Vital clean energy progress defended

Efforts lead to cleaner air, more clean jobs

Broncos fans know that if you want to win big, you’ve got to play defense—and that was certainly true for Environment Colorado and our allies at the state house in Denver this year.

While we advanced some crucial legislation—including plans to phase out coal and boost solar power—our most important success was in defending the progress of the last few years against legislators who wanted to roll back protections for our air, land, and wildlife and undercut years of effort toward a robust clean energy economy.

Thanks to a broad coalition of environmental groups, and the timely activism of many Environment Colorado members, not one environmental gain was undone.

Defending clean energy jobs

With our state on track to build 100,000 solar rooftops on homes and businesses, Colorado’s commitment to renewable energy has already brought more than $500 million in venture capital to the state.

Yet some lawmakers wanted to move backward, making the state’s clean energy “goal” less than the status quo. We blocked that effort and preserved clean jobs.

Moving forward on clean air, hydro and solar power

The Legislature passed a historic Regional Haze State Implementation Plan (SIP) designed to dramatically improve air quality and public health (see brief on page 2). Legislators also advanced efforts to increase the responsible development of clean hydroelectricity, and created a system to assess fair permitting fees for solar systems across jurisdictions to ensure that the industry keeps thriving.

A win for Colorado

It was a tough five months, but when the dust had settled, Environment Colorado and our conservation partners had blocked dozens of bad bills and moved even further toward a clean energy future. In their post-session wrap up, The Denver Post called the Colorado conservation community a clear winner of the 2011 legislative session. But the most important winners are the people of Colorado, who will benefit from cleaner air, water and jobs.

Save energy, save cash

We know energy efficiency is the cheapest and cleanest way to cut our fossil fuel use and pollution.

Check out Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center’s “Plugging Into Clean Energy” guide to help you cut through the clutter and pick what works for you at: www.EnvironmentColorado.org/center/plug-into-clean-energy
To our members

Fall is my favorite time to head out to Leadville or Aspen and try to bag a few last fourteeners before the snow hits the high country.

Yet every time I head West, I'm reminded of the constant and increasing pressure our landscape is under. The scattered dead pines from the bark beetle—an epidemic caused in no small part by a changing climate—seem to appear a little earlier on my drive down I-70. Mining claims are cropping up near trailheads, and another oil and gas operation has picked up steam closer to a forest road.

Slowly puttering my way to the peak, I have plenty of time to appreciate the unparalleled experience of the Colorado backcountry. And though the threats to our land are grave, I'm encouraged that folks like you are fighting with us to ensure that we all can enjoy the golden landscape of Colorado in fall for many, many years to come.

Thanks for being with us,

Pam Kiely
Program Director

Recent action

Polluters take us to court over clean energy standards
Environment Colorado and our allies are standing up for the state's renewable energy standards in court. A group called the American Tradition Institute has filed a lawsuit against the state of Colorado, claiming that our mandate for 30 percent renewable energy by 2020 is unconstitutional. The group says the energy standard puts an “undue burden” on utility companies, but Xcel energy recently announced that it will be able to meet the new standard next year—eight full years ahead of the deadline set by Colorado’s law.

A 30 percent renewable energy standard will keep tons of global warming pollution out of the air, create clean jobs and make Colorado a leader in the growing clean energy market. We're working with a coalition of environmental groups—including EarthJustice and Western Resource Advocates—to ensure that the ATI case is quickly dismissed and that we stay on the road to a clean energy future.

Clearing the air: Regional haze plan approved
The last piece of the Clean Air puzzle is finally in place—and Coloradans can breathe easier as a result. This spring, the Legislature approved a strong regional haze reduction plan.

After former Gov. Bill Ritter signed the Clean Air, Clean Jobs bill in April 2010, the Public Utilities Commission and the state Air Quality Control Commission were charged with approving a plan to replace or repower our oldest, dirtiest coal plants to dramatically reduce air pollution.

Eight months later, the PUC issued a formal ruling to shutter the Valmont coal plant in Boulder and the Cherokee coal plant in Denver. On the heels of that decision, the AQCC in January approved a strong plan to meet federal standards for regional haze, and the Legislature signed off this spring. The state submitted the final plan to the EPA this summer for approval.
Cars of the future: A huge boost for fuel efficiency

With the cost of our oil addiction at an all-time high, we called on President Obama to take a bold step: Put us on the road to oil independence by making super-efficient cars the norm. He listened—announcing that fuel efficiency standards will double by 2025, to 54.5 miles per gallon.

The most important policy ever enacted to break our oil dependence
In the weeks leading up to the president’s decision, thousands of members of our national federation sent messages urging him to raise fuel-efficiency standards dramatically. We pointed out that if all the cars on the road today got 60 mpg, the average Colorado household would save more than $730 a year. Nationwide, we noted, a 60 mpg standard would reduce our oil consumption by 44 million barrels per year by 2025 and cut carbon pollution by 465 million metric tons—the equivalent of taking 70 million cars off the road.

More than 10,000 people signed our petition urging the president to enact this ambitious but achievable standard. While the president’s decision fell a few miles per gallon short of the position we fought for, the new standard is a huge step toward a clean energy future.

The damage mounts
Unfortunately, oil-related environmental disasters keep piling up. In July, an ExxonMobil pipeline spilled 42,000 gallons of oil into the Yellowstone River. As one resident said after the spill, “You go down to where the oil is, and you don’t hear anything anymore. No birds, no toads, no crickets, nothing.” Our oil dependence has taken a terrible toll on wildlife, water quality and the economy in communities nationwide—from the Gulf of Mexico, to the Kalamazoo River in Michigan, to the Jordan River that feeds into the Great Salt Lake. The good news is that a growing number of politicians are waking up to the fact that we can’t continue to depend on a fuel source that does so much damage to the places we love.

Sen. Michael Bennet stands up to Big Oil
As the Obama administration worked on new efficiency standards this summer, oil companies ramped up pressure on Congress—even holding industry-funded rallies to make it look like the American public supports Big Oil’s agenda.

The president didn’t fall for it—and neither did Sen. Michael Bennet. His “Oil Independence for a Stronger America Act,” introduced in July, would reduce America’s oil consumption by 8 million barrels a day—completely eliminating our oil dependence by 2030.

Of course, the oil industry and their allies on Capitol Hill aren’t giving up. We can’t match their lobbyists dollar for dollar, but we’ll keep working to make sure that decision-makers hear Coloradans’ voices just as loudly.

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After talking to folks across the state about the need to close legal loopholes in the Clean Water Act, Environment Colorado joined forces with Trout Unlimited, Clean Water Action, and others to deliver 23,887 postcards, photo petitions, and letters to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in support of its efforts to protect all of our state’s waterways from pollution and irresponsible development.

As the public comment period for the EPA’s proposed guidance to clarify the Clean Water Act came to a close, kayakers, conservationists and sportsmen from across the state demonstrated broad support for the agency’s efforts. “This summer we’ve heard from tens of thousands of Coloradans, and the consensus is clear,” said Pam Kiely, program director of Environment Colorado. “People support strong EPA action to fully protect the creeks and rivers they rely on for rafting, kayaking, swimming and fishing.”

Thousands sign on to protect our rivers

College student Alex Adamczyk and fellow Environment Colorado staff members helped deliver more than 20,000 comments to the EPA, urging the agency to enforce strong clean water rules.

Add your voice to the growing call to protect Colorado’s waters:
www.EnvironmentColorado.org