Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2012
To our members

“I’m proud of the fact that we’ve stood up and fought the good fight in the face of so many challenges.”

I can’t deny that 2012 was a challenging one for many of us.

Our rivers, lakes and wildlife continued to suffer from corporations excessively wasting water. And our state parks suffered from low lake levels and massive budget cuts. Time and time again, we saw big polluters and politicians putting their short-term interests ahead of our environment.

No one said the job of standing up for clean water, clean air and special places would be an easy one. In fact, I hear every day from special interests who say we can’t do it.

But we stayed the course and continued to fight the good fight with the help of our supporters—you and people like Sister Elizabeth Riebschlaeger, a south Texas nun who is organizing to protect her community from fracking, or Michael Banks, a Jacksonville dentist whose years of organizing paid off this year with the celebration of the new Neches River National Wildlife Refuge.

And together, we’re making a huge difference. In 2012, we mobilized thousands to extend critical wind power tax credits. We toured Texas calling out the water hogs and educating the public about water conservation. And, as a result of gathering thousands of comments and testifying at public hearings, power plants will be forced to slash toxic soot emissions and new fracking operations will emit significantly less volatile organic compound emissions.

Despite all of the challenges of this year, your support has helped make all this possible.

As we embark on the next year, we do so knowing that with you by our side, Texas is already a cleaner, greener, healthier place.

Thanks as always for making it possible.

Luke Metzger
Director, Environment Texas
Repowering Texas

In 2012, Environment Texas enlisted new support for repowering our state with the clean, renewable wind energy that’s abundant, from west Texas to the Gulf coast. When federal incentives for wind power were set to expire at the end of the year, we mobilized thousands of Texans alongside our national federation and were successful in convincing decision-makers to extend the credits and keep Texas leading the nation toward a clean, wind-powered future.

Action helped renew critical wind tax credits

On Jan. 2, President Obama signed into law a bill that extends key tax credits for wind power and averts the “fiscal cliff.” For more than a year, we campaigned and warned lawmakers of the harm to the environment and the loss of jobs that would result from the expiration of the tax credits:

• We got letters in to key members of Congress from a range of community leaders, including a west Texas mayor and the former CEO of Shell Oil.

• In November, we released a new report showing that amid our state’s devastating drought, Texas’ current power generation from wind energy saves enough water to meet the needs of 130,800 Texans.

• Our report also found that Texas wind energy displaces as much global warming pollution as taking 3.3 million cars off the road per year and delivers results for public health by avoiding 16,000 tons of emissions of smog-forming nitrogen oxides and 22,990 tons of soot pollution.

• Our campaigning to extend the tax credits resulted in media coverage in the Houston Chronicle, San-Antonio Express News, Bloomberg News, Texas Energy Report, KUHF Houston NPR and Austin’s NBC and CBS affiliates.

Above, Director Luke Metzger released our new report on wind energy. Below, students at Rice University rallied in support of wind energy.
Texas rivers aren’t just part of our natural heritage. They are the lifeblood of our state. So when corporations had the audacity to continue draining our waterways after one of the worst droughts in Texas history, we traveled throughout the state, calling them out and urging our leaders in Austin to crack down on our worst corporate water hogs. We testified in the Legislature and researched and widely published solutions for water conservation.
Amid a scorching drought, a new call for action to keep our rivers running

The drought of 2011 was one of the most severe in the history of Texas. And unfortunately, 2012 didn’t bring much relief. Our rivers and lakes across the state, such as the Guadalupe and Lake Travis, were still dramatically low, and wildlife and major ecosystems and their wildlife continues to suffer. In 2012, we called out the water hogs who continued to make our already dire situation worse by recklessly wasting this scarce resource and told them that now more than ever, we all must conserve.

Statewide campaign kept water hogs in check

• We toured Texas with our Volkswagen-sized inflatable water hog and garnered media attention about how Texas can save water and protect our rivers.

• We testified before the Legislature, built coalitions with other environmental groups, local farmers and others, and helped educate the public.

• We developed a website with tips on water conservation and links to programs by local water utilities offering free or reduced price low-flow showerheads and toilets, and rebates and incentives offered for water conservation measures. Our door-to-door canvassers also distributed 24,000 flyers with some of these tips.

We identified concrete solutions to help protect our rivers

Our research has identified dozens of strategies to help save water on our lawns, on farms and in the energy industry. Here are a few:

• Xeriscaping—landscaping designed to limit the need for water can reduce water use by 30 percent.

• Electronic leak detection equipment, already in use in cities such as Arlington and Grand Prairie, can find leaks deep underground.

• Hydraulic fracturing, commonly known as fracking, used more than 25 billion gallons of water in Texas in 2012. Requiring drillers to recycle and reuse frack water could cut some of the waste.
Save Texas Parks

From camping under the stars at Big Bend to exploring the cypress swamps of Caddo Lake, our state and national parks and wildlife refuges make life better. They provide habitat for some of the most incredible wildlife and keep the water we depend on clean. So when 20 state parks were poised to close this year due to budget cuts, we fought to keep them open by testifying in the Legislature, building a coalition of environmental groups and recreation businesses, and shining the spotlight in the media on the need to preserve the best of Texas.
Texans stood together against budget cuts to keep parks open and protected

They might not enjoy the iconic status of the Grand Canyon or Yosemite, but our state and local parks enrich the daily lives of thousands of Texans. However, in 2012, steep budget cuts threatened the future of some of the most incredible places in Texas. While our parks have their own dedicated funding source, sales tax on sporting goods, that source is constantly raided for purposes that have nothing to do with conservation. This year, we became the voice ensuring our parks get the funding they deserve.

Call issued to keep the “Best of Texas” open for us all

After more than 96 percent of its majestic pines were lost to wildfires, Bastrop State Park desperately needs funds to restore the park to its former beauty. Many parks, including Devil’s Sinkhole, had to reduce operations to just a few days a week, and repairs to critical infrastructure like wastewater systems have been put off. Operations at the Parrie Haynes Youth Ranch—a 4,525-acre park on the Lampasas River with miles of horseback riding trails and ropes courses—ended completely.

- We gathered nearly 10,000 signatures on our petition to the Legislature to keep our parks open. This is a huge accomplishment and plain and simple proof that Texans do not want their parks to close.

- We were able to drum up public support for saving our parks by publishing letters to the editor in seven different newspapers throughout the state.

25,000 acres added to Neches River Wildlife Refuge

In 2012, we advocated for the Fish and Wildlife Service to get Land and Water Conservation Funding to purchase more acres of protected land for the Neches Wildlife Refuge. Environment Texas lobbied our state congressional delegation and alerted the media about the importance of keeping this amazing land out of the hands of eager developers wanting to forever change this one-of-a-kind landscape.

The Neches River National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Texas was established in 2006 to protect one of Texas’ last wild rivers. The refuge provides nesting and habitat for the migrating birds of the Central Flyway. Bottomland hardwood forests, whose trees continually improve the river water quality and help control flooding, also thrive in the Neches River ecosystem. The ecosystem has been called “one of the last intact ecosystems in the south.”

Photo credits: (page 5, clockwise from top) DB1911/Flickr; Mike Fisher; Vlad Turchenko; (page 6, from top) Staff; NPS.gov.

Boca Chica State Park near Brownsville helps protect endangered Kemp’s Ridley Sea Turtles

Environment Texas
Texas’ environment and our families will reap the benefits of two Environment Texas-backed decisions announced by the Obama administration in 2012. As a result of our work, power plants will be forced to slash toxic soot emissions and new fracking operations will emit significantly less volatile organic compound emissions. This year will certainly go down as a big one for defending clean air.

**EPA moved to limit soot pollution**

Current air quality standards for soot pollution are too weak, costing tens of thousands of American lives per year. In June, the EPA moved to fix that by proposing stronger soot pollution standards for power plants and diesel trucks. Soot pollution is the deadliest of the common air pollutants, causing thousands of premature deaths every year. It also contributes to haze that hangs over many of the country’s most scenic parks and wilderness areas. Our staff went to work to ensure these new standards became a reality:

- Together with our national federation, we collected more than 26,000 comments in support of stronger standards.

- We testified at public hearings and shared our report, “Danger in the Air,” detailing the threats of soot pollution with media across the state.

**Rule means 95 percent less fracking pollution**

Fracking is responsible for as much air pollution as all the cars and trucks in Dallas-Fort Worth. But in 2012, we took action to dramatically slash pollution that is threatening our environment and the health of thousands of Texans. A new 2012 EPA rule will lead to a nearly 95 percent reduction in volatile organic compound emissions from more than 11,000 new hydraulically fractured gas wells each year.
Fighting Global Warming

Weather headlines from 2012 featuring devastating drought, wildfires and heat-related deaths across Texas provided additional evidence that the impacts of global warming are moving even faster than previously predicted. To urge the Environmental Protection Agency to finalize the first-ever carbon pollution standards that they proposed, this year, we worked with a coalition of our state affiliates and other environmental and public health groups to collect over 3 million public comments in support of the new rules. That number is more than twice as many public comments ever submitted to the EPA on any one issue.

More than 3 million took action on historic rule to reduce carbon pollution

If Texas were a nation, we’d be ranked seventh in the world for global warming pollution, mainly due to power plants and traffic. In March, the Obama administration proposed the first-ever carbon pollution standards for new power plants. Doctors, nurses and scientists warn that carbon pollution dramatically fuels global warming, which triggers poor air quality, contributes to thousands of asthma attacks, heart attacks and other fatal diseases. Upon the president’s proposal, we went to work with our national federation and coalition partners to ensure the standards became a reality:

- We wrote and published two new reports on global warming and extreme weather and released them at news conferences throughout the state.

- We collected the comments by canvassing door-to-door and at busy public places and reaching out to activists both by phone and online.

We worked alongside our national federation, Environment America, and a coalition of other groups to collect more than 3 million public comments in support of the first-ever carbon pollution standard for power plants. This is the greatest number of public comments ever delivered to the EPA on any one issue. Pictured, our federal staff and coalition delivering the first 2.1 million comments.