Legislation backed by Environment Minnesota

The Legislature recently passed the Omnibus Energy bill, a crucial piece of legislation for clean energy, especially solar power, and as of this writing, the bill is awaiting Gov. Mark Dayton’s signature.

The bill, authored by Rep. Melissa Hortman in the House and Sen. John Marty in the Senate, will establish a strong solar energy standard and set benchmarks to get Minnesota to 10% solar. The bill also includes important policies to make local clean energy production more efficient and affordable. Environment Minnesota strongly supports the bill, and has worked for three years to build a campaign around solar power and the 10% goal. We also worked to ensure passage of the solar standard this year by mobilizing citizens across the state to email and call their legislators and urge them to support the bill.

10% solar by 2030
Environment Minnesota Advocate Samantha Chadwick issued the following statement regarding the Omnibus Energy bill: “This bill acknowledges the important role for solar power in our energy future by including concrete policies to expand access to this pollution-free, local energy option.” As a founding member of the Solar Works for Minnesota coalition, Environment Minnesota has been instrumental in setting the stage for increased solar power in the state. We have an ambitious, achievable goal of getting 10% of the state’s energy from the sun by 2030. Getting 10% of our energy from solar would lead to the installation of 5,200 megawatts of solar by 2030—enough energy to power 700,000 homes. The benefits for our environment, our climate and our economy would be immense.

Push for solar gains momentum
As Environment Minnesota pushes for more solar power, leaders have been listening. In his State of the State address in February, Gov. Mark Dayton challenged the Legislature to help take “Minnesota’s next big leap toward a sustainable energy future.”

When this energy bill becomes law, Minnesota is poised to do just that. The bill faced opposition from some utilities and dirty energy interests, but with the public on our side, we will win.
Recent action

Obama strikes new tone on global warming

In his 2013 State of the Union address, President Obama spoke strongly of the need to address climate change by cutting carbon pollution and embracing clean energy, saying that “the failure to do so would betray our children and future generations.”

Environment Minnesota Federal Field Associate Michele Hesterberg responded approvingly to the president’s speech: “Americans have been asking for leadership on tackling global warming. Clean energy solutions, like cutting our energy waste in half and expanding renewable energy, as the president outlined, are critical pieces of the puzzle. We are also counting on the president to clean up carbon pollution from power plants, which will help the United States fulfill its obligation to future generations.

“We look forward to working with the Obama administration to implement and expand upon the president’s plan to address global warming, as outlined in his State of the Union address.”

Climate rally in D.C.: Say “no” to Keystone XL

On February 17, Environment Minnesota federal staff joined more than 40,000 activists for the largest climate rally in history. Along with our allies from across the country, members of our national federation participated in the “Forward on Climate” rally in Washington, D.C., and urged President Obama to follow up on his calls for strong action to address global warming.

As global warming contributes to a rise in extreme weather, the need to address global warming pollution grows ever more urgent. The “Forward on Climate” rally called for strong limits on carbon pollution, more clean energy, and increased energy efficiency. In addition, Environment Minnesota urged the Obama administration to reject the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline, which has the potential to add 240 billion metric tons of global warming pollution to our environment.
Bill would reduce runoff to waterways
An Environment Minnesota-supported bill to clean up Minnesota's rivers and protect them from runoff pollution and other threats is making its way through the state Legislature.

The bill, “The Clean Water Accountability Act,” seeks to address the issue of agricultural runoff pollution, which fouls our rivers and causes algae blooms, dead zones and more.

It also requires the state to put forth a plan for cleaning up our rivers, including:

• A precise assessment of pollution sources and needed reductions;
• Deadlines and milestones for assessing progress;
• Strategies to put money where it will have the best result; and
• A plan for effective monitoring.

Big Ag threatens waterways
Industrial agriculture is causing serious problems for our waterways. Chemical fertilizer, manure and other substances from agricultural land are allowed to flow into our streams and rivers, causing out-of-control algae growth, threatening fish and other aquatic life, and making our waterways unsafe for fishing and swimming.

About half of our waterways statewide are impaired—meaning they don’t meet water quality standards and can be unsafe for fishing or swimming, or dangerous for aquatic life. As more waterways are tested, more are added to the list of polluted waterways.

Though the state creates cleanup plans for polluted waterways, often these plans are not then carried out or evaluated, and waters are very rarely removed from polluted waterway lists.

It’s time to protect our rivers
The state doesn’t have effective ways for limiting or reducing runoff pollution from industrial agriculture. The purely voluntary programs that do exist to address runoff from agriculture don’t hold the biggest polluters accountable and have not been effective in tackling the problem.

The Clean Water Accountability Act seeks to fix this. Along with our allies in the Minnesota Environmental Partnership, a statewide coalition of 75 environmental groups, we’re pushing to pass this important legislation to protect our rivers.

As of this writing, the bill is headed to final votes in the Legislature.

Because of the undue political influence of industrial agriculture, common sense clean water policies such as this bill face opposition in St. Paul. But Environment Minnesota is working hard to make sure it passes. We’re building citizen support across the state, talking to lawmakers directly, publishing letters to the editor, and signing on local farmers, businesses and others in support.

EPA changes hands
On February 14, Lisa Jackson served her last day as administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Former Administrator Jackson took on some of the nation’s paramount environmental challenges during her time as head of the EPA. She was instrumental in implementing the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a landmark program in capping global warming pollution and creating investments for clean energy development.

She also oversaw the implementation of life-saving limits on mercury pollution from power plants, worked with the Department of Transportation to double the fuel efficiency and global warming pollution standards for vehicles, and more, making her four-year tenure one of the most successful in the history of the EPA.

Senate urged to confirm new administrator
In February, President Obama nominated Gina McCarthy to replace Lisa Jackson as head of the EPA. McCarthy, who was previously the assistant administrator of the EPA’s Office of Air and Radiation, has a strong record of winning real results for our environment and public health.

Given her past accomplishments and dedication to doing what’s best for our environment, Environment Minnesota joined with our national federation of state groups, Environment America, in calling on the Senate to confirm McCarthy as the new administrator of the EPA.
In April, American Rivers, a rivers preservation organization, named the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness one of America’s most endangered rivers. The group’s report shows that Twin Metals’ proposed sulfide mine in the area would pollute the Boundary Water’s South Kawishiwi River with toxic waste.

Despite the fact that runoff from sulfide mining would create sulfuric acid and increase mercury contamination, killing fish and making water unsafe to drink, Twin Metals is pushing ahead with its plans. Environment Minnesota is working to stop this dangerous mine and protect the Boundary Waters. Our staff is pounding the pavement and talking to tens of thousands of people across the state this summer to mobilize public support for the Boundary Waters. We’re also urging the Environmental Protection Agency to reject another dangerous sulfide mine proposal from PolyMet and keep the Boundary Waters area safe from toxic mining for good.

Acid mine drainage from a toxic sulfide mine—like the mine proposed by Twin Metals near the Boundary Waters. Environment Minnesota is urging the EPA to reject the mine proposal.

Visit EnvironmentMinnesota.org to learn more.