Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2011
Dear Environment Minnesota members,

I’m proud to say we stood strong for Minnesota’s environment in 2011.

Take our work on clean water—we’ve been campaigning to restore federal protections for the small streams that feed our 10,000 lakes. This spring, the EPA announced it would update standards to do just that. Meanwhile, our outreach staff worked with thousands of Minnesotans to pressure government officials to prevent toxic sulfide mining near the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior.

We’re also moving towards a green energy future—our Solar Works for Minnesota Coalition has grown into a force to be reckoned with, with the support of 125 partner groups. Now, we’re moving towards our goal of 10 percent solar power for Minnesota by 2030.

But it won’t be easy. Polluters and their too-numerous allies in Congress are trying to dismantle our most vital environmental standards, like the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts. It’s hard work to defend the progress we’ve made, and harder yet to push for new policies we desperately need. Still—with your help, I know we can get there. Thanks for standing by our side.

Sincerely,

Ken Bradley, Environment Minnesota Program Director
Green Ideas & Ham

Once a month, Environment Minnesota hosts a breakfast forum in Minneapolis to give members like you a chance to learn more about our issues and get to know your fellow members. Last year, we brought more than 800 people together for lively discussions with experts on renewable energy, transportation, clean water, and a host of other issues.

The environment, over breakfast

On the second-to-last Tuesday of every month, you can join us for a delicious breakfast and exciting conversation with prominent local thinkers at the Red Stag Supperclub in Minneapolis. Some of last year’s best Green Ideas and Ham events:

• Taking on the Science Deniers: A sold-out house joined Twin Cities award-winning investigative journalist Don Shelby and Professor John Abraham from the University of Saint Thomas to discuss the motives and funders behind climate change deniers.

• Earth Day celebration: For Earth Day, our members joined us to recognize some of today’s environmental leaders. Doctor Arjun Makhijani discussed ways to reach a 100 percent renewable energy economy, while U.S. Rep. Keith Ellison gave a stirring speech on environmental values.
Land of sky-blue waters

From the Boundary Waters to the Mississippi River, from the scenic St. Croix to Lake Superior and the countless lakes that dot our landscape, water is the lifeblood of Minnesota. In 2008, Minnesotans reaffirmed the importance of our state’s waters when they overwhelmingly voted to devote new sales tax revenue to clean water and the outdoors. Still, there’s a lot to be done.

Our 10,000 lakes threatened by pollution

Water in Minnesota is at risk. It’s surprising to hear, but state agencies are finding that about 40 percent of our state’s rivers, lakes, and streams are degraded, don’t meet pollution standards, and can be unsafe for fishing and swimming. Many factors contribute to these problems:

• Overflowing manure lagoons from factory farms contaminate nearby water. Polluted runoff from farm fields, sewers, and roads gets into lakes, causes algae blooms and uses up oxygen, killing fish. Pesticides and toxics in our water threaten plants and animals and pose health risks to humans.

• Foreign mining companies continue to push for toxic sulfide mining in Northern Minnesota near the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior. Industry spokespeople claim they will meet Minnesota’s environmental laws—but this year, their lobbyists worked in the Legislature and Congress to roll back the standards they would have to follow.

• Minnesota’s small streams and wetlands are potentially open to unlimited dumping and pollution because of loopholes in the Clean Water Act. Due to a controversial Supreme Court Decision, the protections for half of our state’s waterways are in jeopardy, potentially affecting the drinking water of close to a million Minnesotans.
Standing up to protect our water

Much of our work on clean water is public education—getting the word out to as many people as possible, and giving them the tools they need to make their voice heard by elected officials:

• To restore protections to our small streams and wetlands, Environment Minnesota rallied the public to respond to attacks in Congress on the Clean Water Act. Our field staff talked to more than 30,000 people, mobilized phone call actions, and collected thousands of petitions to send to Washington, D.C.

• We strengthened the coalition of conservation groups working with us to keep sulfide mining out of the Boundary Waters. Meanwhile, our members and volunteers wrote citizen letters to local newspapers, urging our leaders to prevent toxic mining in the area.

• We worked to address runoff pollution from industrial agriculture and promote local, sustainable food systems through two public forums on food and farming. We also released two research reports that document corporate agriculture pollution and the political influence of agribusiness lobbyists.
Environment Minnesota has been a key player in building Solar Works for Minnesota, a coalition of business, labor and environmental groups working to move our state into a green energy future. We’ve been working with state leaders to craft legislation that will lead Minnesota to generate 10% of its energy from the sun by 2030, saving you money and fueling a growing solar industry right here at home.

125 partners for solar power

Over the last few years, we’ve made tremendous progress transforming Solar Works for Minnesota from a dream into a strong coalition of more than 125 partners. We’ve helped throw solar into the center of Minnesota’s energy debate, though we still have a long way to go. We expect polluters and their allies in the capitol to put up resistance, but most Minnesotans want the state to set strong renewable energy goals:

- Every year, Minnesota spends more than $20 billion to import dirty, dangerous fossil fuels from other states—money that could be kept in our local economy.

- A 2010 survey revealed broad support across party lines for increased government investment in solar power. Sixty-eight percent of Republicans, 78 percent of Independents, and 88 percent of DFL members polled supported the goal. Source: poll by the Minnesota Environmental Partnership

In 2012, our goals include making it easier for public buildings to install solar projects. We’ll also be putting pressure on the Legislature to pass the Minnesota Solar Energy Act. Your voice, emails and actions will be critical to success—so make sure you stay tuned to campaign updates in the coming year.
Solar film contest puts the sun to work

Our “Putting the Sun to Work for Minnesota” short film contest was an incredible success. We depended on filmmakers’ creativity to make unique shorts that captured the public’s attention, and showed off Minnesota’s great solar potential — and we were impressed. More than 20 creative teams submitted films to the competition, and the judging was close. These films were exceptionally good at telling the solar power story:

**Year 2035 by Sean Drummond.** This short tells the tale of a young man who time-travels to the near future. He finds a Minnesota where the air is so polluted by fossil fuel that he must wear a mask to breathe. Disheartened, the man decides to return to the present and keep Minnesota from the path he witnessed by ensuring that solar energy is part of its future. **Third place.**

**Ol’ Roun’ Sun by John Akre.** The second place prize went to this funny cartoon, which pits “Ol’ Roun’ Sun” against his nemesis “Foss L. Fyool,” who comes from Texas and convinces the “Minnesotagonians” to spend all their money on his “efficient” energy. Eventually the people “smarten up” and realize they’re being hoodwinked by Foss L. Fyool. They return to using the free power of the sun they’d had all along. **Second place.**

**Man with the Golden Sun by Team Solar Hotdish.** For their parody of an action thriller, Solar Hotdish—led by Lisa and Steve Fait—pulled out all the stops. In the film, a mad genius reveals his plan to harness Minnesota’s vast solar energy for his own devices. Involving more than 50 people, this entry’s production quality exceeded all our expectations. **First place.**
Clean air, healthy families

We should be able to breathe clean air without worrying about mercury in our bloodstream or soot in our lungs. Yet coal-fired power plants and other industrial polluters spew hundreds of thousands of tons of dangerous pollutants into our atmosphere every year. We need to protect our families’ health by requiring polluters to clean up their act.

EPA to cut mercury, save 25,000 lives

In 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency moved ahead with efforts to significantly reduce mercury, soot and smog pollution from power plants. We built support across the state to ensure these rules were adopted:

- We released two reports on the health impacts of smog and mercury pollution. The reports also reveal how much pollution is emitted by specific power plants nationwide.

- We partnered with our national coalition of allies to help motivate more than 800,000 people across America to send the EPA public comments in support of strong action on mercury—no other single EPA rule has ever received so much public support.

- When polluters lobbied Congress to block the EPA from acting on clean air, we rallied thousands of online activists to speak out. In March and April, our efforts succeeded when those measures were voted down in the Senate.
Get Minnesota off oil

The environmental costs of our oil dependence are out of control—from the accidents that wreak havoc from the Gulf Coast to the Yellowstone River, to the smog that pollutes our air, to the threat of catastrophic climate change. With Minnesota’s families paying more than ever at the pump, there has never been a better time to put this country on the path to getting off oil for good.

54.5 mpg—a big move to get off oil

In July, Environment Minnesota released a report that outlines a comprehensive strategy to get off oil and reduce our state’s oil imports by 1.13 billion gallons. Meanwhile, our members joined with tens of thousands of people across the nation to voice their support for clean cars. The White House responded:

- This year, the Obama administration announced new fuel economy standards that will make 54.5-mpg cars the norm by 2025. This is the single biggest step ever taken to reduce oil consumption and global warming pollution.

- The administration also announced the first fuel economy standard for trucks, which will save more than 20 billion gallons of gasoline by 2018.

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