Improving protection for our drinking water

For decades, more than two million Massachusetts residents have been able to count on clean, healthy drinking water from the Quabbin Reservoir. The forest land surrounding the Quabbin—set aside years ago thanks to the foresight of the state—filters out pollutants and helps maintain some of the purest drinking water in the country.

But the water has been threatened recently by nearsighted logging activity. In late 2009, the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation allowed loggers to clear-cut an area surrounding the Quabbin. This is a major threat to our biggest source of drinking water. While the commonwealth recently completed a process for determining how to manage public lands other than watersheds, it is important that officials now address the problems facing this critical habitat and source of drinking water.

Heavy grassroots pressure
The good news is that in early July, Gov. Deval Patrick’s administration announced a suspension in logging around the Quabbin reservoir, pending scientific review and public commentary on the management of state forests around watersheds. The percentage of forestland in Massachusetts that is protected from logging was also increased, from only 40 percent to more than 60 percent. This time-out for our forestland is an important first step toward ensuring that our drinking water remains some of the purest in the country.

The announcement came after heavy pressure from grassroots activists across the commonwealth.

Our field staff spent the summer talking to hundreds of Bay Staters each day, having conversations on the street and on our members’ doorsteps. After spending the past few months raising awareness and recruiting new activists for our drinking water, we’re carrying this campaign into the fall. Working inside the Statehouse and outside with our members, we’ll continue to make sure that the voices of citizens across the commonwealth are heard loud and clear: No more clear-cuts around the Quabbin Reservoir.

Read the newsletter on our website:
www.EnvironmentMassachusetts.com/newsletters/fall10
To our members

Since the Deepwater Horizon tragedy on April 20 and throughout the ensuing disaster, our members have been contacting me almost daily, asking how they can help. As part of Environment America, Environment Massachusetts has worked to connect residents of the commonwealth with Gulf state organizations and activists to prevent another tragedy like the one that continues to unfold.

Our members are stepping up: Through our “Gumbo for the Gulf” initiative, dozens of residents across the commonwealth held Cajun-themed potlucks and dinner parties to raise money for our organizing, and for local organizations to help with direct food relief for affected fishermen. We’ll keep you posted this fall on ways you can get involved—and on what you can do to protect our own coast.

Thanks, again, for all that you do.

Sincerely,

Ben Wright
Advocate

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Recent action

400,000 strong against new offshore drilling

In the wake of the Gulf oil spill, Environment Massachusetts and our national federation, Environment America, helped rally more than 400,000 people to speak out against expanded offshore drilling.

The repercussions of America’s dependence on oil became tragically apparent when BP’s Deepwater Horizon drill rig exploded in April, gushing more than 120 million gallons of oil into the Gulf. The spill devastated wildlife, coastal marshes and the people who depend on the Gulf for their livelihoods—and the aftershocks will be felt for years.

The surest ways to prevent a catastrophe like this from happening again are to better regulate existing drilling and ban drilling in new areas. We’ve spoken to 80,000 people in six states to build support against expanded drilling. In June, Environment Massachusetts and our allies submitted more than 400,000 petition signatures asking the president to stop the rush to expand offshore drilling.

Fighting global warming at home

The fight against global warming begins at home—literally. Homes, businesses, offices and other buildings account for 54 percent of the energy used in Massachusetts, and over 90 percent of that energy comes from dirty and dangerous sources of power that increase our state’s global warming pollution—not to mention our energy bills.

Fortunately, there’s a simple solution: making our buildings more energy efficient. Increasing the efficiency of homes through simple retrofits and upgrades not only reduces our state’s global warming pollution, but according to the Alliance to Save Energy, can save consumers 30 percent of their energy bill or more. This fall, Environment Massachusetts is partnering with other community and environmental groups to help Massachusetts residents take advantage of programs to help weatherize their own homes. For more information, contact us at 617-747-4400.

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How do you want to be remembered?

You can be remembered as someone who cared enough to keep up the fight for a cleaner, greener, healthier future by making a bequest to Environment Massachusetts.

For information, call: 1-800-841-7299, or e-mail PlannedGiving@EnvironmentMassachusetts.org.
The United States just suffered the greatest environmental disaster in our history. At least 120 million gallons of oil poured into the Gulf after BP’s Deepwater Horizon drill rig exploded on April 20—the equivalent of more than 10 Exxon Valdez spills.

Oil contaminated 580 miles of coastline from Texas to Florida, and the spill has already proven catastrophic for local wildlife—from oil-soaked pelicans, to dolphins choking on fumes, to the sea turtles who nest in the Gulf’s warm waters. It will also be catastrophic for shrimpers, fishermen, and the men and women who work in the Gulf’s $20 billion tourism industry, all of whom now face a difficult and uncertain future.

It may take decades for the ecology and the economy of the Gulf Coast to recover. As we begin the long process of cleaning up the spill, compensating those affected, and rebuilding the Gulf Coast, we must ensure that a crisis of this magnitude never happens again. We have known for decades that America’s dependence on oil is environmentally and economically unsustainable. Beyond the threat of catastrophe, our addiction to oil pollutes our air, endangers our climate, enriches our enemies, and robs our economy of billions of dollars every day.

And while it’s not an immediate threat, as long as we remain dependent on fossil fuels, Massachusetts’ coast is not without its own tempting reserves. U.S. Rep. Edward Markey has authored a bill that would permanently ban drilling off the coast of New England, protecting critical fishing ground and habitat including Georges Bank forever. Environment Massachusetts is urging our entire Congressional delegation to stand behind this proposal.

We can get off oil permanently
The best way to protect our own New England coast is to free America from our dependence on oil, and Environment Massachusetts is part of a major new program to make that happen. We want American-made electric cars instead of more air pollution, walkable communities and public transit instead of price shocks at the pump, and clean electricity instead of oil spills. The result will be more jobs, less pollution, improved public health, and thousands of dollars in savings for American families.

Environment Massachusetts is bringing together a coalition of environmental groups, public health organizations, consumer advocates and national security groups to build a sustained campaign to end America’s addiction to oil.

Right now, we are fighting to ensure that any climate or energy bill passed by Congress includes strong policies to reduce oil dependence. Sen. Jeff Merkley of Oregon recently proposed visionary legislation that could reduce our oil consumption by over 40 percent by 2030 through increased fuel efficiency, support for electric vehicles, and regulatory reform to ensure our tax dollars support public transit and smart growth instead of highways and sprawl. We call on the Senate to pass Sen. Merkley’s plan.

The disaster in the Gulf demands that we go further after the current standards expire, so Environment Massachusetts is calling for even stronger rules requiring cars and trucks to go farther on a gallon of gas.

In May, President Obama announced historic new clean car standards, which Environment Massachusetts and our network of sister environment groups helped to secure. These new rules are expected to cut gasoline consumption by more than 11 billion gallons per year in 2016, nearly as much as all the vehicles in Texas use annually. This is a great start, but not nearly enough—the standards are slated to expire in 2016.

The BP oil spill in the Gulf demonstrated in heartbreaking terms why we need to move away from oil as quickly as possible. That’s why Environment Massachusetts is working to set aggressive new standards requiring cars and trucks to go farther on a gallon of gas.
As oil flowed into the Gulf of Mexico in June, Sens. Scott Brown and John Kerry had to decide whether or not to increase America’s dependence on oil and block Clean Air Act rules by voting on a measure that would have done both. Sen. Kerry stood up for the environment; Sen. Brown stood by the side of Big Oil.

The measure, dubbed the “Dirty Air Act,” would have crippled future attempts to reduce our dependence on oil by blocking any regulation of global warming pollution—including new federal clean car standards. The measure failed, but the fight against polluters and their allies is far from over.

“Now the Senate must get down to business passing a bill to lessen the extensive damage caused in the Gulf, cut our oil dependence, and move to a clean energy economy that caps carbon pollution and finally prioritizes energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy,” said Emily Figdor, our federal global warming program director, in a statement following the Senate’s vote.