Big Bend National Park

Annual Report

Recapping our work in fiscal year 2016 for our members
To our members

None of our work would be possible if it were not for the passion, energy and support of concerned citizens across Texas. Together, we’re doing big things.

At several points over the last year, I was reminded how rewarding and fulfilling this work can be, thanks to the passion and drive of our members and supporters like you, the hard work of our staff, and the collaboration between our partner groups. Together, we’re doing big things.

You helped Environment Texas show our leaders that the Clean Power Plan is essential to reducing emissions and protecting children growing up today.

You helped spread the word and build support across the country with Environment Texas for saving bees and our food supply, and with Environment Texas Research & Policy Center for leaving dirty energy behind in favor of moving to 100 percent renewable sources that are good for the environment and good for business.

You took part in defending our right to clean water after the tragedy in Flint, Mich., and alerted the nation about the many threats to our drinking water across the country. And you helped Environment Texas protect America’s beloved special places by speaking up for our most important conservation programs and advocating for more national monuments to protect places like the Grand Canyon.

As you read through this report, remember that while our staff might be in the room when a big environmental victory is won, none of our work would be possible if it were not for the passion, energy and support of millions of concerned citizens. And as critical as this people power was to our victories last year, I can guarantee that this year—with a new president, new Congress, and more challenges to overcome—the same will be true.

Thank you for all you’ve done to make this past year successful, and here’s to many more to come.

Sincerely,

[Signatures]

Luke Metzger
Director

Margie Alt
Environment America Executive Director

Environment Texas, Inc. is a project of Environment America, Inc.
Texas Clean Air Project

In 2016, after six years of litigation, Environment Texas won a huge victory in our fight to hold ExxonMobil accountable for thousands of Clean Air Act violations. This spring, a federal appeals court ruled that Exxon must be held accountable when they violate our environmental and public health laws. Backed by members like you, we’ll continue to make sure the company pays for its violations.

10 million pounds of toxic chemicals

For years, ExxonMobil broke clean air laws at its Baytown oil refinery and chemical plant. Over a period of five years, they racked up more than 4,000 violations, adding up to nearly 10 million pounds of illegal pollution and putting the nearly 15,000 people who live nearby at risk.

So in 2014, Environment Texas, representing thousands of members like you, took Exxon to court. But the trial judge ruled that Exxon’s many thousands of admitted violations were not “actionable” in a citizen enforcement suit—and that, even if they were, he would not penalize Exxon.

Victory for thousands of Texans

With support from our members, we worked to convince a federal Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals to reinstate their Clean Air Act enforcement suit against ExxonMobil Corporation. And in May, you helped us go the extra mile by reversing the trial judge’s decision and found that Exxon had repeatedly violated emissions limits on a large number of air pollutants. The case was returned to the trial judge, who must now decide penalties for Exxon.

This is not only a huge victory for all of us, but for the thousands of Texans that live near Exxon’s Baytown refinery.
Last year, millions of activists stood up to protect bees and our food supply. In June, we participated in the Keep the Hives Alive Tour, a coordinated effort to educate citizens across the nation about colony collapse disorder. The tour culminated with a rally at the Environmental Protection Agency, where Environment Texas and our partners relayed the message from more than 4.5 million petitions from across the United States: Stop the use of bee-killing pesticides.

Environment America’s Anna Aurilio spoke for more than 4.5 million activists when she told the EPA: If we don’t save the bees, our food supply is at risk.

Environment Texas hosted a “Picnic Without Bees” at Auditorium Shores in Austin this summer to raise awareness of pollinator die-offs, and show how our food supply is largely dependent on bees.
Our best pollinators are dying off

In recent years, bees have been disappearing at an unsustainable rate. In fact, beekeepers reported losing more than 40 percent of their hives last year. While this is certainly bad news for the bees, the real danger lies in our inability to match the pollinating power of these creatures—bees help pollinate a majority of the world’s food, and more than $15 billion a year in U.S. crops.

It’s simple: No bees, no food. No almonds, fewer strawberries and apples, less coffee… the list goes on. Scientists point to several causes behind bee colony collapse, including climate change, parasites and pesticide use. Environment Texas’ top priority is getting neonicotinoids (neonics)—a type of insecticide that’s chemically related to nicotine and has been linked to colony collapse—off the market.

Millions of you came together to save the bees

Big agrichemical companies are using more and more of these neonics. That’s why we’re raising awareness of the problem and building people power to sway decision-makers to make the right choice: protect the bees and our food supply.

In 2016, we launched a massive effort to speak with millions of Americans about the urgency of banning bee-killing pesticides and provide concerned citizens with ways to get involved. We had canvassers going door-to-door in 18 states, staff on the phone calling members like you, and we coordinated our efforts with scientists, beekeepers, farmers and coalition partners to make sure we could make the biggest difference possible.

States are taking action, but EPA needs to lead

The good news is that thanks in part to our members’ activism, several states have taken action on neonics, including Connecticut, Maryland, Minnesota and Oregon, with others looking to act soon. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has committed to phasing out the use of neonics on the public lands they manage, and Home Depot and BJ’s Wholesale Club have taken steps to limit the sale of plants treated with neonics, label the plants, or both. And the EPA has put a temporary moratorium on approving any new uses of the neonics.

But we must do more! We’ll continue to update and mobilize our members and supporters to make sure the EPA ultimately takes these bee-killing pesticides off the market altogether. So raise your megaphone—or your cellphone—and help save the bees and our food supply.
We can have healthier communities and a better future for our children, but to get there, we need to transform the way we produce and consume energy. That’s why Environment Texas Research & Policy Center is calling for a nationwide commitment to 100 percent renewable power. It’s a big, bold goal—one that would make America a world leader in the race toward a cleaner, healthier future—and it’s a goal that’s 100 percent possible.
100% renewable is 100% possible

To avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we must avoid burning a majority of the world’s fossil fuel reserves and instead transition to 100 percent renewable energy. David Freeman, a longtime utility CEO who joined Environment America Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group for an online presentation and discussion of their report, “We Have the Power” said, “We’ve been told by the family doctor, the climatologist, that we have to reduce greenhouse gases to near zero in the next 35 years, or we’re going to cook.”

And why would we wait? We can have a cleaner, healthier planet for children growing up today, and we already have the resources and ability to shift to 100 percent renewable energy right now.

Almost all new energy capacity is coming from renewables

Solar power has tripled in America in just the last two years—with a new home or business going solar every one and a half minutes. In many states, wind power is now cheaper than gas or coal—in fact, we celebrated our nation’s first offshore wind farm off the Rhode Island coast last summer. Even better, 98.6 percent of all new energy capacity brought online in the first quarter of 2016 came from renewable energy.

More than [19] cities, counties and states, and dozens of major companies like Apple, Johnson & Johnson and Google have already made commitments to 100 percent renewable energy. Clean energy is not only good for our communities and our planet, it’s also becoming cheaper and therefore, better for business. The bottom line: 100 percent renewable energy is 100 percent possible.

Educating 1.3 million clean energy activists

Environment Texas Research & Policy Center spent last year helping to distribute this information to more than 1.3 million households across America. Transitioning to 100 percent renewable energy will mean taking on some of the most powerful corporations in the world, and to win, we’re going to need a whole lot of well-informed people behind us.

It’s time to sweep past the big energy interests—from Big Oil and gas companies like ExxonMobil and Chevron to utilities like Duke Energy and Pacific Gas & Electric, from climate deniers in Congress to the Koch brothers—that are not only standing in the way, but using their financial might and political clout to roll back renewable energy’s progress.

That’s where you, our members and supporters, come in. The more people who join our call for 100 percent renewable power, the more local, state, national and corporate leaders will step up and take action. Visit our website to learn more and join the call: www.EnvironmentTexasCenter.org
Clean Water For Texas

Last year, we were all shocked to learn about the contamination of drinking water in Flint, Mich. Unfortunately, clean water is threatened in communities across the country. Lead pipes, toxic dumping and factory farms are some of the threats putting our water at risk. Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center are calling out these threats so we can ensure all Americans have safe water to drink and so we can hold polluters accountable.

Clean water for one in three Americans

Environment Texas won a massive victory for clean water in 2015 when you helped win protections for the drinking water sources of one in three Americans under the Clean Water Rule. Sadly, polluters are challenging the rule, delaying important action to protect our communities.

Thanks to the support of our members and supporters we’ve been able to fend off these attacks in Congress, but unfortunately, the rule is on hold due to polluter attacks in the courts.

Factory farms are top water polluters

Pollution from agribusiness is responsible for some of America’s most intractable water quality problems. The Tyson poultry-processing center in Center, Texas discharged 615,811 pounds of toxic pollutants into local waters in 2014, according to the data it provided to the federal Toxics Release Inventory.

In June, Environment Texas Research & Policy Center revealed America’s Next Top Polluters in our report, “Corporate Agribusiness and the Fouling of America’s Waterways.” Tyson Foods came out on top—with more than 55 million tons of manure in its supply chain. “When most people think of water pollution, they think of pipes dumping toxic chemicals,” said Hayden Hamilton, clean water advocate with Environment Texas. “But this report shows how, increasingly, corporations like Tyson are running our farms and ruining our waterways.”
On the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service last year, President Obama created the Katahdin Woods and Waters National Monument to protect more than 87,000 acres in Maine. Yet sensitive landscapes surrounding many of our national parks still remain unprotected and face threats from mining, drilling and logging companies. It’s happening just six miles from the Grand Canyon, and perhaps even near your favorite outdoor places right here in Texas.

Kids growing up deserve protected parks

America’s outdoors are part of what makes this country special, and in today’s world, we often need reminders of the awesome power of nature. Families can take vacations in our great outdoors that open children’s eyes to the wonders of the wild, and wildlife thrives in the open space.

That’s why, with your support, Environment Texas helped restore the Land and Water Conservation Fund in late 2015, which for 50 years has protected natural treasures in every state. It’s also why we called on the president to establish several new national monuments, from the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks to the San Juan Islands. And it’s why we launched a coalition effort to protect the best of America: the Grand Canyon.

Protecting the Grand Canyon from mining

With you by our side, Environment Texas and our national federation called on the president to designate the Greater Grand Canyon Heritage National Monument. This designation would protect 1.7 million acres around the Grand Canyon from uranium mining and other threats. This land includes the habitat for unique species of wildlife, the drinking water sources for millions of people downstream, and land that is sacred to several Tribal Nations.

With your support and action, we can protect the Grand Canyon for generations to come and set a precedent for protecting special places across the country from reckless threats.