Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2013
This year was a big one for Environment Minnesota and the future of our environment in Minnesota. We could not have done it without the outpouring of support from our members across the state.

First, our solar victory—a new law that will make solar more affordable and accessible and increase Minnesota’s solar energy production more than 30-fold—was the culmination of three years of outreach and advocacy. The campaign we launched in 2011 built such momentum that Gov. Mark Dayton and legislative leaders responded, passing a clean energy bill that puts important solar policies on the books. Minnesota is now poised to become a national solar leader.

In addition, the Legislature passed a bill to use public clean water funding to more efficiently address runoff pollution. And as proposals for toxic sulfide mines near Lake Superior and the Boundary Waters got closer to a decision, we delivered tens of thousands of petitions calling on our leaders to protect these natural treasures.

But our work on these and other vital issues is far from finished, and we’re able to keep going because of your continued support and involvement.

Thank you,

Samantha Chadwick
Environment Minnesota Advocate
Protect Minnesota’s Rivers

From the St. Croix to the Mississippi, to the creeks that run through our backyards, Minnesota’s rivers and streams are natural treasures. But pollution from industrial agriculture is a growing problem for our waterways. This past year, Environment Minnesota worked to limit agricultural pollution and protect our rivers.

New study and legislation are first steps

In June, a new state study showed that more than 70% of the nitrogen pollution degrading our rivers in Minnesota comes from agriculture; that nitrogen pollution poses a threat to Minnesota’s drinking water sources; and that 27% of monitored rivers and streams in the state have unsafe levels of toxic nitrates. This is mainly from manure and other fertilizers on cropland.

• This new report, which points to agriculture as a major source of nitrogen pollution in our waterways, is a significant step toward protecting our rivers from agricultural pollution.

• Also in June, Environment Minnesota helped pass a bill in the Legislature aimed at addressing runoff pollution from agriculture. The Clean Water Accountability Act will help Minnesota identify pollution sources more effectively, and it requires cleanup progress to be monitored using clear timelines and benchmarks.

From the Minnesota and the Mississippi Rivers (top) to Minnehaha Falls (bottom), our waterways should be clean.

Photo credits: (cover) JoanMN/BigStock, (page 1 top) * nikitsin.smugmug.com, (page 2 top to bottom) © Jim Brekke, Scott Andre/MPCA, National Park Service.
The Boundary Waters is one of the most beloved places in Minnesota. The clear lakes, beautiful forests, and unmatched wilderness experience draw hundreds of thousands of visitors every year. But in recent years, proposals for toxic sulfide mining near the Boundary Waters and the basin of Lake Superior have threatened these irreplaceable resources.

Attempts to open sulfide mines deflected

Mining companies have a great deal of political power— influence they’ve been using in attempts to push their mine proposals through. Mining interests have tried to cut the public out of the permitting process for these mines and weaken environmental laws that protect the Boundary Waters and the Superior National Forest.

- Sulfide mining has a track record of pollution and environmental degradation. Drainage from sulfide mining can create sulfuric acid, increase mercury pollution, turn water extremely acidic, jeopardize drinking water sources, kill fish and other wildlife, and destroy the habitat they depend on.

- Last fall, the U.S. House of Representatives passed several dangerous bills removing environmental protections in an attempt to make it easier to build toxic sulfide mines in the Boundary Waters region and elsewhere. However, thanks to work from Environment Minnesota and our allies, these bills never passed the Senate.

- Last summer, we released a report, “Trashing our Treasures,” at a news conference overlooking the Mississippi River. The report called attention to these wrongheaded bills in Congress. Environment Minnesota staff also met directly with the offices of our U.S. senators and urged them to block these bills.
Thousands of Minnesotans took action

When we heard a few years ago that plans by out-of-state mining companies would threaten the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior areas with pollution from sulfuric acid, we swung into action. Since then, we’ve helped turn the tide: In recent polls, more Minnesotans say they oppose sulfide mining than in past years.

• This summer, Environment Minnesota staff fanned out across the state and collected more than 10,000 petitions to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency opposing sulfide mining projects in Minnesota, such as the proposed PolyMet mine near Lake Superior. We delivered these petitions to Region 5 EPA leaders in Chicago at a public listening session.

• Our staff and volunteers also staged a canoe rally, wrote letters to papers across the state, and met directly with elected officials to make our case. As the decision deadline for these proposed mines looms, we’ll keep fighting to stop them.

Environment Minnesota staff gathered in Duluth to announce the collection of more than 10,000 petition signatures to the EPA, urging it to reject plans for sulfide mining near the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior.

Photo credits: (page 3-4 top) * Wildnerdpix, (page 4 bottom) staff.
Solar Works for Minnesota

We envision a world where all of our energy comes from clean, renewable sources that don’t pollute our environment or fuel global warming. Three years ago, we launched our Solar Works for Minnesota campaign to push for a simple, clear goal: getting 10% of our energy from solar. And this year, we won a major victory when the state passed a bill adopting our goal.

A huge victory, three years in the making

In May, after a huge push by Environment Minnesota staff, members, supporters and allies, Gov. Mark Dayton signed a sweeping clean energy bill. The legislation set a goal of getting 10% of our energy from solar by 2030 and put in place a set of policies that lay the groundwork for a 30-fold increase in solar energy by the end of the decade.

• This was a victory three years in the making. Environment Minnesota and our allies brought together more than 150 nonprofits, businesses and unions to form the Solar Works for Minnesota coalition, a diverse and powerful alliance that earned the attention and support of key leaders in our state, including Gov. Dayton.

• We educated tens of thousands of people about the benefits of solar through on-the-ground grassroots action, events, media coverage, report releases and online organizing, and leveraged that support to push for our goals in the Legislature and the governor’s office.

• In 2011 and 2012, we built support at the Capitol and across the state for our 10% solar goal while winning real reforms to make solar more affordable and accessible, including legislation that made it far easier to install solar on Minnesota’s public buildings, such as schools, hospitals and fire stations.
Solar in Minnesota to grow 30-fold

Early in 2013, Gov. Dayton himself came out strong for solar and other renewable energy in his State of the State address, and legislative leaders in St. Paul introduced Environment Minnesota-backed bills to expand solar. The Omnibus Energy package, which contained our goal of 10% solar by 2030, was passed and signed into law in May.

- The bill’s central requirement—that all investor-owned utilities get 1.5% of their electricity from solar by 2020—is estimated to expand solar from today’s 13 megawatts to 450 by 2020, more than a 30-fold increase.

- The bill also includes policies that make solar more accessible to small businesses, individual homeowners and community groups, such as new financing mechanisms, set-asides for small projects, and Community Solar Gardens. This bill gives solar the boost it needs just at the right time and will go a long way toward expanding access to solar for homes, businesses, local governments and communities.

Left: Solar panels line the St. Paul RiverCentre. Right: Environment Minnesota released numerous reports to educate citizens and leaders about the benefits and availability of solar energy.
Stopping Global Warming

In June, President Obama announced a climate plan that will set limits on carbon pollution from power plants, advance energy efficiency and increase the nation’s commitment to renewable energy. Now, we’re working to make sure the president follows through on his plan to cut carbon emissions from existing power plants, the largest single source of global warming pollution.

Obama announced climate plan

The plan laid out by President Obama will set limits on carbon pollution from new and existing power plants, lead to investments in clean energy and energy efficiency, and more.

- To build support for strong leadership on global warming, we educated tens of thousands of people about the dangers of global warming pollution and the benefits of clean energy through news conferences, climate change forums, public events, and boots-on-the-ground grassroots organizing.

- In April, we released a report, “In the Path of the Storm,” and launched an accompanying interactive online map detailing how many Minnesotans have been affected by extreme weather in recent years, including devastating floods in northeastern Minnesota and severe drought across the Midwest. The report also examines the latest science linking global warming to an increase in the severity or frequency of certain extreme weather events.

Top: Environment Minnesota’s Michelle Hesterberg at a wind power report release with the mayor of Duluth. Bottom: President Obama announced his climate plan in June.
Minneapolis Energy Options

Minnesota has great clean energy potential, and Minneapolis could lead the way as the state transitions from dirty energy to clean, renewable energy. In fact, the city has set an ambitious goal of cutting its greenhouse gas emissions 30% by 2025. But we still rely too much on dirty energy, and the city’s agreements with big utility companies haven’t allowed us many options.

Building a brighter energy future

Last year, we helped launch the Minneapolis Energy Options campaign and started an important conversation in the city about our local energy future. Minneapolis Energy Options is a grassroots campaign to urge the city of Minneapolis to seek significantly more conservation, energy efficiency, and local renewable energy through—or instead of—its franchise agreements with Xcel Energy and CenterPoint energy.

• As the expiration of the city’s 20-year franchise agreements with Xcel and CenterPoint approached, we set out to educate residents and city officials about the opportunity to chart a new, cleaner course for our energy future.

• This year, we pushed the city council to allow a public hearing and a citywide vote on the issue. We’ll keep urging the council to move the city toward a cleaner energy future with, or independent of, the big utilities.