Alamere Falls, Point Reyes National Seashore

Annual Report

Recapping our work in fiscal year 2015 for our members
To our members

“Behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts.”

From record-breaking drought, to massive wildfires, to severe storms, it has become abundantly clear that global warming is happening now and requires bold action. Unfortunately, opposition from the fossil fuel industry and their allies in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento stand in the way of meaningful action like tackling global warming and realizing the full potential of solar.

The challenges we face in protecting our environment are formidable and daunting. But this past year also gave me a lot of hope for the future. At Environment California, 2015 was all about people power. And together, we have a lot to be proud of.

California once again passed legislation leading the way to reduce the impacts of global warming. Senate President pro Tempore Kevin de León and Gov. Jerry Brown teamed up with Speaker of the Assembly Toni Atkins to pass legislation for clean energy sources, increased energy efficiency and coal divestment.

But our success was not just in Sacramento. After Americans submitted 8 million comments of support for limiting carbon pollution from power plants, President Obama finalized the Clean Power Plan, which will do just that for the first time ever. Californians’ voices helped advance the policy and build the political will to win this victory, which will make a major dent in our country’s contribution to global warming pollution.

Of course, we still have a lot to do. The oil companies are continuing to frack in California and the plastic industry has stopped the single-use plastic bag law from going into effect. But, as you’ll read in the following pages, behind each accomplishment were engaged and committed people like you who joined us in fighting for a cleaner, greener and healthier future. I’m grateful for the energy you bring to these fights, and the staying power you give our efforts. And working together, I am optimistic about our prospects for the future.

Thanks,

Dan Jacobson
Environment California Legislative Director
Save the California Bag Ban

Plastic trash has been polluting the Pacific Ocean for decades, harming our wildlife and threatening our beaches. But with California’s first-in-the-nation law to ban plastic bags, we could drastically reduce our plastic pollution. This year, you helped Environment California fight to protect this law from plastic companies’ attacks.

Reducing plastic pollution

One-third of California’s population lives in a plastic bag-free community. In 2014, after years of organizing by Environment California and hundreds of thousands of petitions from members like you, Gov. Jerry Brown signed a statewide law to eliminate plastic bags across California. This law, the first of its kind in the country, would continue to reduce plastic pollution in our state.

Bag ban under attack

But immediately after the law was introduced, out-of-state plastic companies announced their plans to repeal the ban, and in February 2015, the California Secretary of State certified a ballot measure to repeal it. This measure will appear on the 2016 ballot.

Thanks to your help, this year we worked to dispel the plastic industry’s lies and show Californians the benefits of banning bags. We spotlighted the issue in the media and held conversations with Californians, with tens of thousands of you taking action. The fight isn’t over, but we are continuing our efforts to ensure that the Pacific is protected from this threat.

Top: Environment California members showed their support for banning plastic bags.

Bottom: Dan Jacobson, Environment California legislative director, rallies Los Angeles to pass the bag ban.
Charge Ahead California

Transportation is the single largest source of global warming pollution in California, with exhaust from cars and trucks harming our environment and our health. But by transitioning to electric vehicles, we can clean our air and fight climate change. Environment California Research & Policy Center worked to put California in the driver's seat and switch to cleaner forms of transportation.
You supported strong clean energy policies in California

Nearly 40 percent of California’s global warming emissions come from cars and trucks that run on dirty energy. This dirty air makes tens of thousands of Californians sick and is a leading cause of climate change. This year, Environment California Research & Policy Center helped encourage more policies that promote electric vehicle use and eliminate vehicle pollution.

Transportation makes up largest source of global warming emissions

Gov. Jerry Brown has shown his support for increasing the amount of electric cars in California. This year he signed the Charge Ahead California Initiative to help build the market for electric vehicles and make them more affordable for low-income Californians. The Initiative aims to place one million zero-emission and near-zero-emission vehicles on the road within the next eight years.

As part of the Initiative, this year, Los Angeles received a $1.6 million grant to start a pilot car-sharing program in disadvantaged communities, which will offer low-income citizens more options for getting around, as well as reduce air pollution in the city.

Strong electric car policies in California

To combat the opposition from oil companies aimed at keeping us dependent on dirty fuel, Environment California Research & Policy Center talked to people across the state and built support from local leaders and citizens like you.

We met with mayors, city councilmembers and other local leaders, calling on them to endorse the move to electric vehicles. More than 100 local leaders said “yes” to clean vehicles by signing on to our statement of support.

We also held Electric Vehicle Days around California, giving community members a chance to test-drive electric cars and bicycles and educating them on the benefits of going electric.
Councilmember Paul Koretz briefs our Los Angeles office. We worked with Councilmember Koretz to protect our environment and ban fracking in the state.

No Fracking in California

On the heels of California’s worst drought in recorded history, Big Oil wants to use millions of gallons of our water, lace them with toxic chemicals and frack for oil from Sacramento to Los Angeles. This year, you helped Environment California Research & Policy Center take on the oil industry and call for a ban on fracking in our state.

Channel Islands National Park, one of our most beautiful natural areas, is being put at risk by fracking.

Councilmember Paul Koretz briefs our Los Angeles office. We worked with Councilmember Koretz to protect our environment and ban fracking in the state.
Thousands of proposed fracking wells in California

Time is running out to stop fracking in California, and Gov. Jerry Brown is still leaning toward allowing this dirty drilling practice in the state. If fracking moves forward, oil companies could drill as many as 25,000 fracking wells from Sacramento to Los Angeles.

8,000 march against fracking

In February, Environment California Research & Policy Center participated in one of the biggest climate rallies in California and the biggest fracking action in U.S. history. More than 8,000 took to the streets of Oakland to call for an end to fracking in California. We reached thousands of people on social media and just days later, thanks to your support, we helped deliver more than 184,000 petitions from Californians to Gov. Brown.

After New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo banned fracking in the state, we renewed our call on Gov. Brown to do the same in California. We increased the pressure and built grassroots opposition to fracking—the same kind of grassroots opposition that won the ban in New York. We also highlighted the issue in the media, publishing letters to the editor and op-eds in a wide variety of outlets.

In June, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) released a report on fracking that found that the process does not lead to water contamination. We took to the airwaves to debunk the findings and show that the EPA looked at only a small scope of the dangers of fracking.

Building support for a ban on fracking

Big Oil is still pushing to spread their lies and frack across the state, with devastating results for our land and water. So we’re continuing to build support for a ban on fracking in California. This year we talked to people across the state and many of you joined our call on Gov. Brown to stop Big Oil from bringing their snake oil pitch to California.
In 2015, Environment California celebrated the biggest victory for clean water in a decade! In May, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) restored Clean Water Act protections to thousands of waters across the country. Our public education and outreach, bolstered by our members, allies, and a coalition of businesses, elected officials and farmers, built the momentum necessary to get the Clean Water Rule past polluter opposition and signed into law.

Winning the biggest step forward for clean water in a decade

For nearly a decade, Environment California has gone toe-to-toe with powerful polluters to restore the Clean Water Act and permanently protect our waters. And in 2015, our efforts finally paid off when President Obama restored federal protections to more than half the nation’s streams, which feed drinking water sources for one in three Americans.

Nearly 140,000 miles of streams in California regained protections

The Clean Water Rule closed loopholes in the Clean Water Act, returning protections to nearly 140,000 miles of streams in California. You gave Environment California the resources to advocate in Congress, recruit and mobilize a diverse and powerful coalition, and rally the grassroots to demand action. Disappointingly, at press time, a federal appeals court blocked the new protections we just won for our waters. We’ve put together a legal strategy to defend the Clean Water Rule, and given its strong legal and scientific basis, the courts should ultimately reject all efforts to weaken it.
Go Solar, California

California is a leader in solar power. More and more, we’re going solar, meeting our energy needs in a way that’s clean, local and independent. The amount of solar capacity across the United States is growing rapidly, tripling in just the past three years. This year, California outshone the country in solar capacity and helped meet our goals for reducing emissions of global warming pollutants.

Cities leading the way on solar

Five California cities, including Los Angeles, San Diego and Sacramento, have more solar panels than most major cities nationwide. Environment California Research & Policy Center uncovered more research on the benefits of solar power this year.

Research shows the power of solar

In June, we released “Shining Rewards,” our report showing that solar owners deliver more benefits to the electrical grid than they receive in return from utilities. Utilities often claim that solar homeowners don’t pay their fair share, but our research showed that we should be encouraging more solar, not penalizing it.

In July, Environment California Research & Policy Center took a closer look at the success of the Million Solar Roofs Initiative, a program designed to lower the cost of solar and make it a mainstream source of energy. Our report, “California’s Solar Success Story,” showed that thanks to the Initiative, our solar capacity has increased more than 16-fold in the past 10 years.
California is feeling the effects of global warming now more than ever, with disasters like the August 2014 Lodge Fire happening more and more frequently.

Global Warming Solutions

In December 2015, world leaders convened in Paris to negotiate an international agreement to address the serious threat of global warming. Thanks to your support of Environment California and Environment California Research & Policy Center, California led the country on the path to this agreement, and played a major role in U.S. progress to address climate change.

Environment California Legislative Director Dan Jacobson stands with Sens. Pavley, Leno and de León to help pass two bills that will take California’s climate leadership up a step.
Historic action taken to address climate change

President Obama finalized the Clean Power Plan this summer, which is the single biggest action the United States has ever taken to address climate change. Nationwide, the new plan will reduce pollution from coal and gas power plants by 32 percent by 2030. The vast majority of Californians support these carbon pollution limits, and more than 713,000 Environment California members and supporters nationwide submitted comments in support of the Clean Power Plan.

Strong policies to address climate change

The limits on dirty coal and gas plants open the door for increased clean energy, and we helped to make sure that California is poised to lead the country. In fiscal year 2015, Environment California worked to pass bills that would cement our place as a clean energy leader by requiring 50 percent of the state’s energy to come from renewable sources, and doubling energy efficiency in existing buildings.

Already, California has strong policies in place to address climate change, and with your support, Environment California is working to make sure they stay strong. Thanks to these policies, we rank first in the country for installed solar capacity and third in installed wind energy capacity.

Research shows that California is leading the way on climate action

Environment California Research & Policy Center reports showed the impacts of these policies in reducing global warming pollution. In June, we released a report showing that in the next decade, California will cut more global warming pollution than any other state. The report, “Path to the Paris Climate Conference,” shows that by 2025, we will have avoided an estimated 200 million metric tons of carbon pollution. Along with state and federal policies across the country, the United States can reduce carbon pollution 27 percent below 2005 levels by 2025.

Top: Moss Landing Power Plant, in Moss Landing, California.
Bottom: Environment California Research & Policy Center’s “Path to the Paris Climate Conference” report.

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