Congress put protections for Colorado’s rivers at risk

We’re on the verge of winning major new protections for nearly 75,000 miles of streams and hundreds of acres of wetlands, from the waterways that feed the Arkansas and Colorado rivers, to smaller streams like Boulder Creek, Clear Creek and others in our backyards.

But just as President Obama is about to sign off on the biggest victory for Colorado’s rivers in decades, some polluter-friendly members of Congress are doing everything they can to block our progress. As this newsletter went to print, there were four separate rollback attempts under consideration in the House and Senate.

720,606 pounds of chemicals
A recent report from Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center shows that polluters discharged 720,606 pounds of toxic chemicals into Colorado’s waterways in 2010, including 249,446 pounds of chemicals into the South Platte River alone, making it the most polluted river in Colorado.

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.

Civic leaders speak out
Thankfully, the Obama administration announced in February that they are in the last stages of finalizing new guidelines to restore these critical protections.

Environment Colorado and our supporters played an important role in persuading the administration to act.

This spring, Sen. Lucia Guzman, Commerce City Mayor Pro Tem Dominick Moreno and Confluence Kayaks owner Alex Manzo joined Environment Colorado staff and activists at public events to raise awareness of the threat to our rivers and streams.

At one such event, we hand-delivered letters signed by almost 125 elected officials, farmers, and business owners urging Jim Martin, EPA Regional Administrator for Colorado, to help ensure that Clean Water Act protections were restored.

This summer, Environment Colorado outreach staff are pounding the pavement, building the public support our leaders will need to stand up for Colorado’s rivers.
Dear Environment Colorado member,

I’ll admit that I was a little nervous when I heard that my colleague Bessie had set a goal of generating 1,000 petitions for clean energy in a little more than a week.

I should’ve known our supporters were up for the challenge! Whether we’re bringing more clean energy to Colorado, fighting to restore protections to Boulder Creek, Clear Creek and all of our waters, or working with our national federation to keep mercury out of our environment, I’m so inspired by the thousands of members and supporters who give so generously of their time, money and effort to make our work possible.

I hope this summer brings many opportunities for you to get out and enjoy the forests, rivers and open spaces that you’ve done so much to protect. Thank you again for all of your support.

Sincerely,

Jeanne Bassett
For Environment Colorado
Building a better Colorado

Report highlights energy efficiency benefits

We can reduce buildings-based global warming pollution by 39 percent if the government invests in energy efficiency measures, according to a report by Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center. More energy-efficient buildings would also save the average Colorado family more than $350 a year.

“It’s time to build better,” said Environment Colorado Research & Policy Center’s Jeanne Bassett. “Bold efficiency measures for buildings can cut energy use in our homes and businesses by 24 percent by 2030, reducing pollution and saving consumers money.”

Like taking 2.9 million cars off the road

Right now, 40 percent of the energy used in America goes to heat, cool and power our buildings. And because much of this energy comes from dirty and dangerous sources like coal, oil, natural gas, and nuclear power, buildings account for nearly half of global warming pollution emitted in the country. Furthermore, much of this energy is wasted, flying out of leaky doors and windows.

The report, “Building a Better America: Saving Energy and Money with Efficiency,” uses government data to analyze the benefits Colorado would see if we committed to dramatically improving the energy efficiency of new and existing buildings.

Making our buildings more efficient in Colorado would:

- Reduce the projected energy use of Colorado’s buildings 24 percent by 2030.
- 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.

That’s the best part about making energy efficiency improvements,” said Bassett. “They pay for themselves as consumers enjoy lower energy bills and a cleaner environment year after year.”

“Building homes and commercial buildings right the first time is the best future-proofing we can do for Colorado homeowners today,” said Jim Meyers, Director of the Buildings Efficiency Program at the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project. Meyers noted that private sector programs like Xcel Energy’s “New Homes” project—which builds homes that are 10-15 percent more efficient than current building codes require—are making important steps in the right direction.

30 percent more efficient by 2020

Our report calls for steady improvements to building codes over time so that, by 2030, new buildings are so efficient that they can produce all the energy they need on-site using renewable sources. We’re also calling for investment in energy retrofits and weatherization to improve the efficiency of existing buildings 30 percent by 2030.

The good news is that efficiency programs and incentives are paying off, saving consumers money and reducing energy use. Our challenge now is to build on these successes.

Building a Better America

more online

Read the full report, and get tips for making your home more energy efficient, at: www.EnvironmentColoradoCenter.org.

Interview

Sen. Mark Udall

Why is clean energy important to you?
The clean energy industry holds tremendous economic potential for Colorado as new jobs, technologies and businesses are created. Focusing on clean energy can also strengthen our national security and help provide cleaner water and air to all Americans.

What must we do to support Colorado’s clean energy future?
Every time I am in Colorado, I am amazed at what Coloradans are already doing, from creating community solar opportunities to opening wind tower manufacturing plants. 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. I’m working in Congress to export Colorado’s good ideas to the rest of the country.

What are the most pressing threats to Colorado’s open spaces?
Our population is expected to double by 2050; we need to be proactive so that future generations can experience the beauty, clean water and air, and wildlife that we have today. That is why I continue to fight for full funding of the Land and Water Conservation Fund and why I support extending a crucial tax incentive for people who donate a conservation easement on their farms, ranches, or other open spaces.

Read the full interview at: www.EnvironmentColorado.org.
Victory for the 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, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced in January.

Our staff and allies helped lay the groundwork for this preservation victory by digging up the facts, shining a media spotlight on the dangers of uranium mining, helping more than 300,000 people submit comments to Sec. Salazar, and making the case for preservation directly to officials in Washington, D.C.

“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 125 million people.