Make every day ‘Skip the Straw Day’

Back in February, Environment Massachusetts and our national network announced plans to introduce legislation in seven states requiring restaurants to make disposable plastic straws available only on request. The announcement came on Feb. 22, the third annual National Skip the Straw Day.

**Thousands pledge to skip the straw**

Two years ago, a group of innovative students and their adviser at Whitehall Middle School in Michigan developed the idea of “Skip the Straw Day” to encourage consumers to forgo one of the most common forms of plastic pollution contaminating our waterways.

To mark the occasion, along with our network partner U.S. PIRG, we challenged our members and supporters to pledge not to use plastic straws for a day and commit to reducing the amount of single-use plastics in their daily lives.

“Every day should be ‘Skip the Straw Day,’” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s Conservation campaign. “Nothing we use for five minutes should threaten our environment for hundreds of years.”

You responded in truly impressive numbers: Across the country, more than 10,000 of our network’s supporters committed to skipping the straw.

**A growing plastic waste crisis**

Every year, about 8 million tons of plastic end up in the environment. The pollution finds its way into our rivers and eventually the ocean, where it has built up in staggering amounts.

The Great Pacific Garbage Patch has grown to nearly four times the size of California. In the deepest place on Earth, the Mariana Trench, researchers have found the highest level of plastic pollution ever observed in the open ocean.

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Thanks for making it all possible

Millennials for Renewables: Young leaders come together for 100% renewable energy

Millennials get blamed for ... well, everything, but you can’t pin climate change on them. Still, that’s not stopping dozens of millennial leaders in Massachusetts from taking action to solve it.

Boston City Councilor Michelle Wu and state Sen. Eric Lesser (Longmeadow) were among the elected officials, entrepreneurs, architects, researchers and nonprofit leaders who came together on Dec. 3 to get Massachusetts to 100 percent renewable energy. We hosted the event, held at the Boston University Build Lab.

“As millennials, the way our society produces and consumes energy will affect our lives for decades to come,” said Environment Massachusetts State Director Ben Hellerstein. “The good news is that we have the power to do something about it.”

Environment Massachusetts continues to host Millennials for Renewables events to build support for a bill that would set goals for 100 percent clean energy throughout the state’s economy by 2045.

Massachusetts legislators are ready to prioritize climate legislation

On Jan. 10, state Sen. Marc Pacheco (Taunton) and state Rep. Ruth Balser (Newton) released a letter supporting strong climate legislation in 2019. The letter was signed by more than 80 legislators from across the state.

“With the stroke of a pen, governors can start cutting global warming pollution today by increasing renewable energy use, reducing transportation emissions and curbing energy waste,” said Andrea McGimsey, senior director of our national network’s Global Warming Solutions program.

In 2019, our national network will be urging governors around the country to adopt these recommendations.
Plastic does not biodegrade. Instead, it breaks down into smaller fragments—which, all too often, birds, fish and marine animals mistake for food.

Scientists have found plastic fragments in hundreds of species, including 44 percent of seabird species, 43 percent of marine mammal species and every species of sea turtle. Ingesting these fragments is often fatal, because animals can starve when they eat too much plastic they can’t digest.

**Moving beyond plastic**

The solution is so simple: We have to stop using single-use plastics. That’s why Environment Massachusetts and our national network launched our Wildlife Over Waste campaign in May 2018, targeting single-use plastic pollution. Just four months later, California became the first state to require sit-down restaurants to only give out plastic straws upon request. This year, Colorado, Connecticut, Florida, Montana, New Jersey, Oregon and Rhode Island have all introduced similar legislation.

“Reducing the number of plastic straws we use is one of the easiest ways to reduce plastic pollution,” said Alex Truelove, zero waste director for our network. “Every state legislator should be racing to her or his capitol building to support bills that mitigate plastic pollution with minimal exceptions.”

In addition to straws, our network is calling for a statewide polystyrene ban right here in Massachusetts.

**Individual action**

As we work to tackle the plastic waste problem, there’s plenty we can do in our daily lives to reduce our own plastic waste and raise awareness. The Whitehall Middle School students who started “Skip the Straw” day, and their adviser Susan Tate, realize that and hope their vision spreads in the coming years.

“We hope that Skip the Straw Day motivates people to break some of their single-use plastic habits,” said Tate.

By Steve Blackledge, senior director, Conservation campaign; and Alex Truelove, director, U.S. PIRG Zero Waste campaign.

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More than 10,000 of our national network’s members, supporters and staff pledged to go straw-free for Skip the Straw Day.

Page 1 story continued: Choosing wildlife over waste

I’m glad to have you with us as we continue to find ways to harness our country’s wealth, technology and imagination to make our state and our planet greener and healthier for all of us. In these pages you’ll find some highlights of our work together so far in 2019.

Thank you for making all this work possible with your action and support.

Ben Hellerstein
State Director
How our cities can play a pivotal role in saving the bees

Cities can do more to reverse bee die-offs than you might think.

A study published Jan. 14 found that parks, gardens and other public lands in cities can support a rich mix of pollinator species—more so than nearby wildlife reserves, which prioritized trees over the kinds of habitats bees need. The researchers identified two main opportunities for cities to help bees: Increasing the quantity of land available for pollinators, and keeping that land free of pesticides that are harmful to bees.

“The parks, gardens and other public lands in our cities are more important for pollinators than many people think,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s conservation program. “We need to make sure we’re not using pesticides that turn these places deadly for bees.”

We’re urging our leaders across the country to plant pollinator-friendly vegetation and to follow the lead of cities such as Austin, Texas, and states such as Connecticut and Maryland by restricting the use of pesticides that harm bees.

By keeping bee-killing pesticides away from parks, gardens and other public lands, cities can help stop bee die-offs.