New rules could clear Shenandoah’s air

Congress opposes new rules to cut smog

This year, with Environment Virginia’s support, the Environmental Protection Agency took new steps to ease the air pollution that clouds the views at Shenandoah National Park and threatens the health of its 1.5 million annual visitors.

In August, the EPA finalized rules to curb smog and soot pollution from coal plants in 27 eastern states—but as opposition from industrial polluters and their allies in Congress heated up, the agency stopped short of issuing new science-based standards for smog.

In the coming months, Environment Virginia will redouble its efforts to garner support for these new guidelines—and urge the EPA to address another major pollutant that plagues Shenandoah: soot. At the same time, staff and supporters will continue defending new rules that regulate the flow of air pollution across state lines and could curb the influx of smog and haze into the park.

Environment Virginia pushes the EPA to act—now

This summer, Environment Virginia staff and supporters led the charge of organizers and volunteers who spread the word and urged the EPA to address pollution from coal plants in the eastern U.S.—a move that could, once implemented, prevent about 34,000 premature deaths annually by 2014.

Nevertheless, as big power plants mounted a fight against these new rules, President Barack Obama put on hold these new guidelines for smog, or ozone. These new rules would lead to less pollution from coal-fired power plants, as well as other sources. Further, opposition from Congress has stymied the EPA’s efforts to even draft the rules establishing a new, science-based standard for soot, or particulate, pollution.

In the months ahead, Environment Virginia will work to enact and defend a new law regulating the flow of pollution across state lines and see every provision gets enforced, while pushing for an update of the smog and soot standards.

“To save the views from Shenandoah, we need to defend these new smog rules in the face of fierce opposition,” said Anna Aurilio, Federal Legislative Director of Environment Virginia.

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Recent action

Virginia is key in fight against global warming
There is a way forward in the global warming fight—and it starts in states across the country.

Our efforts to solve global warming have hit a dead end in Washington, D.C. The oil and coal lobbies successfully blocked congressional action to tackle global warming for another year. Congressional leaders claim that global warming is a hoax.

However, state and local governments have passed clean energy policies that are projected to cut more than 500 million tons of carbon dioxide pollution per year by 2020. And our research shows we have the potential to go even further. In September, Energy Program Director Rob Sargent unveiled a study showing that states can cut carbon pollution 20 percent by 2020 by adopting clean energy and transportation policies like renewable energy standards, building energy codes and expanded public transportation.

Plug into clean energy
Efficiency is the cheapest and cleanest way to cut our fossil fuel use and pollution. It seems intuitive enough: Use less energy, save fuel and save money.

But with the numerous federal, state and local organizations and agencies ready to help you retrofit your home or business, offering rebates, discounts, financing and other kinds of incentives, it can be tough to figure out where to start.

Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center designed our “Plug Into Clean Energy” guide to help you cut through the clutter and pick what works for you, so you can get on the path toward a more efficient home or business, one step at a time.

For the full list of tips to cut energy consumption and bills, visit:
Polluters join forces to attack Clean Water Act

What do mining companies, oil companies, factory farms and big developers have in common?

They’ve all joined forces with their allies in Congress in an effort to dismantle the law that has protected our rivers, lakes and streams for 39 years: The Clean Water Act.

EPA moves to close loopholes

The Clean Water Act has been extremely successful in limiting pollution across the country. But legal loopholes are allowing polluters to pave over wetlands and dump toxic waste into streams that feed the waterways we love and rely on for drinking water, and polluted sewage runoff from farms, cities and construction sites flows straight into our waters. And now, Congress has attempted to revoke the Environmental Protection Agency’s ability to step in when states aren’t protecting their own waters.

Last summer alone, runoff pollution and sewage overflows caused thousands of beach closings around the country. And every year up to 3.5 million people get sick from contact with raw sewage.

For the past several years, Environment America and our state affiliates have been working to close these loopholes and restore the Clean Water Act’s ability to protect our waters. This year, the EPA responded. In April, EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson announced a plan to close the loopholes that are allowing polluters to pave and dump into the small waters that feed our lakes. And the agency is also gearing up to cut sewage pollution by setting national standards.

“Legal warfare”

Polluting industries immediately sprang into action. Mining companies, developers and corporate agribusiness have all urged their friends in Congress to stop the EPA from closing the clean water loophole—ExxonMobil even threatened “legal warfare.”

Over the summer, polluters’ allies in both parties launched an unprecedented attack on the Clean Water Act in Congress. By mid-July, the House of Representatives had passed three separate measures attacking the EPA’s authority to protect our water.

We saw this coming, and had already begun building a campaign to defend the EPA’s clean water initiatives. All over the country, our field organizers talked face-to-face with tens of thousands of Americans about the attacks on clean water. Citizens wrote to their local newspapers, and thousands more sent comments to Washington urging the EPA to stand strong for clean water.

Our beaches, rivers and lakes provide some of the best summer memories as we head into fall and winter. As we work to protect our waters, we’ll be sure to remind officials in Washington that Americans care deeply about our waters and want to see them protected.

Federal update: The rush to drill

Oil and gas companies are rushing to drill for gas across the country, with devastating consequences for the water we drink, the air we breathe and the places we love. Environment Virginia and our affiliates across the country are confronting the threat head on.

The threat comes from a new and dangerous form of drilling known as hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking.” The process uses an untold number of toxic chemicals, creates millions of gallons of contaminated wastewater, and releases harmful air pollution. And between the clear cuts, new roads and pipeline required at each well site, gas drilling threatens some of America’s most treasured places.

Ultimately, we will need federal solutions to protect our environment from drilling—and our work in the states is building momentum for national action.

Our staff are working to pass strong rules on drilling in states like Pennsylvania and Texas, where the drilling boom has already caused drinking water contamination, air pollution, explosions and other problems. But in states where drilling has yet to take off, like New York and New Jersey, we are working to stop it before it starts. In June, Environment New Jersey helped persuade the Legislature to enact a drilling ban. A few days later, New York officials recommended keeping New York City’s watershed off-limits to drilling—a demand Environment New York has been advocating for more than a year. We are now calling for similar protection for the Catskills, and all the state’s drinking water sources.
Bay update: Enforce new limits on pollution

Last year, at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s mandate, Gov. Bob McDonnell finalized a comprehensive plan to restore the Chesapeake Bay and impose tough limits on its most severe polluters. Now, Gov. McDonnell needs to enforce his cleanup plan in the face of tremendous industry opposition—well-connected agribusinesses and politically powerful developers, who have so far been successful in maintaining the status quo.

This year, Environment Virginia reached out to our members, uniting them to urge Gov. McDonnell to move ahead in the face of dogged industry opposition. It’s time to seize this historic opportunity and implement tough pollution limits on the Bay’s worst polluters.

In addition, Environment Virginia Research & Policy Center released a new report that outlines the extent of pollution from factory farming. You can find this report and more at www.EnvironmentVirginia.org/reports

One million water birds spend the winter along the Bay, including bald eagles, egrets and osprey. Read more about our efforts to restore the Chesapeake Bay at:

www.EnvironmentVirginia.org