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.”

From record-breaking, devastating wildfires and severe storms, it has become abundantly clear that global warming is happening now and requires bold action.

Unfortunately, opposition from the fossil fuel industry and their allies in Washington, D.C., stand in the way of meaningful action, from ensuring clean water to realizing the full potential of solar power.

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 Colorado, 2015 was all about people power. And, together, we have a lot to be proud of.

We took the biggest step for clean water in a decade: Since 2006, a pair of polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions 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, we 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. Coloradans’ voices helped advance the policy and build the political will to win this victory, which will make a major dent in our country’s contribution to global warming pollution and sets 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,

Kim Stevens
Campaign Director

Margie Alt
Environment America Executive Director
Millions of bees are dying off, with alarming consequences for our environment and our food supply. This past fiscal year, Environment Colorado 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 almonds to strawberries, to the alfalfa used to feed dairy cows. Yet, beekeepers report losing on average 30 percent of all honeybee colonies in recent years.

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 President Obama to save the bees

In March 2015, Environment Colorado 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.

In May, 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 in garden stores.
You helped Environment Colorado and Environment Colorado 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 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, Coloradans 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 largest source of global warming pollution.

Thousands of supporters like you took action

Environment Colorado 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.

• During the public comment period for the Clean Power Plan, members and supporters like you submitted nearly 100,000 comments—part of 713,000 comments submitted nationally—in support of a strong Clean Power Plan.

• Hundreds of elected officials, solar businesses and health professionals also joined the chorus of support for limits on power plant pollution.

• You, our members, turned out to events across the state to support bold climate action. We also held climate discussion roundtables with state leaders, local health experts and everyday Coloradans.

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

In 2015, Environment Colorado 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.

• Our research also found that Colorado is poised to play a major role in the United States progress to address climate change. Our report, “Path to the Paris Climate Conference” found that in the next decade, Colorado will reduce global warming pollution levels equivalent to adding 4,800 wind turbines to its energy infrastructure.

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.
In 2015, Environment Colorado and Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade! In May, President Obama 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 Colorado 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.

More than 73,000 miles of streams regained protections

The Clean Water Rule closed loopholes in the Clean Water Act, returning protection to more than 73,000 miles of streams in Colorado. You gave Environment Colorado the resources to advocate in Congress, recruit and mobilize a 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.
- We mobilized Colorado businesses, from breweries to kayak shops, to remind decision-makers that regional economies depend on clean water. When Big Ag launched a smear campaign against the rule, we identified 450 farmers across the country to join our media outreach efforts.
- 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 the legacy of the 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 Colorado Research & Policy Center’s research on the threats facing Colorado’s rivers 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 850,000 pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped into Colorado’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.
A Million Solar Roofs

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 Colorado 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, solar power is on the rise across the country.

• Environment Colorado 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. Denver ranked 1st 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.
Protect Our Parks and Forests From Drilling

Across the country, fracking is booming, leaving a trail of contaminated drinking water, sickened families, and torn up parks and forests in its wake. In 2015, you helped Environment Colorado organize to stop this dirty drilling process, and put the pressure on federal officials to safeguard our public lands and public health from the dangers of fracking.

Federal rules leave forests and parks open to fracking

This fiscal year, Environment Colorado called on President Obama and Congress to keep fracking away from all our national forests and parks, and to close loopholes that exempt fracking from key provisions of our nation’s environmental laws.

In March, the Obama administration released a long-awaited rule governing fracking on federal public lands. Unfortunately, the rule failed to protect parks and forests from the oil and gas industry’s plans. Already, oil and gas companies have secured leases on 36 million acres of public lands. Here in Colorado, places like White River National Forest, areas right outside Mesa Verde National Park and others are at risk.

We will continue to work to pass protections for these special places, and in addition, work to help citizens across Colorado win the ability to protect their local communities from the dangers of fracking.