to growing clean energy markets in tandem with local government policies. These include: streamlining the permitting process for solar power in order to cut costs; removing cost barriers to solar energy adoption by adopting permitting policies and tax incentives; and partnering with local utilities to set renewable energy goals and financial incentives.

Reducing threats of global warming
Solar power mitigates the dangerous impacts of global warming by reducing harmful pollution, improves air quality, and increases demand for local jobs in solar panel installation and manufacturing.

“Solar is taking off across the country, yielding huge payoffs for the environment, public health and the economy,” said Rob Sargent, director of Environment Georgia’s Go Solar campaign. “Ramping up solar in Atlanta will be important to meeting our environmental and energy challenges.”

Big utilities resistant to change
With momentum building, Environment Georgia is urging the state to set a bold goal of 15 percent solar by 2030. Civic leaders, citizens, social media users and businesses have joined Environment Georgia and our national federation’s call to support strong policies to facilitate reaching this goal. Nearly 600 civic leaders from across the country have stood up for strong solar goals, and 1,000 businesses have signed on to the campaign.

In the face of solar power’s rising popularity and feasibility, however, utilities across the country are campaigning to increase fees for rooftop solar.

“With prices going down and concern about global warming going up, solar power is growing rapidly across the country,” said Sargent. “We need federal, state, and even more city leaders to embrace the policies that allow solar to shine.”

Top 10 Solar Cities
1. Los Angeles, CA
2. San Diego, CA
3. Phoenix, AZ
4. Indianapolis, IN
5. San Jose, CA
6. Honolulu, HI
7. San Antonio, TX
8. Denver, CO
9. New York, NY
10. New Orleans, LA

All told, the U.S. has enough solar electric capacity to power 3.5 million homes.

To urge your elected officials to set ambitious solar goals and support strong solar policies, visit:

www.EnvironmentGeorgia.org

For the full “Shining Cities” report, go to:

www.EnvironmentGeorgiaCenter.org
As of this spring, the Conasauga River is one step closer to receiving an “Outstanding” designation by the Clean Water Act—the highest level of protection from pollution available to rivers. The Conasauga would be the first river in the state to receive that status, and the designation would be the culmination of an eight-year campaign by Environment Georgia.

“The Conasauga River deserves to be Georgia’s first ‘Outstanding’ river,” said Jennette Gayer director of Environment Georgia. “The headwaters of the Conasauga support one of the most biodiverse river ecosystems in the country. Plus, it is a truly breathtaking part of our state to visit and enjoy.”

The Conasauga is home to outstanding trout fishing, snorkeling and endangered fish and mussel species. During the public comment period on the rule this summer, Environment Georgia will continue to mobilize support for bestowing this protection on the Conasauga. A final decision is expected in August.

Learn more about our efforts to protect our waterways, grow solar power in Georgia, and more inside!