Legislative Agenda to Focus on Four Areas

When Michigan House of Representatives Speaker Andy Dillon named his committee leadership team, his choices signaled progress for the environment and spoke volumes about Clean Water Action’s election work in 2006.


Leading the House Health Policy Committee: State Rep. Kathy Angerer from Monroe, re-elected to a second term in November with the help of Clean Water Action volunteers and staff who supported Angerer’s election by knocking on 8,440 doors in her district. Angerer, with a 90% environmental voting record, will be receptive to improving public health through pollution prevention programs like Clean Water Action’s Toxic Free Michigan proposals.

For the four pillars of Clean Water Action’s 2007 Environmental Agenda—Great Lakes, environmental health, imported trash and clean energy—last year’s election results mean more opportunities for reversing Michigan’s trend favoring special interests over the public interest and protecting our lakes, rivers, streams and public health. And the opportunities are not limited to state government. In Macomb County, former Clean Water Action community organizer Sarah Roberts of St. Clair Shores was elected to the Board of Commissioners and was appointed to the county’s Water Quality Board where she is expected to be a strong defender of Lake St. Clair water quality.

Clean Water Action is now mobilizing public support for its 2007 Environmental Legislative Agenda:

**Great Lakes**

Clean Water Action’s top priority is closing special interest loopholes in Michigan’s water use laws and winning adoption of the proposed Great Lakes Compact. With the Nestle Corporation’s aggressive pursuit of more than 90 million gallons a year in new water withdrawal projects—and its attempt to privatize public waters—Michigan’s waters are in crisis. Clean Water Action will put forward a package of proposals designed to protect our waters from withdrawals and diversions. At the federal level, with the new 110th Congress, Clean Water Action is working through the Healing Our Waters campaign to promote Great Lakes restoration. Invasive species, toxics cleanup and pollution prevention are high on this agenda.

**Trash Imports and Recycling**

Michigan has become the magnet for trash from nearby states and Ontario. Since January 1, 2005, nearly 11 million tons of out-of-state and Canadian trash have been dumped in Michigan landfills. Why? Unlimited landfill expansions and cheap dumping charges for waste haulers. Michigan charges only 21 cents per ton for landfilling waste, while nearby Illinois charges $2.22, Wisconsin charges $3.74, and Pennsylvania charges $7.25 per ton. Clean Water Action is working to increase Michigan’s dumping charge to $7.50 per ton, with the proceeds returned to local communities to expand recycling programs and support other services. Clean Water Action also supports a bill introduced by state Rep. Kate Ebli of Frenchtown Township for a five-year moratorium on new and expanded landfills.

**Environmental Health**

The Toxic Free Michigan campaign urges lawmakers to push clean technologies forward and create safe jobs to build a strong economy in the future and protect the health...
Loopholes Invite Even More Water Export Threats

Just one year ago, Michigan passed new laws to keep Michigan’s Great Lakes waters in Michigan. Today, unfortunately, the threat from water exports—from being over—is growing. Loopholes and other weaknesses in these new laws—which we pointed out at the time they were passed—leave Michigan in 2007 facing a “water rush” of up to 20 new proposals to withdraw, bottle and ship our waters.

As we predicted a year ago, the move to privatize Michigan’s Great Lakes waters is on. It will now be up to Clean Water Action—and each of us individually—to stop it.

Clean Water Action will ask the new Legislature and Gov. Jennifer Granholm to plug the loopholes and fill in the giant cracks in Michigan’s water laws that threaten a flood of water projects from international corporations.

What’s at stake is nothing less than the future of our Great Lakes waters. Nestle Waters North America has proposed to the State of Michigan new water withdrawal projects near prized trout streams and important watersheds in Michigan. Two pending bottled water projects alone will increase Nestle’s Michigan water withdrawals by 70 million gallons a year, on top of the 80 million gallons a year it already takes from two Michigan watersheds.

The fact is that Nestle and other large corporations want to make water just another commodity to sell on behalf of their investors, and with global water scarcity, that means a virtual unlimited market for Great Lakes waters.

As the Muskegon Chronicle put it in a February 4 editorial:

“A gaping hole in the water use laws enacted by the Legislature last year allows giant international conglomerates to siphon off underground water supplies at rates up to 1.5 million gallons daily....Treating the sale of water as an object of commerce, and allowing its transport outside the Great Lakes basin for sale and distribution, is entering dangerous legal territory not only for Michigan, but for other states and provinces. The day is coming, we believe, when the Great Lakes will face the greatest threat of all—unlimited exploitation by competing regional governments seeking access to the “liquid gold.”

It’s time for action, and you can count on Clean Water Action to be leading the fight to protect our Great Lakes way of life. But we need your help.

You can volunteer for the Great Lakes by emailing me at dholz@cleanwater.org. And saving the Great Lakes costs money. For Clean Water Action, 95% of our financial support comes from individuals like you. Please consider using the enclosed envelope and making a gift today. A contribution—in any amount you can afford—would go a long way toward reaching our goal of protecting our Great Lakes waters for future generations.

David Holtz, Michigan Director
Clean Kent County Campaign Targets Sewage

For years the makers of the pain reliever Ibuprofen faced an interesting problem: The way Ibuprofen was processed and made produced waste byproduct that was costing the company lots of money. Waste chemicals also polluted the environment and endangered public health.

In 1991, they got smart. They designed a new way to make Ibuprofen that is just as effective, only now with a fraction of the waste. Money is being saved, and there’s much less harm to the environment and public health. Moreover, the new process creates more Ibuprofen, producing more to sell. This cutting-edge new way of making chemical products is called green chemistry, and it is catching on with businesses and research facilities all over the world. Perhaps the best news is that Michigan has become a national leader in green chemistry, and Clean Water Action is helping to spearhead a new Toxic Free Michigan campaign to promote green chemistry.

After working closely with Clean Water Action and the Ecology Center in October of 2006, Gov. Jennifer Granholm signed the nation’s first-ever Green Chemistry Executive Directive. Not only will this directive strongly encourage businesses in our state to use a green chemistry approach when making their products, it will also provide funding to researchers so that they can develop greener technologies that protect the safety of workers. It also encourages Michigan’s schools to develop green chemistry programs for students. Under the Green Chemistry Executive Directive, Michigan will lead the way towards protecting our health, environment and future.

Opportunities for Health Care Professionals

Clean Water Action is teaming up with health care professionals, environmental groups, and groups of people who have been affected by toxic chemicals and chemical waste, to phase out toxic chemicals and replace them with safer alternatives using techniques like green chemistry. **We need your help!** We are urgently seeking health care providers who are interested in environmental health and/or green chemistry and who are ready to take action. If you are a health care provider, please contact our Environmental Health Organizer, Laura Russello, at lrussello@cleanwater.org or (734) 222-6347.

Clean Water Action is helping to inform these homeowners and renters that they can develop greener technologies that protect the safety of workers. It also encourages Michigan’s schools to develop green chemistry programs for students. Under the Green Chemistry Executive Directive, Michigan will lead the way towards protecting our health, environment and future.

Clean Kent County Campaign Targets Sewage

Many Michigan residents who move from the city to more rural areas unknowingly become part of a worsening sewage problem for our Great Lakes system. Septic systems and other on-site sewage disposal are the method of choice for most rural homes out of the reach of city sewer lines. But tens of thousands of homeowners don’t realize that without periodic maintenance and pumping, these systems will fail and leak harmful wastes to Michigan’s lakes, rivers, streams and drinking water sources.

Clean Water Fund is working with citizens and officials on a Clean Kent County campaign to prevent or reduce the sewage threat to groundwater, streams and lakes. The two-year project—with support from the Frey Foundation, Sebastian Foundation, Grand Rapids Community Foundation and local Grand Rapids Clean Water Action members—targets the estimated 50,000 septic tanks in the county that are believed to pose an environmental risk. As rural development of the county continues, new septic tanks are adding to the number.

In a typical system, raw sewage is sent through plumbing in the home and to a septic tank. There light solids float to the top, forming a scum layer, and the heavy solids sink to the bottom, forming sludge. In the tank, organic solids such as food particles and human waste are decomposed by millions of naturally occurring bacteria. The septic tank delivers the partially treated liquids, or effluent, to a soil treatment area. When not pumped out frequently enough, or otherwise poorly maintained, the system can fail, causing either sewage backup into a home or the release of pollutants to nearby waters—or both.

“Through no fault of their own, many new residents of rural areas are contributing to sewage in our waters,” says Cyndi Roper, Clean Water Fund’s Great Lakes Policy Director. “They assume their sewage is being piped to a treatment plant, but it’s not. Clean Kent County will inform these homeowners and renters and government officials about the need to prevent the systems from failing and polluting our waters.”

The Michigan Department of Environmental Quality estimated in 2004 the state’s 1.2 million on-site wastewater systems in Michigan generate 264 million gallons of liquid waste per day. An estimated 10 to 20% of such systems—anywhere from 120,000 to 240,000—are believed to be failing due to inadequate maintenance. In 1990, approximately 28% of Michigan housing units were served by on-site systems. Data now suggest that over 50% of new single family homes in the state use on-site wastewater systems.

If you live in Kent County and would like more information on how you can help with this program, please contact Clean Water Fund’s Kent County Community Organizer Kym Spring at (616) 742-4084.
Volunteer Highlights

Every two years Clean Water Action volunteers translate their dedication into grassroots electoral power over the phones and at the doors. The work is straightforward; volunteers personally speak with as many Clean Water Action members as possible, so they are able to make informed decisions on Election Day to elect pro-environment candidates.

These one-on-one conversations help voters cut through disingenuous ad-saturated media and campaign hype. Clean Water Action provides evaluations of where candidates stand on protecting the environment, and volunteers help spread the word.

Volunteers working on elections help make victories for the environment possible, and during the past election cycle their tenacity was amazing. Overall, 253 volunteers from around the state contributed 2,448 hours of their valuable time!

Volunteers who put in extra effort deserve special thanks and gratitude for their success. They are: David Baker, Sharon Thomas, Shawn Skipp, Margaret Kaminski, Pete Michelich, Alaina LeBlanc, Steve Myer, Mollie Stanton-Fuja, Bob Mills, Doug Howell, Ryan Winkler, Lee Gebben, Mabel Petit, Rachel Hackett, Sharon Headley, Laura Hoekstra, Cyndi Lanning-Burch, Dave Petroelje, Roger Drindle, Kathleen Russell, Rachel McLaughlin, and Lucille McNaughton. Thank you!

Clean Energy

Michigan needs to build a clean energy future. Our dependence on dirty coal technology has poisoned lakes and fish, shortened average life spans, and helped cause some of the highest asthma rates in the country. And, Michigan residents spend $20 billion a year on non-renewable fuels that come from other states and overseas—money that could be used to help our state’s waning economy.

Clean Water Action is encouraging lawmakers to act to build a clean energy future for Michigan by:
  • Creating a public benefits fund of $150 million per year for energy efficiency.
  • Requiring at least 20% of Michigan’s electricity to come from clean, renewable sources by 2020.
  • Making energy efficiency, clean biofuels and renewable energy a key part of growing our economy by committing at least $5 billion to clean energy ventures over the next 10 years.
  • Updating commercial and residential building codes and energy efficiency standards for appliances used every day in homes and businesses.

Energy efficiency programs could save $4 billion a year in energy costs—just as a start. And, these programs cost less than half of what it takes to build a new power plant. Creating a public benefits fund for energy efficiency programs will help create thousands of jobs manufacturing wind turbines, solar panels and other clean technologies, thereby supplying power to millions of homes and businesses. These programs will also reduce the risk of global warming and its impacts on the Great Lakes.

WE VALUE OUR VOLUNTEERS: PLEASE CONSIDER DONATING YOUR TIME TO CLEAN WATER ACTION.
FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT BECKY JO FARRINGTON AT (517) 203-0754
OR EMAIL HER AT elansingcwa@cleanwater.org

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