



Fall Report

Renewed push to save our rivers from drought

Environment Texas calls out state water hogs

This summer, as parts of Texas began to emerge from the worst drought since 1789, Environment Texas launched a new campaign to crack down on the state's worst corporate water hogs and keep Texas' rivers running strongly.

In July, Environment Texas staff and volunteers took our message on the road, with our inflatable "water hog"—a Volkswagen-sized pig balloon—in tow. At three press conferences across the state, we attracted media attention to the issue.

Further, since May, staff have been fanning out across the state, educating the public and engaging concerned Texans in our call for new state laws to limit corporate water waste, from factory farms to oil and gas companies.

Our worst drought in centuries

In 2011, as the heat wave broke records across the state, the Brazos and Guadalupe rivers ran dry, and as many as 500 million trees perished. Tourism and recreation suffered from low lake levels and river flows. Some communities ran out of water and had to have it trucked in. And as of press time this year, approximately 70 percent of the state remains in drought.

"Our state water plan estimates that at least one-third of our water needs will come from conservation, but the Legislature has done next to nothing to promote it," said Environment Texas State Director Luke Metzger. "Last session,



Earl McGehee, Creative Commons

▲ Drought-stricken Blanco River

they cut what little money there was for conservation in half."

Industrial waste drains Texas' rivers

Agriculture uses 56 percent of all the water in Texas. Power plants that use traditional steam-driven turbines also use large amounts of water for cooling. They are responsible for 4 percent of all water consumption in Texas. And an

oil and gas drilling technique known as hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," used approximately 25 billion gallons last year. "Many Texans are doing their part by following watering restrictions," said Metzger. "But individual action is not enough to solve our water problems—we need to crack down on our biggest industrial water wasters. We need to do this before it is too late."



Staff

in the media

◀ Luke Metzger discusses corporate water waste in Fort Worth, a stop along the "water hog" tour to bring attention to the state's biggest water wasters. Along for the trip was our giant, inflatable "water hog."

To our members

With careful research, creative media tactics, lobbying and grassroots pressure, Environment Texas is able to have an impact—even when up against some of the world’s wealthiest corporations.

This summer, we tackled water waste by some Texas corporations, including in agribusiness, oil and gas, and electricity production. Our staff went door-to-door, educating Texans about how to influence the Legislature to act and how they could save water in their own homes.

In other news, our lawsuit against Exxon should go to trial by early next year. We’re gearing up for the next legislative session in January and already have pledges from key lawmakers to curtail corporate water waste.

Thanks for your support.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
State Director

Recent action

Proposed rocket launch pad at wildlife refuge

Environment Texas recently launched a petition opposing the construction of a rocket launch pad next to the Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge. The project would harm critical habitat for ocelots, piping plover and endangered sea turtles, which every year produce dozens of hatchlings critical to the species’ survival.

California-based SpaceX is angling to use this place to launch million-pound rockets into space, causing noise, heat and powerful vibrations. The disturbance could destroy the ecosystem, while impacting the local tourism industry, which attracts visitors from across the country to observe the region’s 500 species of birds.

In fact, nature tourism in the area generated about \$300 million in 2011 and supported 4,407 full- and part-time jobs, according to a Texas A&M study.

“Approximately 95 percent of Texas is privately owned,” said Tessa McClellan, field organizer for Environment Texas. “SpaceX can find suitable land that isn’t surrounded by a national wildlife refuge and state park.”

Preserve more land for Neches River Refuge

This summer, Environment Texas called on Congress to fully fund a critical conservation program—and put those dollars to use preserving more land around the Neches River National Wildlife Refuge.

The program, the Land and Water Conservation Fund, has been used to incorporate private lands into nearby wildlife refuges and national seashores, before they’re lost to encroaching development.

The Neches River ecosystem has been called “one of the last intact ecosystems of the South.” It provides nesting and migratory habitat for the migrating birds of the Central Flyway. Properly funded, the LWCF could expand and enhance the existing refuge.



▲ Sea turtle

14.6 million pounds of chemicals in Texas waterways

Industrial facilities dumped 14.6 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Texas' waterways—the fourth-worst in the nation, according to a report released in March by Environment Texas.

“Wasting Our Waterways: Industrial Toxic Pollution and the Unfulfilled Promise of the Clean Water Act” also reports that the Houston Ship Channel, the Brazos River, Cottonwood Branch stream, Corpus Christi Inner Harbor and Tankersley Creek received the highest toxic discharges in the state.

A polluter's paradise

“Texas' waterways are a polluter's paradise right now,” said Luke Metzger, state director of Environment Texas. “Polluters dump 14.6 million pounds of toxic chemicals into Texas' lakes, rivers and streams every year. We must turn the tide of toxic pollution by restoring Clean Water Act protections to our waterways.”

The Environment Texas report documents and analyzes the dangerous levels of pollutants discharged to America's waters by compiling toxic chemical releases reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory for 2010, the most recent data available.

Major findings of the report include:

- The Houston Ship Channel is ranked first in the state for highest amount of total toxic discharges, with 2.7 million pounds discharged in 2010.
- The Brazos River ranked eighth in the nation for discharges of cancer-causing chemicals and fourth in the nation for discharges of reproductive toxicants.
- Chicken processing companies Sanderson Farms and Pilgrim's Pride ranked as the biggest polluters in Texas.
- The Colorado River received 2,693 pounds of toxic chemicals, including 427 pounds of chemicals known to cause cancer.

Cancer, birth defects and more

The report summarizes discharges of cancer-causing chemicals and chemicals with the potential to cause serious reproductive problems, ranging from birth defects to reduced fertility.

Among the toxic chemicals discharged by facilities are arsenic, mercury and benzene. Exposure to these chemicals is linked to cancer, developmental disorders and reproductive disorders.

“Clean water is the foundation for healthy communities and for a healthy environment,” said David Foster, state program director for Clean Water Action. “This report underlines the imperative need for the EPA to follow through and issue its new guidance so that all waters of the U.S. are protected under the federal Clean Water Act. That was the original intent of the Act. We have learned that we cannot count on states to do the job, least of all Texas, whose leadership challenges federal authority to protect public health and the environment at every turn.”



▲ Brazos River

Green Future Fund

A new way to honor supporters

Environment Texas is proud to announce the establishment of our Green Future Fund.

The Green Future Fund will honor a special group of our donors: those who are ensuring a greener future by remembering Environment Texas or our sister group, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center, in their wills, life insurance policies or retirement accounts.

These legacy donors are helping to ensure that Environment Texas will continue to flourish—protecting the places we love and the values we share for years to come.

“We appreciate all of our supporters,” said Environment Texas' Luke Metzger. “But I feel a special gratitude toward those members who have the vision and generosity to plan a gift that will protect our state's environment beyond their own lifetimes.”

Establishing a legacy gift also offers donors a few advantages. Some supporters wish they could give more, but can't right now. Including Environment Texas in your estate plan costs nothing today, while ensuring support for our mission in the future. Legacy gifts may also offer tax benefits. Your professional advisor can help you determine any tax advantage.

As a Green Future Fund donor, with your permission, we'll recognize your gift in our annual report and other publications, helping to inspire other members to make their own legacy gifts. Of course, you may also choose to give anonymously. Either way, any specific details you choose to provide about your gift will remain confidential.

If you'd like to become a member of the Green Future Fund, or if you just have questions, call our planned giving coordinator, Marilyn Tesauro, at 1-800-841-7299 or plannedgiving@EnvironmentTexas.org.

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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.

Exxon refuses to settle

In the months before Environment Texas' lawsuit against ExxonMobil proceeds to trial, the oil company deposed Environment Texas State Director Luke Metzger, calling him to be questioned by an Exxon lawyer in July.

It was the latest development in the five-year-long Texas Clean Air project, which seeks to crack down on Texas' worst air polluters and force compliance with federal clean air laws.

The lawsuit alleges thousands of Clean Air Act violations at Exxon's Baytown refinery and petrochemical plant. Together with the Sierra Club, this is Environment Texas' third federal lawsuit that targets illegal air emissions in the Houston area, following two earlier successful cases.

"These violations are unacceptable, and we will not let ExxonMobil get away with polluting our environment and endangering the health of Texans," said Metzger. "Our lawsuit will hopefully prevent them from continuing to violate state and federal laws."

Photo Chris Denbow



More Online



Visit our website at www.EnvironmentTexas.org to support the Texas Clean Air Project and all our efforts to keep the air clean and safe to breathe.

◀ Exxon Baytown Refinery