Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2012
Dear Environment Minnesota members,

In the past year, Environment Minnesota has had a lot to celebrate—and we owe all of our success to the support of members like you. Despite the difficult political climate in Saint Paul, we won a major victory for clean energy when we helped pass legislation that makes it easier to install solar on schools, hospitals and other public buildings. Nationally, we helped cut toxic mercury pollution from coal-fired power plants by 90 percent when the Obama administration finalized new emissions standards. The Obama administration also finalized new clean car standards that will double the fuel efficiency of today’s vehicles by 2025, drastically reducing global warming-causing carbon pollution and cutting oil use in Minnesota and nationwide.

Your support and all the letters, emails, and postcards that our members sent to elected officials were the most important factors in our collective victories. We are happy to report that the number of activists and members has almost doubled in the last year, and we expect our voice to be even louder in the coming year. Thanks for making it all possible.

Sincerely,

Ken Bradley,
Environment Minnesota Program Director

―It’s hard work to defend the environmental progress we’ve made, and harder yet to push for new policies we desperately need.‖
In May, Environment Minnesota won a huge victory for clean energy when Gov. Mark Dayton signed a bonding bill making it easier and more affordable to install solar on schools, hospitals and other public buildings. This was a crucial move away from the dirty energy sources of the past, and a significant step toward our goal of getting 10 percent of the state’s energy from the sun by 2030.

A major victory for solar at the capitol
After a hard-fought campaign in which thousands of Environment Minnesota supporters contacted their lawmakers in support of solar power, we helped pass a provision that will allow public building projects financed by bonding to use five percent of the project cost for solar power.

• This bill will make it easier and more affordable for public buildings to install solar, and it will go a long way toward shrinking Minnesota’s carbon footprint—as more and more public buildings turn to solar for their energy needs, our dependence on fossil fuels will shrink.

• A boon to the environment and public health, the bill will also benefit the local economy. Reduced utility bills for public buildings will take a burden off Minnesota taxpayers, and a “Made in Minnesota” provision will help Minnesota businesses manufacture solar photovoltaics and thermal systems in-state.
Minnesota’s environment and our families will reap the benefits of two Environment Minnesota-backed decisions announced by the Obama administration in late 2011 and 2012. As a result, existing power plants will slash their emissions of toxic mercury, and new power plants will emit far less carbon into our atmosphere.

A pair of historic victories for clean air

Power plants endanger our health, pumping massive amounts of carbon and mercury pollution into our air. Over the last year, we focused our clean air campaign on cutting these two dangerous sources of pollution from power plants—and won a pair of unprecedented results.

First-ever nationwide mercury standards

Every year, coal-fired power plants spew hundreds of thousands of pounds of toxic mercury into our air, which fall to earth in the form of rain and contaminate rivers, lakes and streams. Last year, reducing mercury and other air pollution was one of Environment Minnesota’s top priorities.

- In 2011, 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.

- The Obama administration responded by announcing the first-ever nationwide standards for mercury pollution from power plants. Then, in June 2012, the U.S. Senate rejected a bill that would have allowed power plants to continue to spew toxic mercury pollution into our air, and put 11,000 American lives at risk. Now, power plants must cut their mercury emissions by 90 percent.
EPA proposes carbon pollution standards

In addition to President Obama’s mercury pollution standards, the past year saw another historic victory for clean air: On March 27, 2012, the EPA proposed limits on carbon pollution from new power plants. If passed, they will be the first nationwide limits on the largest single source of the carbon pollution that fuels global warming.

• The EPA is expected to finalize these carbon pollution standards for new power plants by the end of 2012, and begin developing standards for existing coal-fired power plants in the near future as well.

• However, through paid ads and armies of lobbyists within Congress, the coal industry and other corporate polluters are trying to prevent the implementation of these commonsense standards. To counter these special interests, Environment Minnesota and our allies collected a record-smashing 3 million comments in support of the carbon standard.
The Boundary Waters is a Minnesota treasure. But this year saw repeated attempts by the mining industry to push forward with new sulfide mining that threatens the Boundary Waters area. Multiple companies are planning large-scale copper-nickel mines that would put the area’s waterways at risk of toxic, acid mine drainage. So far, we’ve been able to stop them.

**Standing strong for the Boundary Waters**

If mining projects like PolyMet are allowed, it will set a dangerous precedent for a toxic, destructive new industry in Minnesota's Arrowhead Region that would threaten the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior with pollution.

- Due to pressure from the EPA, Environment Minnesota and our allies, PolyMet has continued to delay the release of its new mine plan for its sulfide mine. And public awareness of the issue is growing, thanks in part to a report we released this past summer called “Trashing our Treasures.”

- However, we can’t stop at temporary victories—we need to protect the Boundary Waters for good. And the industry won’t stop trying until we do: This year, the mining companies and their allies tried to weaken the laws that protect the Boundary Waters, Superior National Forest, and water quality standards.

- Through our citizen outreach, advocacy and coordination with our allies, we reached tens of thousands of people this year. With your support, we’ll keep pushing until we win permanent protections from toxic sulfide mining.
Protect Our Rivers

Minnesota’s rivers, from the Mississippi to the St. Croix, are threatened: Increasingly, polluted runoff flowing off the land and into our waterways is ruining our rivers and streams. About half of the tested waterways in the state are considered “impaired” because they don’t meet basic pollution standards. To fix this, we’re pushing the state to develop science-based pollution limits.

Building broad support for our rivers

The main culprit in the degradation of our waterways is industrial agriculture. Chemical fertilizer, manure and eroded dirt from agricultural land flow into our streams and rivers, and cause out-of-control algae growth, threatening fish and other aquatic life while filling our rivers with sediment.

- Along the Minnesota and Mississippi Rivers, studies show that the great majority of sediment pollution comes from agricultural lands. Despite this, industrial agriculture is largely exempt from water quality standards and pollution limits.

- Minnesota can prevent excessive runoff pollution and protect our rivers by establishing and enforcing science-based pollution standards for farming operations, but big agribusiness and their political allies stand in the way. With your support, we can overcome Big Ag and protect our rivers.
Minneapolis Energy

Minnesota has huge clean energy potential, and Minneapolis can lead the way to a clean energy-powered future. The city has set an ambitious goal of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions 30 percent by 2025, but Xcel and CenterPoint Energy are holding us back: Last year, Xcel’s emissions actually increased, and neither utility has shown strong commitment to clean energy.

Minneapolis: a clean energy future

Time and time again, Xcel and CenterPoint have shown that they’re not committed to meaningfully reducing Minneapolis’ greenhouse gas emissions. But in the next few years, the city’s 20-year franchise agreements with Xcel and CenterPoint Energy are expiring. The expiring contracts provide a perfect opportunity to realign Minneapolis’ energy goals to reduce emissions, increase local, renewable energy, and reduce energy usage with these long-term agreements. Minneapolis has three options:

1) It can negotiate new 20-year franchise agreements with Xcel and CenterPoint that guarantee the utilities will meet their part of the greenhouse gas emission reductions, increase local renewables and promote energy-efficiency.

2) It can sign a short-term three to five-year franchise agreement with Xcel and CenterPoint while the city explores other options, such as creating a municipal utility. Municipalizing the city’s utility would provide many advantages and give residents full control over their energy future.

3) Sign another 20-year franchise agreement with no guarantees that Xcel and CenterPoint will reduce their greenhouse gas emissions or invest in local, renewable energy and energy efficiency.
Let’s keep our options open

If Minneapolis municipalizes its energy system, there are several advantages. As a public entity with a better credit rating, the city has a better borrowing rate than either Xcel Energy or CenterPoint Energy, and could fund infrastructure at a savings to energy consumers. Municipal utilities also pay 25 percent more back to their communities than utilities that have signed franchise contracts.

• Nationwide, residential customers of municipal utilities tend to pay less for electricity than residential customers of investor owned utilities. Municipal utilities are also more reliable. And most importantly, municipal utilities are better able to cut greenhouse gas emissions and shift cities toward clean energy use.

• Minneapolis should try to reach new franchise agreements with Xcel and CenterPoint Energy that meet its greenhouse gas targets and dramatically increase renewable energy development. But if they are not able to help the city meet its goals, then we should take our energy future into our own hands.

Minneapolis’ franchises with Xcel and CenterPoint Energy are expiring within the next few years. We’re pushing the city to consider cleaner, healthier energy options.
2012 Annual Report

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