New hope for protecting Lake Erie

Pushing to better protect the Great Lakes

This winter, state and federal officials across the Great Lakes region launched an assault on the Asian carp, one of the newest and most dangerous threats to the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem.

An invasive species, the Asian carp has yet to officially infiltrate the Great Lakes, but it’s close. If it takes hold in the lakes, the effects could be disastrous. The carp can consume massive amounts of plankton, thereby starving native species higher up the food chain. They can grow to be five feet long and weigh up to 100 pounds, and they have injured boaters by jumping out of the water—up to 10 feet—when spooked by passing motorboats.

The rise of invasive species like the Asian carp adds to a set of longtime pollution problems that continue to plague the world’s largest group of freshwater lakes. Lake Erie suffers from a dead zone that in past summers has grown to be 6,300 square miles—bigger than the state of Connecticut.

The combined carp and pollution threats highlight the need for a comprehensive effort to clean up and preserve the Great Lakes—one that requires more resources and greater cooperation among federal, regional and state officials.

Our staff in Columbus, along with advocates from our affiliates in Washington, D.C., Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, are working with members of Congress to build support for a plan that will dedicate new funds to restoration projects and strengthen the efforts of the state and federal agencies tasked with protecting the Great Lakes. The measure is called the Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act.

Great Lakes Ecosystem Protection Act

The measure has been co-sponsored in the U.S. Senate by Ohio’s George Voinovich (R) and Sherrod Brown (D). It enjoys bipartisan support from across the region, with Democrats and Republicans alike emphasizing its urgency.

“The Great Lakes are a centerpiece of the American landscape, a unique and important natural resource to Ohio and the entire region,” Voinovich said upon announcing the bill. “They must be protected not just for this generation, but for generations to come.”

New funding could help clean up pollution and protect Lake Erie’s wildlife.
To our members

In political circles, questions about what steps we should take to protect our environment are almost always contentious and often divisive.

Yet with most of the people I meet as I travel around the state, politics takes a back seat when it comes to the places we love, whether it’s Lake Erie or a local patch of woods.

We don’t question whether they’re worth protecting—most of us struggle to understand how anyone could see it any other way.

This summer, Environment Ohio is working to defend and uphold the legacy of the Great Lakes. We have a chance to make huge progress for the Lakes in the next few months, but with Washington being Washington, we need thousands of ordinary Ohioans to speak up for real solutions. And that’s a force any politician will find hard to resist.

Sincerely,

Dan Kohler
Regional Program Director

Recent action

Gulf Oil spill highlights need for clean energy

At the time of writing this newsletter, the oil slick emanating from BP’s Deepwater Horizon rig had spread over 3,200 square miles of the Gulf. That’s more than three times the size of Rhode Island. It’s hard to overstate the likely ecological damage. Already, as much as 200,000 gallons of oil per day are bubbling up through waters populated with endangered bluefin tuna and sperm whales. As the oil oozes toward the shore, Louisiana’s famed seafood—fish, shrimp, oysters—will be hit hard as well.

This is the catastrophe that the oil industry has been telling us is impossible. We can expand drilling, they’ve told us, because new technology has made drilling “clean and safe.” The spill is proof this isn’t true. Environment Ohio has a legacy of defending our forests and lakes from oil drilling. Now, we’re stepping up the pressure on President Obama to reverse his recent support for expanding offshore drilling and are working to prevent future oil spills on our nation’s coasts.

New auto emissions standards build on states’ work

New fuel economy and auto emission standards approved on April 1 by the Obama administration will reduce the nation’s oil dependence by 11.6 billion gallons by 2016, an amount equal to half the oil we import from Saudi Arabia each year.

The standards were made possible thanks in part to the grassroots advocacy and action of Environment Ohio and our affiliate groups across America, especially in the 14 states where our staff and members helped win approval of state emission standards over the last decade—victories that set the stage for the president’s plan.

Still, the new Clean Cars standards face at least one last hurdle. Big Oil and its allies in Congress—led by Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska—have pushed to block the Obama administration’s efforts to limit carbon pollution, including the new Clean Cars standards. Visit our website to take action and help fight back against these attacks in Congress.

Leadership and Science: Think Global, Act Local

Calling all grassroots leaders and environmental activists! Environment Ohio’s summer leadership summit will take place on July 17-19, 2010. Our Leadership Summit is the perfect opportunity for you to sharpen your tools and learn from the best minds and most dynamic leaders in the environmental movement today.

For more information, visit EnvironmentOhio.org/leadership.


A legacy of protection
In 1969, the escalating abuse of America’s waterways reached a new level. Ohio’s Cuyahoga River—already infamous for the black oil that floated along its surface, the trash that lined its banks, and the complete absence of animal life within its waters—caught fire.

The incident, along with a Time magazine article that covered the fire and called the Cuyahoga the river that “oozes rather than flows,” helped spur the modern environmental movement, ultimately resulting in the passage in 1972 of the Clean Water Act.

For decades, government officials and citizen activists used the Clean Water Act to reduce industrial discharges into our waterways, large and small. When polluters balked, the EPA imposed tough penalties, compelling companies to clean up their act. And it worked—today, we swim in many rivers and lakes that were once unsafe, and enjoy much higher water quality for all kinds of recreation.

Progress at risk
Today that progress is at risk due to two poorly reasoned court decisions that have, in the words of a recent report published by Environment Ohio and other groups, “shattered the fundamental framework of the Clean Water Act” and placed thousands of polluters beyond the law’s reach.

In the decisions, reached in part at the behest of private developers, a slim majority of justices ignored the Clean Water Act’s promise to protect all “waters of the United States.” Instead, the judges seized upon a single word—navigable—to call protections into doubt for a fifth of the nation’s wetlands and more than half of our streams.

“We are, in essence, shutting down our Clean Water programs in some states,” said one EPA lawyer. “When companies figure out the cops can’t operate, they start remembering how much cheaper it is to just dump stuff in a nearby creek.”

In Ohio, hundreds of miles of streams and thousands of acres of wetlands could now be open to unregulated dumping. These streams and wetlands feed and protect major waterways, such as Lake Erie, that provide drinking water, recreation and natural beauty for hundreds of thousands of Ohioans.

Environment Ohio is calling on our congressional delegation to restore Clean Water Act protections to all of our waters. Both the U.S. House and Senate have introduced legislation that would do that. Yet a coalition of powerful industries is pushing back. One coalition member described the strategy: “If you can get Glenn Beck to say that government storm troopers are going to invade your property, farmers in the Midwest will light up their congressmen’s switchboards.”

This summer, we’re reaching out to people across Ohio to counter the polluters’ lobby and join us in our call to restore clean water protections to all of Ohio’s, and America’s, waters.

Report Highlight: Building Better
Ohio families could save about $1,837 per year on their energy bills by 2050 if we start investing in the energy efficiency of our buildings today. Environment Ohio researchers calculated the savings as part of a report, released in March, entitled “Building Better.”

Our researchers pored over government data to estimate the reduced energy consumption, decreased fossil fuel use, money saved on energy bills, and pollution that would be prevented if we committed to dramatically improving the efficiency of new and existing buildings.

How much energy would we save across the country? Enough, we estimate, to power 235 million homes every year.

And Ohio has the potential to massively cut its global warming emissions. Our state could avoid 97.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide pollution by 2050—only Texas and Florida have the potential to cut as much pollution.

As Environment Ohio’s Senior Energy Policy Analyst Rob Sargent points out, “most buildings last for decades, so investing in energy efficiency locks in savings for years to come.”

Sign up for e-mail alerts and stay updated on our progress at www.EnvironmentOhio.org.
Environment Ohio

Our mission
We all want clean air, clean water and open space. 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 Ohio. We focus exclusively on protecting Ohio’s air, water and open space. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

Building a solar future

America could harness the power of the sun to supply 10 percent of our electricity by 2030 if we adopt a set of relatively simple policy solutions, according to a report we released this spring. What’s 10 percent? More energy than we produce at every nuclear power plant in the country.

Our report examines a wide variety of solar technologies and tools, including photovoltaics, concentrated solar power, solar water heaters, solar space heating and passive solar design. Use of these technologies, while already occurring in places from Wal-Mart stores to Boston’s Fenway Park, could be greatly expanded through new investments in research and development, stronger renewable electricity standards and incentives, and green building codes and standards—all of which are part of our Repower America agenda.