Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2011
To our members

“As we head into 2012, I’m ready for the upcoming challenges and opportunities.”

Dear Environment Virginia member,

After reading the paper or watching the news day after day in D.C., every issue seems contentious.

But as our staff traveled around Virginia, venturing beyond the Beltway this past year, we once again discovered that most people want clean air, clean water and natural space. That’s why, as we head into 2012, I’m ready for the upcoming challenges and opportunities.

We’ve seen a lot of conflict this year—from coal companies attempting to block progress on clean energy legislation, to intense partisanship in Congress that often stymied meaningful environmental legislation. But I’m proud to say that in this year of divisiveness, Environment Virginia helped unite citizens around the places we love and the deeply held environmental values so many of us share.

I hope you’ll take a moment to read about our latest accomplishments. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Anna Aurilio
Federal Legislative Director for Environment Virginia
Harnessing the wind

Anyone who’s set sail off Assateague Island knows the wind is a powerful energy resource. As it blows across the open ocean and whips over our mountain ridges, it can generate the electricity we use to power our homes and businesses—we just need to harness it. In 2011, Virginia saw notable steps taken toward those ends.

Offshore wind: the first steps

The wind that blows off Virginia’s coast could eventually power the entire state. Today, after years of campaigning, it appears we’re closer than ever to building some of our nation’s first offshore wind farms. This summer alone, we saw two important advancements at the federal level:

• With the support of Environment Virginia, the federal government announced intentions to reduce barriers to building wind farms in federal waters.

• Environment Virginia, along with our national federation, Environment America, helped persuade the Obama administration to invest more than $50 million in offshore wind power.

• Calling offshore wind investments “smart from the start,” Interior Secretary Ken Salazar began surveying the Atlantic coast’s most promising sites for offshore wind.

The best spots to harness offshore wind off the coast of Virginia:

Under current rules, permitting and constructing offshore wind turbines takes more than 10 years. President Obama promises:

• $50 million to research and develop offshore wind farms.

• A faster permitting process for offshore turbines.

• Maps of the four prime areas for American wind farms.
Clear Shenandoah’s air

With its sweeping Blue Ridge vistas, Shenandoah National Park is an essential part of Virginia’s natural heritage. Unfortunately, dingy haze shrouds some of its best views. This year, Environment Virginia worked with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and helped spur a solution to clear Shenandoah’s air.

New rules will curb coal plant pollution at Shenandoah

On a clear day, you used to be able to see more than 100 miles from Old Rag, beyond the Washington Monument. But today, air pollution can truncate the view to just 25 miles—and sometimes, less than one. This summer, with Environment Virginia’s support, the EPA finalized new rules to clear Shenandoah’s air by regulating pollution from nearby coal plants.

• In addition to clearing Shenandoah’s notorious haze, the EPA’s new pollution limits are projected to prevent about 34,000 premature deaths annually by 2014. Prior to the rule’s unveiling this July, Environment Virginia, along with our national federation, Environment America, led the charge of organizers and volunteers who spread the word.

• Over the course of the summer, almost 5,000 people joined Environment Virginia to support our Shenandoah campaign, providing us with critical financial and political support. Our canvassers knocked on doors across the state, engaged 50,000 Virginians in conversation, and delivered 5,600 postcards to the EPA supporting these pollution standards.

• Nevertheless, major polluting industries are mounting a fight in Congress to block these new rules.
Without action, Shenandoah’s pollution will escalate

When power plants burn coal, oil or gas, they create the ingredients for ground-level ozone pollution, or smog. They also create health-threatening particle pollution, a major contributor to haze. Outside Shenandoah, air pollution from power plants causes thousands of premature deaths each year and tens of thousands of heart attacks, asthma attacks, emergency room visits, hospital admissions and lost workdays.

- Children and adults suffer more asthma attacks and increased respiratory difficulty when exposed to ozone pollution. Approximately 3.9 million children and more than 10.7 million adults with asthma live in regions with very high levels of ozone pollution. According to the United States Department of Health and Human Services, approximately 5,000 asthma-related deaths occur each year in the United States.

- To save the views from Shenandoah, we need the EPA to set and enforce its new rules on coal plants. Done properly, these rules will reduce the amount of smog and haze allowed in the air, both in and around Shenandoah.

On a clear day, you used to be able to see 100 miles from Old Rag. Haze cuts the view to just 25 miles on average—sometimes less than 1 mile.
Chesapeake Bay

If you’ve ever sat in a kayak surrounded by tall reeds or picnicked at Point Lookout, you understand the Chesapeake Bay’s importance to Virginia. But for decades, we’ve seen the Bay suffer from more pollution than it can handle. National agribusiness and developer groups have actually sued the EPA over efforts to clean the Bay and waters across the state, and Congress has moved to block the agency from enforcing new pollution standards.

A new plan to clean the Bay—finally

This winter, the EPA approved Gov. Bob McDonnell’s plan for cleaning the Chesapeake Bay, after determining the document provided adequate measures to curb pollution flowing into the Bay’s waters. This plan—the governor’s second draft—capped months of campaigning from Environment Virginia staff and volunteers.

• This summer, to defend the EPA’s plans to restore the Chesapeake Bay and clean waters across Virginia, we joined forces with allied groups in generating thousands of emails to Sens. Jim Webb and John Warner, urging them to reject congressional assaults on the EPA’s authority.

• In particular, Gov. McDonnell’s plan includes common-sense steps to reduce polluted runoff from the numerous factory farms on the Bay’s watershed. On the Delmarva Peninsula alone, agribusinesses including Tyson and Perdue raise 538 million chickens every year, generating approximately 1.1 billion pounds of manure, much of which washes into the Bay and contributes to the massive dead zone that consumes one-third of its waters every summer.
Special interests fight Bay cleanup plan

Now, Gov. McDonnell needs to begin implementing his plan in the face of formidable industry opposition—well-connected agribusinesses and politically powerful developers, who have so far been successful in maintaining the status quo. National agribusiness and developer groups have actually sued the EPA over this new effort.

- This summer, Environment Virginia urged the governor to move ahead in the face of dogged industry opposition and seize this historic opportunity to reverse the Bay’s dangerous course of degradation, and successfully fought attempts in Congress to undo plans to clean up the Bay and other waters.

- In addition, Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center released a new report that outlines the extent of pollution from factory farming. The report found broad consensus among scientists and policy makers that current rules for managing animal waste need serious reforms.

1.1 billion pounds of manure from the Delmarva Peninsula contributes to dead zones in the Chesapeake Bay every year.
Save Virginia’s coast

Our beaches, barrier islands and salt marshes will be safe from BP-style oil disasters for the time being, thanks to the Obama administration’s decision to drop plans to drill off our coast. It was a great, but temporary, victory for anyone who loves our barrier islands and salt marshes. Now, we’re redoubling our efforts to make these safeguards permanent.

Drilling ban capped months of advocacy

This winter, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the Obama administration's intention to protect the Atlantic coast, Pacific coast and eastern Gulf of Mexico from new oil and gas drilling. The Dec. 1 announcement, which protects 200 million acres along the Atlantic coastline, capped months of advocacy and organizing by Environment Virginia staff and volunteers:

• This summer, we joined our allies across the nation and helped deliver more than 400,000 comments to the Obama administration, calling for a moratorium on drilling along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts.

• Our research showed that for every $1 that could be earned from offshore drilling, clean beaches inject $4 into the economy.

• Soon after the president dropped plans to drill off Virginia’s coast, Big Oil and its allies in Congress launched a concerted effort to re-open the Atlantic coast to drilling. Thankfully, the Obama administration refused to backtrack. In the weeks and months ahead, Environment Virginia will redouble our efforts to send President Obama a clear message: Hands off our shores.
Efforts to break Virginia’s oil addiction

We can protect our families from the impact of rising oil prices while preserving our oceans and beaches, cleaning our air, and stabilizing our climate. This summer, in part from Environment Virginia’s urging, President Obama announced new clean car standards, which will require cars and light trucks to meet the equivalent of a 54.5 miles per gallon fleetwide average by 2025—roughly twice as strong as the current standard.

Once finalized by the administration, the new standards will:

- Save Virginians $1.4 billion at the gas pump by 2030, and cut the country’s annual gasoline use by as much as 23 billion gallons—as much as the United States currently imports from Saudi Arabia and Iraq each year.

- Reduce annual global warming emissions by 280 million metric tons—the equivalent of shutting down 72 coal-fired power plants for a year.