EPA moves to restore river protections

Some in Congress try to block the EPA

While Environment Colorado made significant progress for our rivers over the last year, we might need to overcome resistance in Congress before achieving lasting results.

Over the last decade, polluters have used litigation to strip Clean Water Act protections from 65,000 miles of streams in Colorado, and more across the country. These smaller waterways feed and protect all our rivers, from the South Platte to the Arkansas. They also provide drinking water for 3.5 million Coloradans.

Last fall, when polluters stymied our efforts to fix this loophole in Congress, we urged the EPA to use its own authority to do so. In response, the agency began drafting formal instructions for its attorneys to apply clean water protections to the fullest extent allowed by law.

EPA targeted by “continuing resolution”

Exploiting the budget battle, lobbyists for the mining industry, developers and other polluting industries enlisted their allies on Capitol Hill to include a number of amendments that strip environmental protections. Among the amendments was one that would block the EPA from taking action to restore the Clean Water Act while slashing funding for preventing sewage overflows.

To stop this onslaught, Environment Colorado and our allies across the country worked to expose the polluter influence behind it, and to show broad public support for clean water. On Feb. 14, we presented EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson with thousands of signatures.

Two weeks later, we issued a report showing the growing influence of corporate agribusiness and its systematic efforts to roll back clean water laws. On March 9, the Senate rejected the budget package containing these anti-clean water amendments by a margin of 44-56, but there is little doubt that polluters will try again soon.

Throughout the summer, we’ll be building support for the EPA’s efforts, giving them the public support they need to issue strong new rules that keep Colorado’s rivers running clean.

While the EPA has announced its intention to protect our rivers, some in Congress are trying to block them. Take action on our website to support the EPA’s work to protect our rivers.
Recent action

Clean energy progress defended
Over the last few years Colorado has built a strong clean energy economy. 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 state lawmakers have made efforts to gut clean energy gains, which would result in the loss of Colorado jobs. Among these measures were attempts to lower the state’s clean energy goal (making the “goal” actually less than status quo) and efforts to prevent the state from considering environmental impacts in making planning decisions for our energy future.

With help from partners in the conservation, health and business communities, Environment Colorado has halted these and other attacks, ensuring the continued growth of renewable energy development, which has been a bright spot in Colorado’s economy.

Colorado state parks facing funding crisis
Colorado’s deepening fiscal crisis could take its toll on our state parks. State funding for our parks has been on the decline since the early 1990s, forcing the State Parks Board to accept increased fees, staff layoffs and salary cuts. If Colorado’s budget crisis is not solved, the parks board may be forced to take even more dramatic action, such as leasing St. Vrain State Park to drilling interests or moving forward with park closures.

Our state parks are more popular than ever, with 12 million visits in the last year. Environment Colorado will be working hard this upcoming year with the administration to help protect our parks from closure or development. The loss of our state parks system would be a huge blow to the millions of Coloradans across the state who spend summer afternoons boating, biking or wildlife watching.

To our members

Summer in Colorado means rafting down the Arkansas, kayaking through Glenwood Canyon, or maybe fishing on the South Platte River.

All of these waters are cleaner than they once were, thanks in part to the action of local citizens and the standards set and enforced by state and federal officials.

As times have changed, officials have updated these standards so we keep moving toward a goal of waters that are safe and clean enough to swim in, fish in or drink from.

As some in Congress consider whether to block the EPA from doing its job, I hope you’ll join us this summer in showing your support for clean water.

Sincerely,

Pam Kiely
Program Director
Every year, Coloradans pay over $3.5 billion to power and heat our homes and businesses. This year, our homes and offices could start giving some of that money back—with the help of creative new energy efficiency initiatives.

By refocusing our efforts on efficiency, homeowners could have an easier time financing efficiency upgrades, building owners could have an easier time marketing buildings that are highly efficient, and the bar could be raised for all new homes and buildings so anything new that is getting built is being done right from the start.

Buildings account for 40 percent of all the energy we use. Real improvements in energy efficiency will help cut air pollution, create new jobs in the burgeoning clean-tech industry, and save Colorado homeowners and businesses money each month on their energy bills.

**Building energy ratings**

When you buy a car or a washing machine, it tells you how much fuel or electricity it uses—and allows you to make a greener choice. Why not do the same thing for commercial buildings?

Currently, many businesses that buy or lease a property don’t know the energy performance of the buildings they might be considering. We’re backing the Building Energy Rating Bill, which will assign an energy performance score to buildings.

“This is like buying a car with no concept of the car’s fuel efficiency, or what your annual fuel costs would be for that vehicle,” said sponsor Sen. Michael Johnston. “With a uniform rating system on commercial energy performance, similar to a mile-per-gallon standard on automobiles, we can create a market incentive to improve a building’s energy efficiency and help business-owners make smarter, informed decisions about what buildings to buy and rent.”

**Financing energy efficiency**

The up-front cost is one of the biggest hurdles to homeowners and small businesses making cost-effective efficiency upgrades. To solve this problem, we need to provide better financing options and easy access to capital that helps homeowners afford efficiency improvements. Exploring new options, such as working with utilities and banks to help finance upgrades as part of their utility efficiency programs, could put efficiency on the fast track—leading to savings for consumers and good new jobs in the efficiency industry.

**Green building codes**

We’re calling for updates to be made to building codes, so they mirror the 2009 Energy Conservation Code standards. Studies show that raising the standard to meet the 2009 conservation code would save between $213 and $266 on utilities every year for the average household.

By adopting this code, Gov. John Hickenlooper can expand Denver’s leadership in green buildings statewide.

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**Efficiency saves green**

Environment Colorado estimates that energy-efficiency improvements and better buildings could save as much as 50 percent of the $3.5 billion we spend on utility bills in Colorado.
The South Park Basin provides fresh, clean drinking water for 1.5 million residents in the Denver Metro Area, and it includes several drinking water reservoirs such as Antero Reservoir, Spinney Mountain Reservoir, and the watershed for the South Platte River. The area is also known for being rich in wildlife resources such as mule deer, pronghorn, black bear and greater sage-grouse.

The state land board has been contemplating issuing leases to drill in the South Park Basin. Environment Colorado has urged caution and a full assessment of the impacts on both Antero Reservoir and a gold-medal fishery on the Middle Fork of the South Platte before moving forward.