



Congress' sneak attack on the environment

Recent gains for waters, air in jeopardy

Over the past year, with the public's attention focused on the economy, anti-environmental extremists in Congress have quietly launched an all-out attack on the laws that protect our waters, from Barton Springs to the Trinity River—as well as the air we breathe and the places we love.

It's the most radical, reckless attack on our environment in our lifetimes—and it's happening under the radar, through provisions slipped into massive budget bills.

At stake: Texas waters, air and more

Polluters and their allies in Congress have doubled down on their efforts to weaken or eliminate environmental protections. Lobbyists for mining companies, developers and corporate agribusiness have lined the halls of Congress to lobby for rollbacks, and it often seems as if every piece of must-pass legislation is a vehicle for anti-environmental riders.

In the U.S. House alone, lawmakers have cast an incredible 191 roll call votes on measures that would block the Environmental Protection Agency from improving air and water quality or enforcing other environmental protections.

In February 2011, the House rammed through a budget bill that took aim at our rivers and streams, our air, and funding for some of our most beloved places, including Big Bend National Park. In August, the U.S. House passed a bill containing 39 separate environmental attacks.



Joey Photos

▲ Places like the Frio River are threatened by recent congressional attacks.

170,000 stand strong for our waters

Fortunately, by harnessing the power of public support, we've successfully blocked these attacks so far.

Further, activists across the country sent in 170,000 supportive comments to the EPA, helping to ensure the agency has the public support to move forward with protections for Texas'—and America's

—waterways. With the Senate rejecting several of the worst proposals this fall, the tide may be starting to turn.

As election season approaches, the rollback attempts will surely get worse. But Environment Texas will continue to expose these attacks and mobilize public support so our decision-makers will stand up for clean water.



San Marcos

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◀ The San Marcos River

Read our report "What Else Is Swimming In Your Favorite Texas Swimming Hole?" to learn more about pollution in popular central Texas swimming spots.



To our members

It's pretty discouraging that Gov. Rick Perry calls global warming a hoax, even after the hottest, driest summer in Texas history. But as I've traveled around the state, talking to members, supporters and Texans from all walks of life, I've never seen people so energized about our work to ease the effects of global warming—and quell the extreme temperatures that have been pummeling our state.

Environment Texas organizers are knocking on doors and educating Texans about the Environmental Protection Agency's commonsense solutions that could help reverse global warming's worst effects for Texas.

As Gov. Perry and many of our leaders in Austin stubbornly dig in their heels, the EPA's proposed rules for cleaner cars and power plants are taking on even more importance. Please keep signing our petitions and offering your support.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
State Director

Recent action

Mercury rule will save 11,000 lives

This December, Environment Texas hailed the Obama administration as it finalized the first-ever nationwide standards for mercury pollution from power plants. This new policy will reduce plants' mercury emissions by 90 percent, preventing 130,000 cases of childhood asthma and saving 11,000 lives every year.

Here in Texas, power plants churn out over 11,000 pounds of mercury every year—more than the facilities in any other state. In fact, due to the rampant mercury pollution, the Department of State Health Services has issued health advisories for fish caught in 300,000 acres of Texas lakes.

“This victory wasn't easy,” said Environment Texas' Luke Metzger. “But in our state, the new mercury standard will reduce birth defects, prevent asthma attacks, lower cancer rates and save lives.”

54.5-mpg standard nears finish line

In November, the Obama administration officially proposed new clean car standards that represent the biggest step the U.S. has ever taken to get off oil and tackle global warming.

The standards would require cars and light trucks in model years 2017 to 2025 to meet a fleet-wide average fuel efficiency and global warming pollution standards equivalent to 54.5 miles per gallon by 2025.

The environmental benefits of such a standard are enormous. By 2030, we could save more oil than we imported from Saudi Arabia last year, and slash global warming pollution by an amount equivalent to shutting down 70 coal-fired power plants. Environment Texas joined our national federation in supporting the standard, which is based on similar standards adopted in 14 states.



Paolo Rosa

▲ New clean car standards represent the biggest step we've ever taken to get off oil.

New rules could ease global warming, extreme weather

Our worst drought since 1789

We've been suffering from the worst drought since 1789—and last summer was the hottest in U.S. history. More than 100 Texans died from heat stroke and exhaustion, and we saw water levels in every reservoir in the state dip to less than 60 percent full.

To top it off, we also experienced the worst wildfires in Texas history, which destroyed thousands of homes and nearly wiped out the Lost Pines of Bastrop State Park.

It's probably no accident we're seeing these climate catastrophes. Even the Texas State Climatologist, who serves under Gov. Rick Perry, agrees, estimating that the heat was, at least in part, driven by global warming.

But maddeningly, Gov. Perry won't even listen to his own climate scientist. Instead, he played to big campaign contributors in the fossil fuel industry and claimed global warming is a "hoax."

Meanwhile, his appointees at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality were busy scrubbing a report about Galveston Bay of any mention of climate change.

Despite the lack of action in Austin, there is a way forward on global warming—and it starts right in our homes.

New standards will cut Houston's pollution

Buildings are responsible for 40 percent of the energy use and global warming pollution in the U.S. Making our buildings more energy efficient is a cost-effective way to reduce global warming pollution and save consumers money.

This December, at the urging of Environment Texas and allied groups across the state, the Houston City Council voted to adopt standards for new buildings that are 5 percent stronger than the statewide minimum. At the same time,

the council set a path that will allow Houston to achieve 15 percent greater efficiency by 2014.

This decision demonstrates the City of Houston's commitment to reducing energy use, limiting pollution associated with electric generation, lowering energy bills, and reducing dependence on fossil fuels through energy efficiency.

Houston leads the way for Texas

"Houston is leading the way by establishing strong standards for efficiency this year and adopting a plan for moving towards the 2012 model codes in the next few years," said Tessa McClellan, field associate for Environment Texas.

By 2030, Houston is projected to gain 3.5 million residents and more than a half-million new homes. As the region continues to grow, these new standards take on increased importance.

"By building these homes to be as energy efficient as possible, Houstonians can worry less about keeping the lights on." worry less about keeping the lights on.



more online



A new Environment Texas Research & Policy Center report found improvements in our homes' energy efficiency could cut 8 percent of Houston's current energy use.

www.EnvironmentTexas.org/reports



Interview:

EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson

The EPA has recently worked on several clean air standards including the Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule. Can you explain what these standards mean for the average family?

These new Clean Air Act standards mean cleaner, healthier air for American families. The Mercury and Air Toxics Standard and the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule are part of a series of common sense steps under the Clean Air Act to reduce emissions of mercury, acid gas, particulate matter, arsenic and other harmful chemicals from some of the biggest polluters in the nation.

These reasonable steps will provide dramatic protections to our children and loved ones—they will save tens of thousands of lives and prevent hundreds of thousands of asthma and heart attacks.

What's the best way for our supporters to express their opinions on these issues?

Unfortunately, we are at a point where we have to remind some leaders in Washington to put the health of their constituents above the wish lists of special interests. Speaking directly to those who want to undermine common-sense environmental protections is one of the best ways to stand up for your right to clean air and clean water.

For more from Lisa Jackson, visit www.EnvironmentTexas.org/page/TXE/Lisa-Jackson-Interview

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Joe Mac

Environment Texas

Our mission

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Texas. We focus exclusively on protecting Texas' air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Christmas Mountains to be protected

In September, Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson announced intentions to transfer the Christmas Mountains to the Texas State University system. Under the plan, students at Texas State campuses will get to explore the mountains and expand our knowledge of this unique natural treasure. Further, the mountains will remain open to the public, with access directly from Big Bend National Park. And conservation easements guarantee the property will remain wild and undeveloped.

The decision was a major departure from the fall of 2007, when Patterson proposed selling the mountains to private interests, despite an agreement to keep the land in public hands. After a public outcry and extended campaign from Environment Texas, Patterson abandoned this plan.

"This deal ensures that the Christmas Mountains will remain wild and protected forever," said Luke Metzger, director of Environment Texas. "I'm confident they will be well-cared for and preserved for future generations of Texans."



Richard Whitaker, Austin Chronicle

◀ Environment Texas Director Luke Metzger joins with Land Commissioner Jerry Patterson, Texas State University Chancellor Brian McCall and The Conservation Fund's Andy Jones to announce the protection of the Christmas Mountains.