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Summer Report

Clean water for Massachusetts

Showing support for EPA action

When we were kids, most of us were warned not to swim until at least 30 minutes after we eat. The better advice might be: Don't swim until at least 48 hours after a heavy rain.

Massachusetts has come a long way since the days when Greater Boston discharged wastewater directly into Boston Harbor. Yet heavy rains still overwhelm too many sewer systems, sending untreated waste directly into our rivers, streams, bays and harbors. This waste leads to high bacteria levels in waters used for swimming—triggering ear infections, gastrointestinal illness and more.

Worse, thanks to a pair of controversial recent Supreme Court decisions, Clean Water Act protections for more than half of our state's streams and wetlands have been called into question—a huge loophole for would-be polluters. As one Environmental Protection Agency official put it, "When companies figure out the cops can't operate, they start remembering how much cheaper it is to just dump stuff in a nearby creek."

Millions of gallons of untreated sewage
Fortunately, the EPA is moving to restore and strengthen protections for our waterways. The agency is planning to update standards that would reduce runoff pollution, including sewage, from stormwater overflows, and restore Clean Water Act protections to all of our waters, including small streams and wetlands.



▲ Rivers and streams in Massachusetts.

These steps would help reduce the discharge of untreated sewage into places like Quincy Harbor each year, a primary reason why beaches were closed in Falmouth, Yarmouth and Truro in 2010.

Among those opposing the standards is the National Association of Home Builders, which has urged Congress to block the EPA from doing its job. Unfortunately, in February, the U.S. House voted to prohibit the EPA from restoring clean water protections to streams and wetlands.

We've held the line against attacks on clean water so far, but as the debate over

the nation's spending continues, there is little doubt that polluters and their allies in Congress will keep trying to roll back protections for our water.

"They might want to roll back the clock," said Ben Wright, our chief advocate. "But we're confident that the people of Massachusetts want to keep making progress on clean water."



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show your support

◀ Groups from Trout Unlimited to the Sierra Club have joined the fight for clean water. If you lead or are active in a group and want to endorse our campaign, email Ben Wright at ben@environmentmassachusetts.org



To our members

Summer in Massachusetts means going to Crane Beach in Ipswich or Marconi in Wellfleet, taking a canoe trip on the Concord or a rafting trip on the Deerfield, or maybe fishing on the Connecticut River or in Boston Harbor.

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 for swimming, fishing and drinking.

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

Sincerely,

Ben Wright
Advocate

Recent action

2010 a breakthrough year for solar

In an otherwise lackluster year for the economy, the solar industry shone brighter than ever before in 2010, with a 67 percent increase in the amount of solar energy projects installed across America compared to 2009.

That means thousands more homes and businesses powered by pollution-free solar energy, an increase made possible by strong solar policies implemented at the urging of Environment Massachusetts. In December, our top clean energy advocate in Washington, D.C., Sean Garren, led our charge in Congress to extend critical incentives for solar power.

Environment Massachusetts, along with the rest of the Environment America federation, continues to strategize with entrepreneurs within the solar industry to hit a far more ambitious benchmark: getting 10 percent of our nation's energy from solar by 2030.

President pushes for conservation funding

Margie Alt, the director of our national federation, joined President Barack Obama at the White House in February for his announcement that he'd seek the renewal of the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund.

What's the Land and Water Conservation Fund? For the past 45 years, the federal government has put a fraction of the revenue from offshore drilling into a trust fund to expand national parks, protect hunting and fishing areas, and aid local conservation and recreation projects such as city parks and playing fields.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund has benefited national treasures in all 50 states—from the Appalachian Trail that winds its way up through Massachusetts, all the way to the Grand Canyon.

Our staff is currently building support for the approval of the conservation funding in Congress.

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▲ A professor takes his class to tour a solar roof at the Watertown Arsenal.

Energy efficiency gets a new headquarters

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There are plenty of government agencies, utility programs, nonprofit organizations and others that are ready to help Massachusetts families save energy.

Yet with so many rebates, discounts, financing deals and other incentives, it's hard to know where to start. That's why Environment Massachusetts, with support from the Mass Energy Consumers Alliance, created our online Energy Efficiency Headquarters.

Guide cuts through the clutter

The online guide is designed to help people cut through the clutter and pick what works for them. On the site, visitors can sign up for a free energy audit, the results of which will give them a detailed blueprint for energy-saving investments in their homes. The site also offers step-by-step links to the credits, rebates or other incentives that will reduce your upfront costs and accelerate the return on your energy-efficiency investment.

More than 200 sign up for energy audits

Environment Massachusetts Advocate Ben Wright has promoted the home energy audits at district meetings in Pittsfield, Andover and other communities, as well as through email to our online supporters list, with more than 200 people signing up so far.

The meetings have served a dual purpose, also bringing Wright, local residents and their legislators together to talk about how the state can do more to promote energy efficiency and clean energy.

"I am so pleased that after years of working to pass laws and implement energy efficiency programs, our members are finally able to reap the benefits," said Wright.

Environment Massachusetts and state Sen. Jamie Eldridge drafted legislation that would ensure that all new buildings generate more energy than they consume by 2030.

These steps would build on the progress already made in Massachusetts under such laws as the Green Communities Act and the Global Warming Solutions Act, as well as the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, all of which were adopted after spirited grassroots campaigns involving our staff and members.

Under the Green Communities Act, Massachusetts will now get 15 percent of our energy from renewable sources. Large-scale projects like Cape Wind will play a huge role, but rooftop and neighborhood solar and wind will also be part of the solution.

The Global Warming Solutions Act commits our state to reducing our global warming pollution 25 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. This legislative session, Environment Massachusetts will be advocating for the renewable energy and energy efficiency solutions that will get us there.

"More Massachusetts families and communities are starting to take advantage of energy efficiency and clean, renewable power, thanks in part to the pro-clean energy policies we've helped put in place," said Wright. "We're looking forward to doing whatever we can to keep bringing more of these benefits to more people throughout our state."



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online



Energy efficiency headquarters

www.EnvironmentMassachusetts.org/energy/energy-efficiency-headquarters



Rep. Bill Keating

We sat down with the U.S. Representative of the Cape and Islands.

Q: What are your environmental priorities?

A: *Wastewater management and access to safe, affordable public drinking water are top environmental priorities throughout my district. Additionally, coastal erosion continues to be a challenge due to both natural tides and man-made flows like the Cape Cod Canal. As a result, we see several inches of coast lost each year. I am looking into potential solutions to remedy these problems. On a broader level, I strongly support smart investments in clean energy technology and am proud that Cape Cod will be home to our country's first offshore wind farm. By cultivating alternative sources of energy, we are not only protecting our environment, but also keeping our country competitive in the global marketplace and reducing our dependence on foreign oil.*

Q: What is the main obstacle to progress on the environment in Congress?

A: *Without a doubt, the most pressing obstacle facing environmental preservation and protection efforts in Congress is the pending budget cuts. Approximately two-thirds of the proposed cuts come directly from programs that protect our environment. While I believe we must combat the rising federal deficit, I do not believe we should attempt to achieve that goal by arbitrarily slashing funding for effective government programs. Many of the initiatives facing total or severe funding reductions are essential wildlife and habitat conservation efforts, like the North American Wetlands Conservation Act and State Wildlife Grants. It would be a huge setback to have successful environmental protection programs fall victim to partisan devices.*

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Environment Massachusetts

Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open space. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Massachusetts. We focus exclusively on protecting Massachusetts' air, water and open space. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Lawmakers sign on to plastic bag ban

With plastic pollution swirling into a toxic soup known by researchers as the North Atlantic Garbage Patch, harming untold numbers of marine wildlife, 40 Massachusetts lawmakers have agreed to cosponsor a bill that would reduce the pollution by banning plastic check-out bags.

The action came after at least 600 Environment Massachusetts supporters urged their state representatives and senators to support the bill.

Our state uses 3 million plastic bags per day, with many bags littering our streets, parks and beaches and ultimately washing into the sea. From coast to coast—from Los Angeles County to North Carolina's Outer Banks and towns up and down Massachusetts' shoreline—many communities have already agreed to ban the bag.



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Facts on the North Atlantic Garbage Patch

- **Maximum density:** 520,000 bits of plastic per square mile
- **Range:** As much as 990 miles, roughly from Cuba to Virginia
- **Threat to wildlife:** Fish, birds and other animals mistake the plastic for food