Annual Report

A recap of our work for our members in 2012
To our members

“By the end of the year, more than 60 communities had banned the single-use plastic bags that litter our coast, pollute the ocean and harm wildlife.”

Dear member,

As I start my 25th year of environmental activism, I am reminded that protecting the environment is not a one-shot deal. Instead, it is a series of small, necessary steps that lead to cleaner air, cleaner water and better-protected beautiful places. As I look back at 2012, I can see that none of these steps would have been possible without the support of you, our members.

This year we helped pass a bag ban in the second largest city in the country, Los Angeles. Surrounded by local environmental groups and activists, I was reminded what power we have when we work together. There are now over 60 cities that will be living “bag-free” in the next few years.

Another key step was when President Obama required that new power plants limit global warming emissions into the environment. Our constant vigilance on the president made this action all the more gratifying. By showing the president all the support we had from the public, he was able to fight back against special interests and do the right thing.

And finally, a positive leap forward for clean energy; we’ve helped bring nearly 1.5 giga-watts of rooftop solar power to California, creating more solar energy than all but five countries worldwide. We have sidestepped all the “nay-sayers” and have moved to the point of rethinking how we generate power in California and the country.

As I look forward to the next 25 years, I am confident that together we can win monumental victories for the environment—one step at a time!

Sincerely,

Dan Jacobson
Legislative Director, Environment California
Global Warming Solutions

As the world’s 12th largest source of global warming pollution, California has the opportunity and responsibility to lead the country in undertaking big initiatives to solve global warming. We helped pass the Global Warming Solutions Act in 2006, which laid the groundwork to cut emissions by 80 percent by 2050. Last year, we moved forward by winning stronger car emissions standards, more solar on rooftops, and the state’s first-ever “pay to pollute” carbon auction.

With more energy-efficient buildings, more electric cars hitting the road, and record breaking growth in renewable energy like wind and solar, we can sharply reduce global warming pollution. Add to that a cap on carbon pollution that puts a price on the right to pollute, and you have a viable strategy for solving our trickiest problem.

The nation’s first economy-wide carbon cap

In 2012, Environment California continued to move forward with bold, yet practical action to solve global warming. With the help of our supporters and our public education campaign, we helped our state launch the first-ever “pay to pollute” carbon auction.

A key part of this campaign was distributing literature in thousands of neighborhoods. Over 100,000 factsheets about climate change were put directly into people’s hands or left on doorsteps throughout the state. Now, polluters must buy and sell carbon emission permits. By putting a price on carbon, California can cut its global warming pollution and move forward on more clean energy innovations.

Report: CA businesses “Greening the Bottom Line”

In 2012, we released several reports to the media, localizing the problem of global warming as well as the solutions. One of the reports was “Greening the Bottom Line 2012.” We organized news conferences in Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area and the Central Valley, standing up with businesses and government leaders to highlight how cutting pollution can save money.
Thanks to our members, something remarkable is happening in California. From Los Angeles to Marin, we’ve helped people in more than 60 communities band together to win bans against single-use plastic bags. We’re reducing plastic pollution in the Pacific. We’re sparing ocean wildlife from harm. And now one in five Californians is living bag-free. With you by our side, all this was possible, and we’re not stopping until we’ve banned the bag statewide.
Wave of local plastic bag bans swept across California

A toxic soup of trash is swirling off our coast, polluting the Pacific and harming wildlife. All this garbage is creating an ecological disaster: hundreds of thousands of seabirds, turtles and other animals die each year after ingesting or getting tangled up in plastic trash. It doesn’t have to be this way. We’ve been working up and down the coast to reduce this plastic pollution, cleaning up our ocean and sparing wildlife from harm.

Angelenos took action to win biggest ban yet

Last May, the largest city in the state, Los Angeles, committed to banning single-use plastic bags. This is our biggest victory for the ocean yet! The plastic industry lobbied council members in City Hall, but Environment California staff and volunteers hit the pavement to show overwhelming public support for the ocean. And with the help of you, our members, we won.

Over 1,000 Angelenos placed a call to the City Council, while thousands more signed petitions in support of the ban. On the day of the vote, many of you joined Environment California’s news conference on the steps of City Hall to stand up for keeping plastic out of the Pacific. The ban passed almost unanimously, with a 13-to-1 vote to clean up the city, its coast, the Pacific and its wildlife.

More marine life saved by cutting plastic trash

All this trash is a huge threat to wildlife. From the smallest fish or fluffy Laysan albatross chicks, to the majestic leatherback sea turtle, thousands of marine animals are killed every year because of the plastic we put in the ocean. A report that outlined over 400 autopsies of leatherback sea turtles showed that one in three had plastic in their system. Too much of the plastic garbage polluting our oceans comes from things we simply don’t need, like plastic bags. With member support, we can keep plastic out of the Pacific.

Our advocates and grassroots activists helped to ban the bag across the state

[Photos of various locations where the ban was implemented: Avila Beach, Los Angeles, Santa Cruz]
As California’s beloved Yosemite National Park neared its 150th anniversary, Environment California sought to restore a 1,600-acre wildlife corridor that had been excluded from the park more than a century ago at the behest of timber and railroad interests. With the support we helped organize, members of California’s congressional delegation were expected to introduce a bill to restore the land to the park in 2013. In related news, we also helped keep our state parks open and win approval for Pinnacles National Park.
A call to restore a wildlife corridor

After Yosemite National Park was created, the government left thousands of acres of forest, meadows, ridges and streams unprotected due to pressure from timber and railroad interests. Some of that land was lost to development forever. But 1,600 acres are still unspoiled, home to tall pines and rolling hills. This land serves as a wildlife corridor between Yosemite and Sierra National Forest.

Willing landholders have been trying to make these 1,600 acres a part of Yosemite National Park for years, but now Environment California has joined them in calling on Congress to finally act in Yosemite’s interest.

Thousands joined us in calling on Sen. Feinstein to lead

Last year, we further raised the profile of this issue by showing lawmakers how much public support is behind expanding Yosemite. Already, over 10,000 Environment California members and activists have submitted comments to Sen. Dianne Feinstein, urging her to lead the way in making this dream a reality for Yosemite.

Just in time for the park’s 150th anniversary

Environment California is working to ensure that lawmakers at the federal level take action to expand Yosemite by its 150th birthday in 2014. And we’ve worked with lawmakers at the state level to pass a resolution in the state Legislature calling on California’s congressional delegation to expand Yosemite this year.

We have also gotten endorsements from major figures in the preservation world, such as Betty White—famous actress and honorary National Forest Ranger—and Robert Hanna, the great-great-grandson of John Muir.

In the coming months, Environment California will continue to build excitement around Yosemite’s 150th birthday in order to galvanize lawmakers in Congress to do the right thing and restore this once-lost swath of forest to the national park we love.

Environment California Legislative Director Dan Jacobson hiking in Yosemite

Pinnacles became a national park

Environment California was thrilled to see Congress pass the Pinnacles National Park Act at the turn of the New Year, amidst the turmoil of the “fiscal cliff” negotiations. The bipartisan bill upgraded the protection status of Pinnacles National Monument, located in central California near Soledad, to that of a national park.

Pinnacles National Park stretches across 26,000 acres and is home to volcanic rock formations that attract rock climbers from around the world. Pinnacles is also a critical habitat for Peregrine Falcons and the California Condor, a species that has come back from the brink of extinction thanks to the protection of places like Pinnacles National Park.
A Million Solar Roofs

Since our groundbreaking Million Solar Roofs Program began 10 years ago, California has come a long way. We’ve worked to bring 1.5 gigawatts of rooftop solar power to the market, generating more solar energy than all but five countries worldwide. Last year, we helped pass three strong solar bills that will make solar more accessible and affordable for more Californians. With our supporters, we’re reducing air pollution, fighting global warming and creating local jobs.
California now has nine times more solar roofs than in 2006

California has only scratched the surface of its clean energy potential. Until our buildings and vehicles are powered 100 percent with clean energy, the problems associated with our addiction to fossil fuels will continue to grow. We’ve had much success, but much more needs to happen to protect our health, environment and society from global warming, smog and other forms of pollution. Tapping into California’s abundant sunshine is a winning solution.

We celebrated California’s solar cities

We kicked off the year with the release of our report, “California’s Solar Cities 2012,” which catalogs the amount of solar power installed by over 700 cities across the state, identifying the hubs of the state’s thriving solar economy.

From Bakersfield to San Francisco and Clovis to Culver City, solar power is becoming mainstream technology throughout California. We released the report at news conferences in top solar cities, joined by the mayors of San Diego, Fresno and Sacramento, to not only celebrate their solar accomplishments to date, but to reaffirm their commitment to expand on this strong solar foundation.

We helped bring more solar to schools

One of the greatest opportunities when it comes to making solar power a community resource is to install it on schools throughout the state. Moving schools towards solar energy has the triple impact of reducing air pollution, saving our cash-strapped schools money and educating students, parents, school administrators and entire communities about the effectiveness of solar and other renewables.

• We helped win three key energy bills that will make it possible for more Californians—including schools—to put up solar panels and invest in solar hot water heaters.

• Our recent report, “Making the Grade with Clean Energy,” documented the solar projects of over 200 public K-12 schools across the state, shining the spotlight on the potential for our schools to embrace solar energy solutions, save thousands of dollars, and do what’s right for the environment.

• The call for more solar in our schools was echoed by Los Angeles public elementary schools that won prizes in our “Sunlight! Camera! Action!” video contest, reminding us that “there’s so much to gain and nothing to lose” by tapping into the power of the sun.

We hope that we’ve provided the inspiration and the information that will empower you to make more solar power available for your home, business or school. 

We invite you to get involved in the movement to bring solar power to California. We’ll help you do it, and we’ll celebrate with you as we reach our goal of 1 million solar roofs.

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Cleaner Cars, Cleaner Air

Powering our homes and cars should not pollute our air or poison our kids. Yet California cities still top the charts when it comes to the nation’s most polluted places. Last year’s state and federal victories for cleaner car tailpipe and mile-per-gallon standards, mercury limits from power plants and a new cap on soot pollution, one of the deadliest forms of air pollution, will all help correct this statewide problem.
California led the way to new, national clean car standards

Nearly half of all Americans live in places with unsafe levels of air pollution. Soot pollution is the deadliest of the common air pollutants, causing thousands of premature deaths every year. And nearly 40 percent of the California’s global warming emissions come from transportation. With our supporters and allies across the state and in D.C., we won big victories in 2012 to clean up the air for our families.

EPA passed life-saving soot pollution standard

The half of Americans who live in places with unsafe air suffer a range of consequences, including heart attacks, asthma attacks, emergency room visits, hospital admissions and even death.

Current air quality standards for soot pollution are too weak, and it costs tens of thousands of American lives every year. In June, the Environmental Protection Agency moved to fix this by proposing stronger soot pollution standards for power plants and diesel trucks. Our staff went to work to ensure these new standards would become a reality:

• We collected more than 26,000 comments in support of stronger standards.

• We testified and turned out dozens of citizens to a public hearing in Sacramento last July.

New emissions standards will save oil, reduce carbon

Before President Obama took office, California and 13 other states led the way for cleaner cars and implemented strong state-level car standards. This helped pave the way for the new clean car standards we saw through in 2012. They will drastically reduce emissions of carbon pollution and cut oil use nationwide.

By 2030, the standards will cut carbon pollution from vehicles in the United States by 270 million metric tons—the equivalent of the annual pollution of 40 million of today’s vehicles—and save 1.5 million barrels of oil every day.
No More Nuclear Disasters

The Japanese Fukushima disaster was a wake-up call for Californians: We’re gambling with the environment and our health. A year later, the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station in Southern California experienced its own accident that shut down the plant for more than a year. In 2012, Environment California focused on educating opinion leaders and the public about the need to retire California’s aging nuclear plants and replace them with clean energy.

**Nuclear plant on fault line shut down, for now**

The drinking water for 49 million Americans could be at risk of radioactive contamination from a leak or accident at a local nuclear power plant, according to released by Environment America Research & Policy Center.

Thanks to our research and the public’s watchfulness of nuclear power, when San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station started to leak in 2011, the plant was shut down for over a year.

In order to reduce the risks nuclear power poses to water supplies and to our communities, we called on state and federal officials to deny PG&E and Southern California Edison’s—the two companies that own Diablo Canyon and San Onofre nuclear power plants, respectively—permit to relicense their two aging power plants. Instead, officials should conduct thorough safety review of these plants and plan for their retirement and phaseout over the next 10 years.

**Action taken to keep CA safe, for good**

In 2012, we brought together experts to educate the L.A. Times editorial board, who then wrote a piece calling for the retirement of San Onofre to replace its power with clean, renewable energy.

In addition to meeting with the L.A. Times, we also met with the Brown administration, members of the California Energy Commission, and members of the California state Legislature to discuss the viability of a nuclear-free future in California.