FROM THE DIRECTOR

“The places we love will always need defending. But defending what we’ve already won isn’t enough. We want to live in, and leave to our children, a greener, healthier world than the one we live in today. That’s what we’re working for. Your action and support make it all possible, and for that we are deeply grateful.”

In our second year facing a president and a Congress who seem hostile toward our environmental goals, we at Environment Michigan made a conscious decision to do more than just play defense.

We pursued a strong, forward-looking agenda for three reasons:

First, the planet can’t wait. The survival of wildlife in our oceans depends on whether we curb plastic pollution now, not two or six years from now. Ditto for the quality of the air we breathe and the water we drink, the sources of the energy that powers our lives and the stability and suitability of our climate.

Second, success breeds success. When one community or college campus commits to renewable energy, another is more likely to follow their lead. When litigation compels one company to curb its pollution, others feel greater pressure to fall in line. When citizens succeed in reducing the use of one form of single-use plastics, they’re emboldened to try to reduce the next.

Third, ultimately winning—and defending—strong environmental protections depends on us winning enough hearts and minds to our cause to make any politician think twice about devaluing the environment, no matter the pressure applied by polluting industries or other interests.

In these pages, you’ll find reports on our vigorous efforts to defend Michigan’s clean water and air laws, our national parks and other public lands and our progress on global warming. But you’ll also find examples of our work with cities and communities to reduce plastic pollution, with companies to reduce deforestation and comply with pollution limits, with college campuses to embrace renewable power, and much more—work that’s paying off in positive results now for our environment.

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Nathan Murphy
State Director, Environment Michigan
Global Warming Solutions

From defending our existing climate protections to promoting policies to reduce emissions, our global warming program is working to eliminate the pollution and practices that are warming the planet and changing our climate.

Environmental Defense: Our Climate

For much of the early part of 2018, the Trump administration hinted at plans to roll back federal clean car standards aimed at keeping greenhouse emissions at bay. Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center was ready, holding rallies in support of clean car standards and citing then-Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Scott Pruitt for recklessly endangering our climate and health.

Environment Michigan, our members and coalition partners submitted hundreds of thousands of public comments to the Trump administration opposing rollbacks of the clean car standards and other crucial environmental protections. In Washington, D.C., our national network’s advocates stood up for climate science and worked to defend the Clean Power Plan, one of the best tools we have for reducing global warming pollution from power plants. Our team was ready, and Environment Michigan State Director Nathan Murphy testified in opposition to the proposed rules when the EPA and NHSTA held a public hearing in Dearborn in September.

Clean transportation

In May, Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center published a report outlining a major step we can take to cut global warming emissions. Titled “Electric Buses: Clean Transportation for Healthier Neighborhoods and Cleaner Air,” the report found that replacing all of America’s school buses with electric buses could avoid an average of 5.3 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year, and that replacing all of our diesel-powered transit buses with electric buses could save more than 2 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions each year.
Clean, Green & Renewable

Our energy program seeks concrete steps toward a world in which we conserve more, use the energy we have more wisely and efficiently, and rely only on sources of energy that are clean, renewable and tread lightly on the planet.

Ben Hellerstein (left), state director of our national network’s Massachusetts office, led a campaign that convinced lawmakers to commit to more renewable energy. At right, intern Katherine King.

Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and members of our national network’s California office at a press conference for the release of the Shining Cities report.
Renewable energy just kept winning

It was a year full of milestones for renewable energy and our work to promote it. Environment Michigan worked to make our state part of the renewable revolution, and our national network did the same nationwide.

100% Renewable

Our national network’s success in California set a shining example for us to follow here in Michigan. More than two years of work came to fruition in September when California passed Senate Bill 100, legislation committing the Golden State to 60 percent renewable electricity by 2030 and 100 percent zero-carbon electricity by 2045.

California is the world’s fifth largest economy, which means its shift toward clean, renewable energy will have major benefits beyond the state’s borders. This breakthrough also sets an example for leaders in our state: If California can do it, so can Michigan.

Meanwhile, Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center pointed the way for our cities, universities and communities join the 100 percent renewable movement. In October, we published “Renewable Energy 101,” a guide for university leaders seeking to transition their campuses to 100 percent clean energy.

Ann Arbor, Grand Rapids and Traverse City have all made commitments to transition to 100 percent renewable energy. Their leadership shows it’s time for other Michigan cities to get on board.

Go Solar

Every year, enough sunlight shines on the U.S. to provide 100 times more power than we need. Last year, our Go Solar campaign moved us closer to realizing that potential.

Our national network is urging 50 of America’s cities to think bigger, act smarter and tap the sun for more power. Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center published a guide titled “Ten Ways Your City Can Go Solar,” providing a roadmap for mayors to make their cities leaders in solar.

Renewables on the Rise

The 2018 edition of Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center’s “Renewables on the Rise” report looked at the past 10 years of growth in the industry, and found that the U.S. generates nearly six times more electricity from the sun and wind than we did a decade ago—enough to power roughly a quarter of homes across the country. The report found that Michigan has made strides on solar and wind generation. In fact, we now generate 36 times more energy from wind alone than we did in 2008. This is great progress, but we’re continuing to work toward a future that runs on renewables.
Conservation

In a world of incredible material abundance, our conservation campaigns work to bring more nature into our lives and to protect and preserve our open spaces, wild places and wildlife for their own sake.

▲ Environment Michigan at a park clean up along the Huron River in Ann Arbor.

▲ Alaska’s Tongass National Forest, the world’s largest temperate rainforest, is protected by the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. Our national network was instrumental in putting those protections in place 17 years ago, and we defended them last year from attempts to take them away.
Action in defense of wildlife

Last year, we ran campaigns to defend and promote more open spaces, wild places and wildlife. We pushed for concrete solutions to the world’s plastic waste problem, and to keep our beaches and coastal waters safe from offshore drilling. We put our expertise and people power to work to protect bees and other pollinators from lethal pesticides and to keep our public lands safe from destructive development.

Wildlife Over Waste

Last year, we launched our campaign to ban polystyrene foam—what most people call Styrofoam—which is one of the worst, and most common, forms of plastic pollution.

Though we only use polystyrene products like foam cups and take-out containers for a few minutes, they can persist in our environment and harm wildlife for centuries. That’s why Environment Michigan began calling for a statewide ban on polystyrene containers last summer. We also worked to build momentum in cities and towns across Michigan to pass local bans on polystyrene.

Across the country, our national network has already seen results. In Texas, major sandwich chain Thundercloud Subs committed to phasing out polystyrene. In Maryland, Baltimore and Anne Arundel County both passed polystyrene bans.

Tropical Forest Protection

Every hour, our planet loses 1,000 acres of forests—along with the animals that depend on these forests for their survival. That’s why Environment Michigan launched a new campaign last year to convince U.S. companies to stop cutting down any tropical forest—a commitment known as “zero deforestation.”

Through blogs and social media campaigns, our staff made the case for tropical forests as vital resources to be protected, not slashed and burned for profit.

Our organizers focused their efforts on Cargill, a major player in the global food industry headquartered here in the United States. More than 13,900 people signed our petition urging the company to lead the shift to zero deforestation.

No Bees, No Food

Bees are in decline, and the potential consequences for our food supply are devastating. All across the country, our national network pushed for bans on a class of bee-killing insecticides known as neonicotinoids (or neonics), which have been linked to bee die-offs. We gathered 219,000 public comments to the Environmental Protection Agency calling for a neonic ban, and urged states to join Connecticut, Maryland, Minnesota, New Jersey and Oregon in taking action against neonics.
Clean Water & Air

From holding water and air polluters accountable to uniting local clean water champions, our national network’s Clean Water & Air program promotes a world in which these precious, life-giving resources are no longer treated as dumping grounds for our waste.

▲ A $1.4 million settlement to clean up the Suwannee River Basin in Florida.

▲ State Director Nathan Murphy testified in front of the House Committee on Natural Resources to protect Michigan waters.

▲ A $3 million settlement in Texas to stop clean air violations at an oil refinery near Houston.
Illegal pollution stopped, action taken on lead contamination

Last year, Environment Michigan and our national network provided the action, research and advocacy to protect the water we drink and the air we breathe.

Environment America Litigation Project

Environment Michigan is part of a national network that researches cases of illegal pollution in Michigan and across the country, and takes polluters to court if necessary. Our litigation team had a banner year nationally, settling three major lawsuits.

In Pennsylvania, our state affiliate PennEnvironment took ArcelorMittal, the world’s largest steel company, to court over hundreds of violations of the Clean Air Act. The company eventually agreed to a $2 million settlement. Our partner group Environment Florida sued chicken producer Pilgrim’s Pride over discharges of toxic wastewater into the Suwannee River, ultimately reaching a $1.42 million settlement—$1.3 million of which will be used to clean up the Suwannee Basin. Environment Texas won a major settlement in our Clean Air Act lawsuit against Pasadena Refining System Inc., a subsidiary of Brazilian state-controlled oil company Petrobras. The terms included pollution reduction upgrades and $3,525,000 in civil penalties, most of which will go to fund a clean vehicles project.

Water threats identified

Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center worked to put a spotlight on threats to our water. Our “Get the Lead Out” report sounded the alarm about the unacceptable prevalence of lead contamination in the drinking water of schools all across the country. As kids headed back to school last fall, Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center released a toolkit to help parents take action at the local level to get the lead out of their children’s drinking water.

Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center also released a report titled “Troubled Waters,” which identified industrial pollution threats to waters throughout the country, and launched an interactive map to help pinpoint pollutants in the Delaware River.

When the Trump administration proposed cutting the Environmental Protection Agency’s budget by nearly a third, Environment Michigan Research & Policy Center released a series of reports titled “Rough Waters Ahead,” illustrating the damage those cuts would cause to our waterways in a way budget numbers alone couldn’t capture.

Protecting Michigan’s Water

This spring, the Michigan Legislature considered a bill that would have put our surface waters at risk by undermining the Department of Environmental Quality’s ability to regulate large-scale water withdrawals. Environment Michigan advocated for our water in Lansing; testimony from State Director Nathan Murphy and others helped ensure that the final law will be far more protective of our waters.
Our staff (partial list)

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