Canvass built support for protections

This summer, Environment Minnesota staff fanned out across the state to talk to Minnesotans from all walks of life about the need to protect the Boundary Waters watershed from toxic sulfide mining.

The face-to-face outreach helped mobilize broad grassroots support for the Boundary Waters, as thousands of Minnesotans signed our petition urging President Obama to make the Boundary Waters watershed off-limits to sulfide mining.

Mining threatens pristine waters

When we’re canoeing, camping, fishing and hiking near the Boundary Waters, we’re all careful to leave the lakes and forest in the same pristine condition we found them. So why would anyone allow this new, risky type of mining in the area?

Yet out-of-state mining companies are already doing exploratory drilling right outside the Boundary Waters. Runoff from this type of mining can pollute waters with sulfuric acid, heavy metals and mercury—killing fish and making water unsafe to drink.

We’re building massive public support to stand up to the mining industry and protect the Boundary Waters from sulfide mining. We’re asking President Obama to make sure we don’t risk it by allowing dangerous sulfide mining in the area.

Too important to risk

Mining companies like Twin Metals are trying to conduct toxic sulfide mining right next to the Boundary Waters. Sulfide mines cause acid mine drainage, which could leach into the Boundary Waters watershed, threatening these pristine waters with sulfuric acid, heavy metals, increased mercury levels and other toxic pollution.

The Boundary Waters are too important to put at risk of this dangerous mining pollution. We can protect this Minnesota treasure by not allowing toxic sulfide mines near the Boundary Waters, but the mining companies are using their political influence and deep pockets to try to fast-track mine proposals.

That’s why we’re building massive public support to convince President Obama to protect the Boundary Waters watershed for good.
Recent action

206 million pounds of toxic pollution
From the Mississippi River to our 10,000 lakes, industrial facilities dumped more than 206 million pounds of toxic chemicals into America’s waterways in 2012, according to a recent Environment Minnesota Research & Policy Center report. The report, “Wasting Our Waterways,” comes as the Environmental Protection Agency considers a new rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to 2 million miles of critical waterways across the nation—a move bitterly opposed by the lobbyists for corporate agribusiness, including the American Farm Bureau.

“America’s waterways should be clean—for swimming, drinking and supporting wildlife,” said Ally Fields, federal clean water advocate with Environment Minnesota. “But too often, our waters have become a dumping ground for polluters. The first step to curb this tide of toxic pollution is to restore Clean Water Act protections to all our waterways.”

Report: Solar capacity in Minnesota on the rise
Our national affiliate, Environment America Research & Policy Center, released a report in August documenting solar progress in the United States. The report, “Lighting the Way,” showed strong solar growth across the nation, including in Minnesota. The report emphasized that it is not availability of sunlight that makes states solar leaders, but the degree to which state and local governments have created effective public policy to help capture the virtually unlimited and pollution-free energy from the sun.

Minnesota’s progress on solar has helped fuel a tripling of solar energy nationwide between 2011 and 2013. In 2013, solar capacity per capita in Minnesota grew by 14 megawatts. Our solar progress is attributed to a number of programs, including net metering and a strong solar standard that Environment Minnesota helped win. “Solar energy is emerging as a go-to energy option here in Minnesota and across the country,” said Rob Sargent, Environment America energy program director. “Thanks to the commitment of state and federal leaders, this pollution-free energy option is poised to play a major role in helping us meet our energy needs while achieving our emission reduction goals.”
More than 220,000 electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles are on America’s roads today, delivering real benefits for our health and our environment, according to a recent report released by Environment Minnesota Research & Policy Center.

According to the report, “Driving Cleaner: More Electric Vehicles Mean Less Pollution,” annual sales of electric vehicles have increased by 500 percent in just the last two years.

Now, with strong implementation of President Obama’s Clean Power Plan and the development of more renewable energy, electric vehicles are set to deliver even greater benefits for the environment.

18 million tons of pollution
The report shows that electric vehicles could prevent more than 18 million metric tons of climate-changing carbon pollution annually in the U.S. by 2025. That’s the equivalent of saving more than 2 billion gallons of gasoline per year, or eliminating tailpipe pollution from 3.8 million of today’s cars and trucks.

The cleaner alternative
Electric cars are cleaner than vehicles that run on oil, even when charged with coal-fired power, according to the Environment Minnesota Research & Policy Center report. That’s because electric motors are much more efficient than the internal combustion engine. And as our electricity system incorporates more wind, solar and other forms of zero-emission energy, electric cars will only get cleaner.

Ultimately, an electric vehicle charged completely with wind or solar power can operate with little to no impact on public health or contribution to global warming.

Much more to do
There is much more that governments can do to accelerate the market for electric vehicles and make them a viable and attractive choice for more drivers.

The report recommends the following:

- Governments at all levels should make it easier for people to own and drive electric vehicles. For example, Georgia offers up to a $5,000 tax credit and Colorado offers up to a $6,000 tax credit, while Washington state offers a sales tax exemption for electric vehicles. Ensuring convenient access to charging infrastructure is also important.

- We should limit carbon pollution from transportation, just like the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative limits carbon pollution from power plants in the Northeast.

- America should generate at least 25 percent of its electricity from clean, renewable sources of energy by 2025.

- And finally, the Environmental Protection Agency should help clean up the electricity system by finalizing the recently announced Clean Power Plan, and states should support and implement the plan.
EPA proposes first-ever limits on power plants

On June 2, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed a Clean Power Plan that sets targets for states to reduce global warming pollution by limiting carbon from dirty power plants, and shifting to clean energy. Following the announcement, Environment Minnesota and our national federation of state groups launched a nationwide “Global Warming Solutions” campaign. Active in 24 states, the $2.4 million campaign will help Americans connect the dots between the consequences of global warming and the meaningful impact of the plan.

“One once implemented, this will be the biggest step the U.S. has taken to cut global warming pollution,” said Michelle Hesterberg, Environment Minnesota field organizer. “This is a huge deal, but it’s not yet a done deal. The polluters are spending millions to oppose this commonsense action. That’s where our campaign comes in—to ensure this critical step is taken.”

more online

Take action and join our fight against global warming at: www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org

EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy announced the Clean Power Plan, an historic step to limit pollution from power plants.