Annual Report

A recap of our work in 2012 for our members.
After the holidays last year, I remember sitting down at my desk and thinking about the year ahead. I remember thinking about how it was an election year, and about the summer Olympics. I remember not wanting to think about Congress.

I would have rather spent my time thinking about how I was turning 49.

Congress was in gridlock, and the thought of a yearlong defensive game made me want to crawl back into my jammies. Then I sucked it up and started to dig in and think about our strategy for the year, and our priorities. I realized that not only could we play a great defense, but if we played our cards right, we could probably pull out a few more wins.

But I knew it’d only be possible if you were up to the challenge. And you were.

My job is pretty great. When I plan out a year’s strategy, I get to reflect on the beautiful, awe-inspiring places in Colorado that I love and want to protect. I get to think about the streams rushing through valleys after the snow melts and about going hiking with my son.

And Environment Colorado is an army of people who also care about that stuff. And when you get a group of people together who care about a shared set of values—clean air, clean water, open space and a clean energy future—you can accomplish more than you thought possible.

This year, we set out not only to defend our great clean energy programs in this state, but to push for even more. And with your help, we were even able to protect 1 million acres around the Grand Canyon from any new uranium mining. We won new car standards that will make 54.5 mpg the standard by 2025. And we preserved local government authority over fracking.

We couldn’t have made so much progress this year without members like you on the team. So, thank you. Thank you for the support, for taking action, and thank you for loving this state and for wanting to protect it as much as I do.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Bassett
for Environment Colorado
Clean Air, Healthy Families

When you get up into the mountains, or away from the road for a picnic, it’s hard to imagine anything but clean air in Colorado. But a brown cloud still hovers over Denver, and tens of thousands of Coloradans suffer from asthma. Last year, in our fight for clean air and healthy families, we were part of a national coalition that collected more than 3 million public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency to urge decision makers to create strong carbon pollution standards for new coal-fired power plants here in Colorado and across the country.

EPA moved to cut carbon pollution
In March, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. Electricity generation is by far the largest source of carbon dioxide emissions in the United States, responsible for 40 percent of fossil fuel-related emissions.

When implemented, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of carbon pollution, a pollutant known to affect public health.

More than 3 million took action
The real battle began after the EPA’s announcement, as utilities, coal companies and other corporate polluters began spending millions to convince the Obama administration to weaken or abandon the standards altogether. A broad coalition of groups supporting clean air safeguards collected more than 3 million comments in support of the Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Carbon Pollution Standard, which limits industrial carbon pollution from new power plants.

The more than 3 million comments were collected across the country. This unprecedented tally is the largest number of comments ever submitted to the EPA during a public comment period, and far exceeds the number of comments the EPA has ever received on any prior issue.
We love our rivers for rafting and for wildlife, and some of the bravest among us will even jump in and swim in them. The vitality of these rivers we love depends on the health of their headwaters, and in Colorado, 75,000 miles of streams that feed into our rivers are no longer protected under the Clean Water Act. In 2012, we talked to tens of thousands of Coloradans about protecting our beautiful waters, thousands took action, and more than 100 local elected officials took a stand with us for our rivers.
With 75,000 miles of streams at risk, grassroots support surged

After Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center released a report this spring that showed polluters discharged 720,606 pounds of toxic chemicals into Colorado’s waterways in 2010, we took to the streets.

It’s clear that we need to do more to protect Colorado’s rivers, not less. But two polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions in the last decade left 70 percent of our streams inadequately protected by the Clean Water Act. Environment Colorado’s staff went door-to-door this summer to talk to Coloradans about protecting our waters across the state.

7 in 10 Coloradans in support, thousands mobilized

In April, a poll commissioned by leading environmentalists and sportsmen organizations showed that Coloradans overwhelmingly support an Obama administration proposal to restore protections for Colorado’s rivers, lakes, streams and wetlands. Nearly 67 percent of Colorado respondents support the President’s proposal to restore clean water safeguards, with strong support across political parties.

Knowing this, we went door-to-door to garner grassroots support, and held over 35,000 conversations with Coloradans across the state. Jenny Archer, one of our staff this summer, talked to a recreational fisherman in Fort Collins who said he had seen a real decrease in the quality and quantity of fish populations. “He feels it’s his responsibility—and the responsibility of all Coloradans who enjoy getting out on the water—to do whatever he can to make sure his children can have the same opportunities,” Archer said.

Colorado leaders took a stand for our rivers

In January, Environment Colorado and a coalition of groups met with James Martin, our EPA Regional Administrator, and delivered letters signed by 117 elected officials, farmers, and outdoor recreation businesses across Colorado who strongly support restoring Clean Water Act protections to these waterways.

• Currently, 75,000 miles of our streams are without any protection whatsoever from pollution and development.

• These streams feed into all our rivers, from the South Platte to the Arkansas, and provide drinking water for 3.5 million Coloradans.
Preserving our heritage

Our geologic history winds through its cracks, and its humbling views remind us why we protect beautiful, unique places. The Grand Canyon should never be put at risk, so when we heard toxic uranium mines were encroaching on its borders—threatening to degrade the land and contaminate drinking water supplies—we took action. Hundreds of thousands called on the Obama administration to protect this national landmark, and after months of hard work, they listened.

Obama: No new uranium mining near Grand Canyon

A million acres around the Grand Canyon will be off-limits to new uranium mining claims for the next 20 years, the longest time possible under current law, according to an announcement in January from U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar.

“Every uranium mine ever opened has required some degree of toxic waste clean-up,” said Nancy Pyne, Environment Colorado’s federal preservation advocate. “We thank Secretary Salazar for preventing the Grand Canyon from being a toxic waste dump.” Pyne also noted that uranium mining in the Grand Canyon could contaminate the Colorado River, which provides drinking water for 25 million people.

More than 300,000 voices demanded protection

Our staff and allies helped lay the groundwork for this preservation victory. We dug up the facts, shined a media spotlight on the dangers of uranium mining, helped more than 300,000 people submit comments to Sec. Salazar, and made the case for preservation directly to officials in Washington, D.C. This victory will protect land around the Grand Canyon and prevent potential contamination of the Colorado River and local groundwater.
Colorado has some of the best landscapes in the world, and from the Rocky Mountains to the Great Sand Dunes, we’re fighting to protect them from drilling and irresponsible development. In 2012, we worked to protect special places—like Browns Canyon and Chimney Rock—for their valuable natural heritage and their landscapes that should never be sacrificed. And our hard work paid off: The Obama administration declared Chimney Rock a national monument—keeping it protected for generations to come.

Special places defended from congressional attacks

Many of Colorado’s lands are protected from oil and gas drilling, industrial mining, and logging in order to preserve the state’s treasures. Last year, Congress threatened to open these beautiful landscapes up to energy development and other destructive actions.

With our members’ support, we were able to fend off bills like the Roadless Release Act and the Wilderness Development Act that would have allowed road-building and logging in the most pristine areas within and surrounding national parks and forests.

Preserving Browns Canyon and Chimney Rock

There are countless places in Colorado that we consider priceless. So year after year, we fight to win these protections. Here are a couple of the places we prioritized this past year:

• Browns Canyon provides rugged landscapes for hiking, whitewaters to raft and the valuable opportunity to just escape into the solitude of wilderness. This is one of those priceless areas that needs to be protected.

• Chimney Rock is not only awe-inspiring, it is extremely valuable to our natural heritage. Thousands of years of history can be found here, and we worked to make sure it remains protected for generations to come.
Defending Clean Energy

Environment Colorado has been a champion for the policies and incentives that have made our state a leader in clean, renewable power like wind and solar. That’s why in 2012, when lawmakers allied with some dirty energy interests sought to chip away at Colorado’s clean energy policies, we organized a strong response, based on hard facts and broad popular support—from ranchers and farmers to environmentalists and consumers. Together, we’ll continue to keep clean energy growing in Colorado.
**Colorado remained a clean energy leader, despite attempts to roll back progress**

Clean energy from wind and solar is a success story for Colorado during a tough economic time, generating pollution free energy and employing tens of thousands of Coloradans. In 2011 alone, Colorado’s installed wind capacity grew 39 percent and today, Colorado’s solar industry employs more citizens per capita than any other state. Even through this success, Colorado’s clean energy programs continue to be attacked by polluters.

**Supporters saved Renewable Energy Standard**

Environmentalists, clean energy businesses and their allies in the legislature were relieved at the end of the 2012 legislative session as a slew of bills designed to promote dirty energy were soundly defeated. Environmentalists credit the success of the pro-environmental votes last year to an outpouring of citizen support.

- During the last 12 hours of the session, almost 500 Environment Colorado activists sent messages to their state senators urging them to cast pro-environment votes.

- In addition, farmers and ranchers, primarily from Southern Colorado, actively supported the pro-environment position—demonstrating wide support in the state for a clean energy economy.

**Senators answered outcry to stand by clean energy**

In February, Environment Colorado’s Bessie Schwarz traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet with Sen. Mark Udall and Sen. Michael Bennet about strengthening environmental protections. She urged the senators to extend a federal tax credit that makes it easier for businesses to invest in wind energy in Colorado and across the country. Both senators said they supported the idea but that, given the anti-environmental political climate in Washington, they’d need to be sure that the people of Colorado wanted them to fight for clean energy.

A little more than a week later, the senators had nearly 1,000 messages from Environment Colorado supporters in their inboxes, and Sens. Udall and Bennet introduced The American Energy and Job Promotion Act to extend the successful wind production tax credit for two years.

“Environment Colorado members have stepped up on behalf of wind energy and of Colorado,” Sen. Bennet told Schwarz. Sen. Udall sent a message to our online activists, thanking them for “staying engaged and being a strong voice for Colorado energy jobs.”

“Colorado has been a national leader on clean energy policies, such as our renewable portfolio standard, and all Coloradans should work to make sure we continue to lead.”

-Sen. Mark Udall
If we want to spare our children and grandchildren the worst consequences of global warming, we must dramatically reduce the carbon pollution that we pump into the atmosphere. In 2012, we educated tens of thousands on the issue and released a report outlining the facts about global warming. The Obama administration then announced historic new clean car standards that will double fuel efficiency standards by 2025, cutting carbon pollution from vehicles in the United States by 270 million metric tons by 2030.

50,000 people educated about climate change
Global warming is happening now and its effects are being felt in the United States and around the world. Last summer, we educated 50,000 people on the causes and predicted impacts of global warming, like deadly heat waves, flooding, extreme drought and wildfires.

In 2012, the Obama administration pushed ahead to cut carbon emissions that fuel global warming, including clean car standards which will double the fuel efficiency of new cars and trucks by 2025, the first-ever carbon pollution standards for new power plants, and a doubling of the production of clean energy.

Report: When it Rains, it Pours
An Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center report makes it clear that Colorado and the Mountain West is already experiencing extreme downpours and heavy snowstorms much more frequently.

• Specifically, the new report found that storms with heavy rainfall or snow are up 30 percent in Colorado and 25 percent across the Mountain West compared to 60 years ago.

• In addition, Grand Junction shows a significant increase in the frequency of large storms with heavy precipitation, roughly estimated to be a 53 percent increase over the nearly 60-year period.

Here in Colorado and across the country, we’re already feeling the effects of global warming. Our staff continues to do research, educate the public and work for good policy to reduce global warming pollution.
Toxic-free waters

Uranium mining threatens our streams and rivers with toxic contamination. For years, Cotter Corporation’s uranium processing plant in Cañon City dumped their waste into pits, which polluted groundwater and a local surface stream. It was even dubbed a Superfund site in 1984. A few years ago, we helped pass legislation that called on the mine to clean up its act. In 2012, Cotter announced it would stop processing uranium in Cañon City—a major victory, but we need to make sure the cleanup happens next.

Victory: Uranium mine near Cañon City shut down
Cotter Corporation announced that it would stop processing uranium at its mill in Cañon City. The announcement comes two years after Environment Colorado helped pass a law that forced the company to clean up its act if it wanted to stay open.

The plant’s closure is great news for the community and for future actions against contamination from uranium mining and dumping. Cotter Corp. began storing liquid waste laced with radioactive materials in holding pools that leaked into the groundwater in the 1950s, and its mill was declared a Superfund site in 1984.

Grassroots power surged for the win
When we discovered that Cotter Corporation’s uranium processing plant’s toxic chemicals were contaminating Ralston Creek—a source of drinking water for 1.5 million Coloradans—we worked with local activists to win a law requiring companies like Cotter to clean up their act.

Beyond uranium, other types of metal mining can be toxic to our waters. Last summer, our staff met with Sen. Bennet’s staff to talk about protecting our waters. “I told the Senator’s aides about a man I met in Evergreen,” said canvasser Daniel Walker-Murray. “Bear River Creek flowed right through his backyard, and as a kid, he would kneel down and drink from it. His dad worked at a copper mine upstream. Today, they wouldn’t even think of drinking from the creek, it’s so polluted.”

“With Environment Colorado’s help, our community was able to unite for a clean up of the uranium mill. Our action was more successful than we could have imagined, leading to the mill’s closure.”

-Sharyn Cunningham
Cañon City Resident
Clean, Efficient Colorado

Right now, 40 percent of the energy used in America is used to heat, cool and power our buildings. Since most of this energy comes from fossil fuels, it accounts for almost half the global warming pollution in our country. One of our reports, released last spring, showed that energy efficiency improvements cut pollution and save Colorado families money. And because of great policies we helped pass in Colorado, we’re already seeing the benefits of cleaner air and money saved for families and businesses across the state.

Efficiency drastically cuts global warming pollution
Five years ago, we helped pass a bill that created energy efficiency goals and incentives for the state’s investor-owned utilities. As a result, Colorado homeowners and businesses have collectively saved a total of $640 million through lower utility bills.

We are continuing to build support for policy that will provide utility energy efficiency programs to the 40 percent of Coloradans that are served by small municipal utilities or rural cooperatives who, with some exceptions, still do not have access to robust energy efficiency audits, rebates and other services.

Report shows big savings for Colorado families
Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center’s report “Building a Better America: Saving Energy and Money with Efficiency,” found that we would reduce buildings-based global warming pollution by 39 percent if the government invests in energy efficiency measures.

The report found that energy-efficient homes would save the average Colorado family more than $350 a year, while reducing the projected energy use of Colorado’s buildings 24 percent by 2030. If we build on our current progress, we can prevent the cumulative emission of 15 million tons of global warming pollution by 2030, the equivalent of removing more than half of passenger vehicles (2.9 million) from the road.

Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center’s report outlined that energy-efficient buildings would save the average Colorado family of four up to $350 on their energy bills each year.
Stopping the Rush to Frack

We all agree that we should protect our clean drinking water from contamination. Yet the drilling practice of hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” in Colorado threatens our water supply with toxic chemicals. In 2012, our research and citizen support helped us win key legislation that protects our drinking water from the toxic chemicals of dangerous oil and gas fracking in Colorado.

Local government authority over fracking preserved
Timely activism from hundreds of Environment Colorado supporters—including a big push in the last 12 hours of the legislative session—helped secure important victories for clean energy in Colorado and preserve towns’ rights to defend themselves against fracking.

This support helped defeat two dangerous fracking bills aimed at local governments’ authority to protect their communities. One bill, S.B. 88, would have stripped local governments of the authority to curb the dirty and destructive drilling practice and another bill, H.B. 1356, would have penalized local governments for exercising the authority they do have.

Clean drinking water and clean energy prioritized
To many of us, it is common sense to protect the safety of our drinking water and stay on track with our clean energy vision in Colorado. Hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, not only uses millions of gallons of our scarce water at every fracking well, but it contaminates our drinking water with toxins and degrades our land with development.

This last spring, we applauded the Boulder County commissioners for passing a temporary moratorium on fracking in unincorporated areas and for the citizens of Longmont for putting a question on the ballot to ban fracking in their city.

Environment Colorado organized thousands of voices against oil and gas fracking in Colorado, which helped defeat fracking bills that would have jeopardized our clean drinking water.