Fiscal Year 2021 Program Report
Thanks for making it all possible
From the director

Every day, the news delivers more dire warnings about the state of our natural world.

Fewer than 400 Right whales remain in the North Atlantic. Fewer than 80 Southern Resident orcas survive in Puget Sound. Nearly 99 percent of western monarch butterflies have disappeared. Climate change is accelerating this loss of wildlife and threatening human life as well.

It would be naive to downplay the scale of these problems and heartless not to mourn the losses. But it would be irresponsible to conclude that there’s nothing we can do—especially when solutions are all around us.

Our country has all of the clean, renewable power we need if we choose to use it. We can accelerate the transition to electric vehicles. U.S. corporations can reduce their use of plastic pollution and their sale of pollinator-killing pesticides. And on and on.

Environment Texas and our national network of 29 state environmental groups made progress on all of these issues and more in the past year. None of these problems are completely solved—not even close. But we keep chipping away, breaking down big problems and making them a little more manageable. Incremental change that leads to concrete results is our stock-in-trade because success, one step at a time, is how we build confidence in—and demand for—the changes that are still to come.

Our action and progress—all of which is made possible by your support—also provide fuel for hope. Not a passive hope, like that of spectators rooting for their team. Our hope is action-oriented, results-oriented, a hope that serves, as an ally once said, “as a hammer that we use in case of emergency to break the glass, sound the alarm and spring into action.”

We’re reminded every day about the emergency our natural world faces. And every day, together with you and all of our friends, supporters and allies, we pick up that hammer.

Thanks for making it all possible.

Luke Metzger
Executive Director
We envision a healthier world powered by clean, renewable energy. With support from Environment Texas’ members, we defended our state’s chances at harnessing our vast renewable energy potential. From our rooftops to our wind farms, we keep taking steps toward a future powered by 100% clean energy.

**Report: After years of advancement in clean technology, it’s clear that ‘We Have The Power’**

**JUNE 16, 2021:** It’s time for America to move beyond fossil fuels, and fortunately, we have the power to realize our clean, renewable energy potential.

That was the finding of the 2021 edition of our national partner Environment America Research & Policy Center’s “We Have The Power” report, released in June. According to the report, America has the technical potential to meet all its electricity needs many times over with wind and solar energy.

“To a visitor from an earlier century, America in 2021 would be unimaginably advanced in all ways but one: We still rely on dirty and dangerous fossil fuels to meet our energy needs,” said Susan Rakov, chair of Environment America Research & Policy Center’s Clean Energy program.

“But it doesn’t have to be that way. This report shows that between the sunshine and the wind, we have the potential to run our society on clean energy, today and in the future.”

**Attacks on renewable energy following Texas blackouts failed in state Legislature**

**JUNE 8, 2021:** After deadly statewide power outages in February, some politicians and pundits falsely blamed renewable energy sources solar and wind.

In response, some legislators introduced anti-renewable energy bills that would have imposed new fees on wind and solar farms. Environment Texas, allied lawmakers and our citizen supporters defended renewables, and when the legislative session ended on May 31, we won: Wind and solar power that can help prevent future blackouts were protected; the new fees were dropped.

“I’m pleased the House stood off attacks on solar and wind power,” said Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger. “As global warming makes extreme weather more frequent and more severe, we need to batten down the hatches to protect Texas families from blackouts and worse.”

Environment Texas urges the Public Utility Commission to focus on providing a more sustainable, resilient energy grid that will better protect Texans from more energy crises.
Clockwise from top: In 2020, Hays County voted overwhelmingly in favor of protecting our wild places; Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger and canvassers worked to save our best pollinators over the summer.
Conservation

Across Texas, our wildlife and wild places need protection. Last year, as bee populations dropped at alarming rates and development threatened our public lands, tens of thousands of supporters like you took part in campaigns to protect wildlife and the places we love.

**Over 47,000 supporters told Amazon: Stop selling bee-killing pesticides**

**JULY 19, 2021:** To save the bees, our staff have asked the world’s largest online retailer to stop selling the pesticides that kill them. And we’re not alone.

In March, Environment Texas and our national network kicked off our campaign to convince Amazon to take neonicotinoid pesticides (or “neonics”)—the substances linked to troubling declines in bee populations—off its (virtual) shelves. By August, campaigners with our network had collected more than 47,000 petition signatures online and in 10 communities across the country.

“We need to reduce the use of this pesticide that’s contributing to the collapse of our most important pollinators,” said Malia Libby, our national network’s Save the Bees campaign associate. “Amazon should do the right thing and take neonics off its shelves.”

Our ask is far from unprecedented: The Home Depot and Lowe’s have pledged to phase out the use of neonics on their live plants, and Lowe’s has committed to taking the pesticides off its shelves altogether.

**Hays County approved a $75 million parks investment**

**NOV. 3, 2020:** Most Texans would agree that more nature in our lives would be a good thing. Among them are 70% of the voters in Hays County.

On Nov. 3, Hays County voted to adopt Environment Texas-backed Proposition A, which earmarks $75 million to create, expand and protect parks and natural areas threatened by development. The vote reflects a larger effort on behalf of Environment Texas to conserve our public lands, including our Million Acre Parks Project and its goal of adding 1 million additional acres of parkland in the Lone Star State.

“The passage of this measure comes amidst the ongoing pandemic, which has seen record numbers of people turning toward wild and natural spaces to find a sense of calm, as well as opportunities to enjoy the outdoors while maintaining social distance,” wrote Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger.

Prop A includes funding for 16 projects, ranging from expanded trails to natural habitats that are critical for wildlife conservation.
Clockwise from top: In January 2021, our national network’s supporters shared their electric vehicle (EV) stories in a series of EV testimonial videos; Our national Destination: Zero Carbon Campaign Director Morgan Folger calls for pro-electric vehicle policies in New Jersey.
Global Warming Solutions

The climate crisis is here, now. For years, Environment Texas has advanced concrete ideas for reducing global warming pollution. This year, we moved forward two critical measures, one that tackles our nation’s No. 1 source of global warming pollution and another that moves us closer to a future free of fossil fuels.

Back on course: Biden administration moved to allow states to set stronger vehicle emissions standards

MAY 7, 2021: For nearly 50 years, federal law allowed California to set stronger clean car standards and more than a dozen other states to follow California’s lead—until the previous administration tried to revoke their authority.

On April 26, the Biden administration started the process of undoing this action—checking off one of the “First things to fix” called for by Environment Texas in a series of 20 recommendations shared with the Biden team before they took office.

“This thank you President Biden, for taking this first step,” said Morgan Folger, director of our national network’s Destination: Zero Carbon campaign. “Now it’s time to reaffirm that states can and should lead the way for clean air and cleaner cars.”

Vehicle tailpipes are a major source of climate-changing, health-harming air pollution. A report from our research partners showed that in 2018, 108 million Americans lived in areas that experienced more than 100 days of degraded air quality.

As Congress reached spending deal, climate and energy advocates notched key wins

JAN. 4, 2021: In December, Congress passed a major energy bill that prioritized clean energy over dirty fossil fuel options as part of the omnibus package to fund the federal government.

The measures, passed with bipartisan support, included big boosts in funding for renewable energy and energy efficiency programs; the phase-out of a class of potent greenhouse gases called hydrofluorocarbons; funding to get the dirtiest diesel vehicles off our roads; money for clean energy research; and much more.

“This energy bill marks an American inflection point between our dirty energy past and our clean energy future,” said Johanna Neumann, senior director of our national Campaign for 100% Renewable Energy. “With the potential to do even more, we look forward to working with Congress in the new year to continue the drive toward a nation powered by clean, renewable energy.”

The bill was signed into law on Dec. 27.
Clockwise from top: Over the years, ExxonMobil’s Baytown facility had released more than 10 million pounds of dangerous contaminants; Our staff are building grassroots support to win clean water for Austin.

Photo credits: (clockwise from top): Roy Luck via Flickr, CC-BY-2.0; Cesar Rangel; Richard A McMillin via Shutterstock
Keeping on the path to cleaner air and water requires constant vigilance—including making sure we hold one of the world’s worst polluters accountable. Below, you’ll find a report on our campaign to protect our air, our water and our climate for generations to come.

**Federal judge once again imposed a penalty on Exxon for thousands of Clean Air Act violations**

**MARCH 2, 2021:** You can call it deja vu; we call it another win for clean air.

In March, a federal judge once again decided to assess a penalty on ExxonMobil Corporation for violating the Clean Air Act thousands of times over eight years at its refinery and chemical plant complex in Baytown, Texas. The $14.25 million penalty was handed down after Exxon lost its appeal of the original penalty, imposed after a lawsuit brought by Environment Texas and Sierra Club’s Lone Star chapter.

“Exxon has been fighting this case for 11 years, refusing to take any responsibility for spewing millions of pounds of illegal pollution into Texas communities,” said Luke Metzger, executive director of Environment Texas. “We call on Exxon to finally stop its scorched-earth litigation tactics, pay its penalty and drop these endless appeals.”

This penalty, like the first, is larger than any penalty ever imposed in a Clean Air Act citizen enforcement suit.

**Environment Texas canvassers went door to door to help win clean water for Austin**

**JULY 1, 2021:** Austin waters are more than dirty, they’re dangerous: A lake sickened 56 people and an algae bloom in Lady Bird Lake killed five dogs.

This summer, Environment Texas canvassers went door to door to win clean water for Austin. With health precautions in place, canvassers rallied support around convincing the Austin City Council to require nature-based infrastructure in new development. Nature-based infrastructure, such as rain gardens and green roofs, prevents water pollution by allowing rainwater to soak into the ground and filter out pollution on its way to waterways.

“Nearly half of our creeks have unsafe levels of fecal bacteria,” said Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger. “As we pave over more of the city, we need to ensure nature-based infrastructure prevents dangerous pollution.”

Our canvassers will continue rallying support to win over the City Council and protect our water.
Member Spotlight: 

Sara Rahimian

I was born in Tehran, Iran, and grew up in Sacramento, California. When I visited Iran as a teenager, I saw my grandparents help the poor in meaningful ways. Contributing to solutions is part of my family’s DNA. Mankind’s unsustainable relationship with the planet is deeply worrisome because, to me, nature is the truest manifestation of magic in our world. The Earth is full of natural marvels such as the many plants, animals and geographies that have emerged over billions of years. To see us so callously counting extinctions is devastating. I support Environment America because I think we need more than individual action. Every person who joins this movement to save our Earth has so much to gain in knowing that they are part of an existential solution at a critical moment.

Our staff (partial list)

Luke Metzger  
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None of our work would be possible without the support of our members. In this report, we’re highlighting the story of one of our national network's members, in her own words.