Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report
Thanks for making it all possible
From the Director

Over the past year, Americans have mourned the loss of hundreds of thousands of loved ones, neighbors and friends to COVID-19. As the crisis altered our daily lives in ways both profound and mundane, Environment Texas continued to work, online and safely distant, for clean air, clean water, open spaces and a livable climate.

In this report, we share the stories of that work with you: stories of researchers, advocates, attorneys, organizers and citizens striving together to protect and preserve our natural world. We thank you for helping to make that work possible, in normal and not-so-normal times.

This year, our national network persuaded more cities and states to “go renewable” and to take steps to electrify their transportation systems. We also won more bans on single-use plastic items.

And, in a victory that was years in the making, we celebrated as America reaffirmed its commitment to public lands when the Environment Texas-backed Great American Outdoors Act became law on Aug. 4, 2020. We also worked to ensure this popular and bipartisan law is correctly implemented.

Over the past four years, the Trump administration dismantled or weakened more than 100 critical protections for the environment. We have a chance to restore and strengthen those protections and we are working with the Biden-Harris team to see this process through.

Your action and support make it all possible. Thank you, as always, for standing with us.

Luke Metzger
Executive Director
Clean Water & Air

In our view, we must fulfill the promise of the Clean Water Act by making all our waters fishable, swimmable and drinkable. The Trump administration took a different view. We took action in the courts and in Congress to defend our water, making progress on the chemical contaminants known as PFAS and on lead-contaminated drinking water.

Unauthorized air emissions in Texas doubled in 2018
DEC. 18, 2019: Texans who think their air quality got worse in the past few years are probably right.

A report by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center, released on Dec. 18, 2019, found that Texas industrial facilities released 135 million pounds of illegal air pollution in 2018—double the amount in 2017. The report also found that companies reported 4,590 breakdowns, maintenance incidents and other unauthorized instances of air pollution in 2018. The state of Texas and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the report found, financially penalized companies for just 57 of the unauthorized air pollution events, or 1.2 percent.

“Unfortunately the problem doesn’t seem to be getting better,” said Environment Texas Research & Policy Center Executive Director Luke Metzger to the Houston Chronicle. “Facilities continue to be in noncompliance with their permits and frequently, and sometimes flagrantly, violating the law and putting out health-threatening pollution.”

Houston invests in green infrastructure
JUNE 10, 2020: Old, chronic problems often require modern solutions.

Flooding and related water pollution from stormwater runoff and sewage overflows, for example, have long plagued Houston. On June 10, the Houston City Council approved a new solution: Incentives for investments in innovative, nature-based infrastructure projects such as permeable pavement, rain gardens and green roofs, which mitigate flooding by helping stormwater soak into the soil.

“When stormwater flows over yards, parks and natural areas, it picks up fecal waste from pets and wildlife, as well as other pollutants like toxic chemicals and trash. This dirty water floods our sewer systems, which can add raw sewage to the mix dumped into our streets and bayous,” said Anna Farrell-Sherman, clean water associate for Environment Texas. “This pollution makes us sick.”

In Houston, 96 percent of freshwater sites contained unsafe levels of bacteria at least once in 2017. The introduction of green infrastructure will help curb this pollution by capturing and cleaning stormwater.
Our staff and members rallied people all over the country to speak out for the historic Great American Outdoors Act, including U.S. Rep. Joe Cunningham (on left, bottom right) and U.S. Sen. Joe Manchin, flanked by Environment America’s Jamie Lockwood and Wendy Wendlandt (in middle, top left). Above, bottom: In February, our advocates celebrated the introduction of the “Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act of 2020” with U.S. Sen. Tom Udall (N.M.). Environment Texas Advocate Anna Farrell-Sherman (above top) raises awareness about protecting our state parks through Prop. 5.
Conservation

Our country’s lands and waters are precious beyond measure. This year, Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center, along with our national network, worked to defend and expand protections for our special places and the wildlife that live in them, standing up for bees and other pollinators, national parks, and our oceans. In July, we celebrated a major victory for public lands.

**Great American Outdoors Act dedicates $900 million per year to conservation**

**JULY 27, 2020:** After years of tireless work, our advocates, members, supporters and allies celebrated a massive win for public lands.

On July 22, the U.S. House of Representatives followed the U.S. Senate in approving the Great American Outdoors Act, which will fully fund the long-neglected, but highly effective, Land and Water Conservation Fund. That means $900 million per year for our public lands, along with billions in short-term funding to clear a backlog of maintenance issues at our national parks.

“The Great American Outdoors Act embraces what we all know to be true: Protecting and enhancing our public lands is an essential part of the American ethos,” said Steve Blackledge, senior director of our national network’s Conservation America campaign. “By locking in $900 million a year for outdoor projects, plus providing a short-term infusion of money to address maintenance issues, the House is reaffirming that commitment to the natural world.”

**88% of Texans approve Prop. 5 to increase funding for state parks**

**NOV. 5, 2019:** In November 2019, a record number of Texans voted to approve Proposition 5, a constitutional amendment to guarantee that sales taxes on sporting goods go to fund our state and local parks.

To build voter support for the measure, Environment Texas launched a statewide media tour. Our staff visited 15 state parks and held press conferences in seven cities in the run-up to voting day, from Houston to El Paso.

“Between 1993 and 2017, out of the $2.5 billion that was collected in revenue from sales taxes on sporting goods, only about 40 percent was actually given to our state parks. Proposition 5 changed that,” said Environment Texas Associate Anna Farrell-Sherman.
Above: Morgan Folger (left), director of our Destination: Zero Carbon campaign, is joined by Pennsylvania State Rep. Malcolm Kenyatta (center) and PennEnvironment Climate Defender Organizer Alex Lola at a January 2020 media event. Top right: As New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy signs a bill into law promoting electric vehicles, Doug O’Malley, state director of our sister group Environment New Jersey, speaks on behalf of the coalition that supported the bill. Here in Texas, we championed new clean car standards.
Global Warming Solutions

Global warming is the most profound symptom of our unhealthy relationship with the Earth. Thanks to our advocates and members, many states have committed to major action to reduce their carbon pollution. As power generation gets cleaner, we focused this year on the transportation sector, America’s number one source of global warming pollution.

We filed a lawsuit to protect Clean Car standards

JUNE 2, 2020: In May, we took the Trump administration to court for clean air.

On May 27, our national partner Environment America and 10 other public interest organizations filed a lawsuit opposing the Trump administration’s action to weaken federal Clean Car standards. The petition challenges a rule by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Transportation’s National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that violates several federal statutes.

“The EPA’s own analysis shows that this will reverse climate progress. The Clean Car standards should protect our climate, our health and the future of our children and grandchildren,” said Environment America’s Clean Cars Associate Eleanor Reynolds. “This plan is unacceptable. Not only does it fail to adequately address the climate crisis—it sets us back years when we have no time to lose.”

Houston sets a roadmap to more electric vehicles

OCT. 11, 2019: For Houston-area drivers thinking about buying a new car, a new plan will make an electric vehicle a more appealing option.

On Oct. 11, the city of Houston announced a plan to increase electric vehicle sales to 30 percent of all new cars sold by 2030. The goal of the plan is to increase awareness, affordability and availability of electric transportation in Houston. EVolve Houston, a coalition between the city and energy companies, is working to reduce Houston’s transportation-related carbon emissions by encouraging sales of new electric vehicles.

“Affordable, efficient, long-range electric vehicles are hitting the streets in record numbers, and better vehicles are coming online all the time,” said Jen Schmerling, deputy director of Environment Texas. “However, to meet our commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement and get to zero-carbon transportation by mid-century, we need to do more. EVolve Houston will incentivize cleaner driving and more environmentally-friendly habits in individual citizens and small businesses, and lead to more public support for a fully decarbonized society.”
Bottom, left: Caribou in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In August 2020, after the Trump administration approved the beginning of oil and gas leasing in this special place, Environment Texas and our national network joined a lawsuit opposing the plans. Bottom, center: On August 27, John Rumpler, senior director of our clean water campaigns, participates in a virtual panel on the environmental and health impacts of the Trump administration’s “pause” on enforcement of clean air and water protections.

Photo credits: (clockwise from top): Mr. James Kelley via Shutterstock, Felix Lipov via Shutterstock, Staff, Malkolm Boothroyd
The price of a clean and healthy environment is eternal vigilance—especially as President Trump pushed to dismantle protections for our rivers, our public lands, our oceans and our climate. This year, our national partners Environment America and Environment America Research and Policy Center bolstered our green firewall in defense of America’s environmental protections.

After advocates took action, the Trump EPA backed down on suspending enforcement

**APRIL 14, 2020:** By suspending enforcement during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Trump administration’s Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) risked putting Americans’ health at further risk. So Environment Texas Research & Policy Center spoke out until it reversed its decision.

On March 26, the EPA released a policy that stopped enforcement of key provisions of our nation’s environmental laws during the COVID-19 pandemic. The decision came on the heels of requests from the oil and gas industry and others seeking exemptions at this time.

“Refineries release millions of pounds of air pollution—including fugitive emissions or leaks—that would go undetected without stringent monitoring requirements,” John Rumpler, senior attorney for our national network, told USA Today at the time.

After months of advocacy, during which thousands of Americans called on Congress or the courts to compel the EPA to do its duty and protect communities, the agency terminated its pandemic polluter loophole.

We went to court to defend clean water protections

**MAY 5, 2020:** Environment Texas and our national network went to court to stop the Trump administration’s Dirty Water Rule, which puts rivers and drinking water at risk.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers have revoked federal protections for thousands of waterways across the country. On April 29, Environment America, with the Southern Environmental Law Center, filed suit to challenge the Dirty Water Rule in court. From the Great Lakes to the Galveston Bay, the streams and wetlands that lost protections under the rule are crucial to the health of the nation’s most iconic waterways—providing habitat for wildlife, filtering pollutants and absorbing floodwaters.

“As surely as water flows downstream, the Dirty Water Rule endangers the waterways where millions of Americans swim, fish, boat and draw their drinking water,” said John Rumpler, senior director of our national network’s Clean Water for America campaign. “We will not allow it to stand.”
Our staff (partial list)