Annual Report
Recapping our work in fiscal year 2015 for our members
To our members

“Behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts.”

People sometimes ask me how, given the scale of environmental problems and inaction by our leaders in Austin and Washington, I can keep doing this kind of work.

It’s a good question, and one I asked myself a lot after this past Legislative session. But I’m inspired by the fight we’re bringing to big polluters and the results we’re carving out despite the odds against us.

At Environment Texas, 2015 was all about people power. And, together, we have a lot to be proud of.

We took the biggest step for clean water in a decade: Since 2006, a pair of polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions left 2 million miles of streams without guaranteed protection under the Clean Water Act. After nine years of advocacy, and 800,000 comments from people like you, we saw these protections restored.

We helped win a major increase in solar power for Austin and overturn an anti-solar ordinance in the small town of North Richland Hills.

And, finally, we acted on climate: After Americans submitted 8 million comments in support, President Obama finalized the Clean Power Plan to limit carbon pollution from power plant for the first time ever. Texans’ voices helped build the political will to win this victory, which will make a major dent in our country’s contribution to global warming pollution and sets a precedent for other nations.

As you’ll read in the following pages, behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts. And working together, I am optimistic about our prospects for the future.

Thanks,

Luke Metzger
Director
2015 legislative priorities

The environment saw mixed results in the 84th Texas Legislature. With oil and gas companies donating $5.5 million to legislators in the 2014 elections, Environment Texas’ lobbying, grassroots organizing and media outreach was more important than ever. While the session brought some major setbacks for the environment, our members also helped us achieve some key victories.

Amidst challenging session, key policies won

From making it harder to sue big polluters to the expiration of an electric car program, the 2015 legislative session yielded environmental setbacks.

The biggest loss was preempting the rights of cities to ban or even regulate fracking through the passage of HB 40. We helped get the state’s major newspapers to editorialize against the bill, recruited local elected officials to speak out, and worked with our allies in the Legislature to attempt to stop or at least amend the bill. The odds were against us, and in the end we lost, but we didn’t let HB 40 pass without a fight.

But, with your support, we did pull off some important wins. Our state and local parks got an increase in funding, fines for illegal dumping were doubled and stronger safety protections for fertilizer facilities to avoid West-type disasters were adopted. And there are the things the Legislature didn’t do—bills to repeal our renewable energy law, to block cities from banning plastic bags, and to block high speed rail all failed.
Global Warming Solutions

You helped Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center win the greatest step the United States has ever taken to address the climate crisis. Working with a broad coalition, we helped educate the public, engage elected leaders, and deliver an overwhelming 8 million comments of support for limiting power plant pollution—paving the way for President Obama and the EPA to finalize the historic Clean Power Plan.
You helped get the historic Clean Power Plan over the finish line

From record-breaking drought and devastating wildfires, to extreme downpours and flooding, Americans are feeling the impacts of global warming now. Scientists predict that without drastic cuts in global warming emissions, these effects will become catastrophic. In 2015, President Obama took decisive action to address this threat by moving forward with the Clean Power Plan: the first-ever limits on carbon emissions from power plants—America’s largest source of global warming pollution.

Thousands of supporters like you took action

Environment Texas and our members came together to help build the momentum necessary to finalize the Clean Power Plan and push past strong opposition from the fossil fuel industry and climate-deniers in Congress.

• Environment Texas’s national citizen outreach team had face-to-face conversations with more than 47,000 people about the threat of global warming and the solutions the Clean Power Plan offers.

• During the public comment period for the Clean Power Plan, our national team, including Environment Texas’s members and supporters, submitted more than 713,000 comments in support of a strong plan.

• Nationwide, hundreds of elected officials and solar businesses, and nearly 1,000 health professionals joined the chorus of support for limits on power plant pollution.

Environment Texas Research & Policy Center showed need to limit carbon pollution

In 2015, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center analyses shone a spotlight on the threat of global warming and the meaningful impact of limiting carbon pollution from power plants.

• The report “America’s Dirtiest Power Plants” found that Texas’ coal-fired power plants are ranked first in the country for global warming pollution. Curbing this pollution will be essential to tackling the threats of climate change.

• The report “Dangerous Inheritance” revealed that the average temperature in Texas has increased 1.7 degrees since the 1970s—and without urgent action to curb carbon pollution, global warming will continue to contribute to dangerous heat waves, severe storms, rising sea levels and more.
Clean Water for America
Protect Texas’ Rivers

In 2015, Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade! In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued a rule to restore Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waters across the country. Our public education and outreach efforts, bolstered by action taken by our members, allies, and a diverse coalition of businesses, elected officials and farmers, built the momentum necessary to get the Clean Water Rule past polluter opposition and signed into law.
Winning the biggest step forward for clean water in a decade

For nearly a decade, Environment Texas has gone toe-to-toe with powerful polluters and their allies in Congress to restore the Clean Water Act and protect our waters—permanently. And in 2015, our efforts finally paid off when President Obama restored federal protections to more than half the nation’s streams, which feed drinking water sources for one in three Americans.

143,000 miles of streams in Texas regained protection

The Clean Water Rule closed loopholes in the Clean Water Act, returning protection to 143,000 miles of streams in Texas. You gave Environment Texas the resources to advocate in Congress, recruit and mobilize a diverse and powerful coalition, and rally the grassroots to demand action.

- We helped gather 34,000 comments of support from Texans and held more than half a million face-to-face conversations about the need to close loopholes in the Clean Water Act.
- With the rule under threat, our national team held meetings with more than 50 congressional offices, urging them to champion the voice of the public and stand up for clean water.
- Disappointingly, at press time, a federal appeals court blocked the new protections we just won for our waters. We’ve put together a legal strategy to defend the Clean Water Rule, and given its strong legal and scientific basis, the courts should ultimately reject all efforts to weaken it.

Research highlighted legacy of Clean Water Act

Our waterways provide drinking water, essential habitat for wildlife, and treasured destinations for fishing, swimming and boating. Last year, together with our affiliated state groups across the country, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center’s research on the threats facing Texas’ rivers and the impact of the Clean Water Act earned nearly 1,000 media hits nationally.

- The report “Wasting Our Waterways” documented toxic pollution entering our waterways and threatening our health and drinking water supplies. It found that 16.4 million pounds of toxic chemicals were dumped in Texas’ waterways in 2012 alone.
- “Polluting Politics” found that BASF Corporation spent $2.8 million on lobbying in a single year. The enormous spending came after their Freeport, Texas, facility dumped 2.1 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Texas’ waterways in 2012.

Polluting industries carved loopholes in the Clean Water Act, leaving 2 million miles of streams across the country open to pollution.

With a resounding call from supporters like you and our allies nationwide, we worked to protect America’s waterways.

800,000 comments to the EPA

1 million took action online

1,000 letters to the editor

1,000 business owners, farmers and elected officials

VICTORY!

On May 27, 2015, the Clean Water Act was restored.
Go Solar, Texas

Solar power is growing so fast across the country that goals once considered ambitious are now seen as readily achievable. Spurred by pro-solar policies, we’re getting more of our energy from the sun, putting us on the road to 100 percent clean energy. In 2015, Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center presented hard-hitting research and made the case for setting bold solar goals.
Putting the country on the road to 100 percent clean energy

It’s time for America to go big on solar power. The amount of solar capacity in the United States is growing rapidly; it’s tripled in just the past three years. By tapping the power of the sun, we can break our dependence on fossil fuels and move to clean energy that is virtually limitless and pollution-free.

Strong policies fuel solar’s success

With another panel or project installed every four minutes in 2013 and the rate only getting faster, solar power is on the rise across the country.

- Environment Texas Research & Policy Center’s report “Lighting the Way” found that the top 10 states for solar, which hold 87 percent of the nation’s total installed solar electric capacity, have implemented strong policies that are enabling increasing numbers of homeowners, businesses, communities and utilities to “go solar.”

- The report “Shining Cities,” released in March, found that cities are also playing a crucial role in growing national solar capacity: Just 20 cities accounted for 6.5 percent of total installed solar in the country. Two cities in Texas ranked in the top 20: San Antonio at number seven, and Austin at 17.

Let’s set bold goals for solar locally and nationally

To continue solar’s growth, Texas can continue to set an example by prioritizing solar in energy policies and set bold goals for solar on both the state and local levels.

- Supported by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center’s research, the Austin City Council announced a resolution to triple the city’s solar goals, and generate enough solar to power 100,000 homes.

- In May, across the state, 30 civic leaders, including the Mayors of Houston, San Antonio, Dallas and Georgetown, followed the recommendations of our research and called for the state to generate 20 percent of its electricity from solar by 2025.