Fiscal Year 2018 Annual Report

Thanks for making it all possible
In our second year facing a president and a Congress who seem hostile toward our environmental goals, we at Environment Texas 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 Texas’ 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.

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.

Luke Metzger
Executive Director, Environment Texas
Global Warming Solutions

Global warming is a symptom of our unhealthy relationship to our environment. Last year, Environment Texas worked to win real solutions that put the environment first.

Students urged UT to cut fracking pollution
With 9,000 oil and gas wells on its west Texas lands, the University of Texas (UT) is part of one of the nation’s largest oil and gas operations. This spring, after hearing from more than 117 professors in the UT system, student governments and top donors, former UT Chancellor William McRaven ordered a review of fracking pollution originating on UT lands. Wells on University Lands released as much methane, a powerful greenhouse gas, in six years as 2.5 million cars. We are asking new Chancellor James Milliken to cut methane emissions in half in the next five years.

Four Texas coal power plants closed down
In a win for clean air and Texan’s health, coal’s power is weakening in Texas. In the past year, four coal burning power plants shut down operations across the state. Texas electric generator Luminant closed a coal mine and three coal burning plants, Big Brown, Sandow and Monticello. According to a report by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center, the Big Brown plant produced 8.6 million metric tons of carbon emissions, equivalent to the pollution of 1.79 million cars. San Antonio’s city-owned CPS Energy is scheduled to close J.T. Deely coal powered plant by the end of 2018.

100% Renewable
Over the past decade, Texas has increased its wind power production by 410 percent, according to a report by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center. In fact, we rank first in the nation for annual wind generation. Texas now has more than 10,000 wind turbines, and on just one windy day, they were able to supply more than half of the state’s electricity demand.
Responding to Harvey

As the waters began to recede, the extent of Hurricane Harvey’s damage became clear—and our staff and local partners worked quickly to alert Texans to the public health threats left in the wake of the storm.

▲ Environment Texas Director Luke Metzger speaks to MSNBC following Hurricane Harvey.

▲ A Superfund toxic waste site after Harvey flooding.
Hurricane Harvey unleashed a toxic soup

Our research uncovered pollution dangers from flooded toxic Superfund sites to sewage overflows to chemical leaks and illegal air pollution—and in the days and weeks following the storm, we published six reports to get important information into the hands of those most affected.

In the wake of the storm

Dangerous chemicals in our air and water leaking from the many industrial plants and Superfund sites in the Houston area were of particular concern. Environment Texas set up a database, Neighborhood Witness, to track more than 8 million pounds of illegal air pollution coming from refineries and chemical plants in the aftermath of the storm. We toured the San Jacinto River Waste Pits after the Superfund site flooded and discharged toxins, and we met with community members and helped collect water and soil samples.

Our Clean Water Advocate Brian Zabcik investigated sewage overflows and other water pollution resulting from the storm. We also drew attention to the opportunity to use green infrastructure as one of the many ways to help reduce flooding and water pollution. Brian also recently released a first-of-its-kind report on municipal policies across the state for Green Stormwater Infrastructure (GSI).

We met with the Chairmen of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, Railroad Commission of Texas, and the Texas Water Development Board, and passed on some of our recommendations including staging the shutdowns of refineries before and after hurricanes to reduce air pollution, and flood proofing oil and gas infrastructure.

Together with our partners at the One Breath Partnership, we called out Gov. Greg Abbott for waiving environmental laws during the hurricane. Thanks to our work, the governor ultimately rescinded the waiver.

Building for the future

As Houston continues to rebuild, it’s critical that businesses and government organizations avoid making the same mistakes that exacerbated the impact of Harvey. We know that severe weather events will happen, and because of our changing climate they can become even more dangerous. We need to acknowledge these risks and react accordingly.

In order to do so, we need to rebuild Houston with better stormwater infrastructure and transportation options and get Houston flood officials to finally factor in climate change in their planning. We also need to transition to renewable energy, as climate change is anticipated to increase the frequency and severity of certain extreme weather events, and implement better chemical security policies and regulations, so the public is protected when natural disasters do strike.
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 Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger asks Whataburger staff to stop use of plastic foam cups.

Our national network was instrumental in protecting Alaska’s Tongass National Forest with the Roadless Rule 17 years ago; we defended it last year from attempts to roll it back.
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—which 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 Texas began calling for a statewide ban on polystyrene containers last summer. We also worked to build momentum in cities and towns across Texas to pass local bans on polystyrene.

Across the country, our national network has already seen results. Here 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 Texas 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, we 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 got the city of Austin to ban use of neonics on parks and other city lands.
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.

▲ **Victory No. 1**: A $1.4 million settlement to clean up the Suwannee River Basin in Florida.

▲ **Victory No. 2**: A $2 million agreement to curb pollution from the world’s largest steel company in Pennsylvania.

▲ **Victory No. 3**: 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 Texas 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

It was a banner year for our national litigation team, who settled three lawsuits against major polluters last year.

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. 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.

Water threats identified

Environment Texas 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. We convinced the Austin school district to install filters on water fountains where even low levels of lead were detected.

Environment Texas 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 Texas 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.

Clean Water Network

Through the Clean Water Network (CWN), Environment America Research & Policy Center brings together more than 250 local and regional groups dedicated to protecting clean water across the country, allowing them to build deep networks of coordinated support. Last year, we expanded the CWN into Alabama, uniting experienced watershed groups into a coalition.
Our staff (partial list)

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