Some in Congress want to undo progress
Wisconsin is on the verge of winning major new protections for hundreds of miles of streams and wetlands that feed and filter our lakes. But just as President Obama is about to sign off on the biggest victory for clean water in a decade, some polluter-friendly members of Congress are doing everything they can to block him.

Biggest victory in a decade
From Lake Michigan to Lake Superior and all the smaller lakes in between, Wisconsinites care deeply about our lakes. But despite their popularity, for many years the waterways that feed our lakes have not been nearly as protected or as safe as they once were.

Thanks to two polluter-driven Supreme Court decisions in the last decade, more than half of our streams and hundreds of acres of wetlands—the same waterways that feed and filter our lakes—may not have been protected by the Clean Water Act. An estimated 24 billion gallons of untreated sewage have been flowing into the Great Lakes each year, causing more than 3,000 beach closings in 2009 alone.

Thankfully, in April 2011, the Obama administration proposed new guidelines to restore protections to many of Wisconsin’s waterways, including the streams and wetlands that feed and filter our lakes. And in February, the administration announced that it was in the last stage before officially finalizing these protections.

Wisconsin Environment played a critical role in getting the administration to act. Along with our national federation, we talked to more than half a million people, gathered 88,000 public comments and mobilized more than 500 elected officials, farmers and recreational businesses in support of the proposed guidelines.

As we build support for the president to finalize the guidelines, many in Congress are working to stop him. As of May, there were four separate rollback attempts in the House and Senate. Wisconsin Environment is committed to defending these new protections so that Wisconsinites can enjoy all of our lakes without worrying about pollution.

From Green Lake to Lake Winnebago, we are excited that the Obama administration is about to take this historic step to protect Wisconsin’s lakes. Thanks to the support of our members, we will soon have a victory we can all celebrate.

Fishing on Snowden Lake. When finalized, the Obama administration’s proposed guidelines will restore Clean Water Act protections to waterways that feed our lakes.
Recent action

How to build a better, greener America
Wisconsin families could cut global warming pollution from buildings by 30 percent and save about $450 every year on their heating bills by 2030 if we invest in energy efficiency today.

These findings were included in “Building a Better America,” a report released on March 8 by Wisconsin Environment Research & Policy Center staff, along with the U.S. Green Building Council, local and state leaders, architects, builders and public health advocates. In December, the Obama administration announced the Better Buildings Challenge, which includes 60 chief executives, mayors, university presidents and labor leaders. The leaders have committed to investing nearly $2 billion of private capital into energy-efficiency projects to upgrade the performance of office, industrial, municipal, hospital, university, community college and school buildings. The administration also announced a $2 billion commitment to energy upgrades of federal buildings using long-term energy savings to pay for up-front costs, at no cost to taxpayers.

Move forward, not backward, on solar power
Wisconsin has been home to a growing solar energy market for some time. Once ranked as high as fifth in the country for solar jobs, the stage was set for a solar energy revolution in Wisconsin (see page 3 for our most recent report on Wisconsin’s thriving solar industry). Yet over the last year, instead of embracing this home-grown solution to toxic air pollution and global warming, some politicians in Wisconsin have been working to roll back our clean energy laws and the progress they’ve made.

Enough is enough. This year, Wisconsin Environment launched a campaign to get 10 percent of Wisconsin’s energy from clean and safe solar power. By working with businesses, clean energy activists and stakeholders all over Wisconsin, we are going to overcome the fossil fuel industry and put our state on track to a clean energy future.
Known more for winter storm warnings than sun-soaked afternoons, the picture of Wisconsin’s solar industry has always been a bit cloudy.

Yet, our new report, “Home Grown: Shedding Light on Wisconsin’s Solar Industry,” found not only that solar can play a significant role in a clean energy future, but that solar technology has already carved out a niche in Wisconsin, where it is powering homes and the economy without polluting our air or fueling global warming.

Corporate polluters cling to fossil fuels
Fossil fuels have been polluting the air and water in Wisconsin for more than 100 years.

Even though coal and oil put Wisconsin’s kids and families at risk for health problems such as asthma and heart attacks, energy companies are still spending millions of dollars to protect the status quo. It’s hard to accept that just by paying our electric bills, we are paying for lobbyists to fight against Wisconsin’s solar energy future.

In trying to protect their profits by keeping Wisconsin addicted to fossil fuels, polluting special interests threaten our way of life. Fossil fuel pollution fouls our rivers, lakes and streams, endangers public health and causes global warming. In addition, a new Wisconsin Environment report documents the science warning that global warming is causing extreme weather to become more common or even more dangerous (see sidebar for more information). To reduce our global warming pollution, it is essential to transition from fossil fuels to clean energy such as solar.

That’s why it’s heartening that, despite fierce opposition from entrenched corporate interests and their political allies, Wisconsin’s solar industry is moving full-steam ahead.

Solar energy powering homes—and the economy
Solar provides economic bright spot
Our report found that Wisconsin is home to all parts of the burgeoning solar industry.

Our top-notch research institutions are finding ways to make solar energy more efficient, our manufacturing facilities are building solar panels and other solar equipment, and our workforce is putting panels on roofs all over Wisconsin. People across the state are finding ways to invest in solar panels to power our homes and buildings.

As Wisconsin lays the foundation for a clean energy future, all parties involved with solar are excited to be part of a solution to one of our state’s biggest environmental problems.

“Solar has a feel-good element to it,” said John Young, CEO of Madison’s Resource Solar. “For me, there’s an element of wanting to outfox the powerful oil and gas interests. My opinion is that solar is a more environmentally friendly form of energy, and that’s a positive for the individuals within our company and the customers who adopt our systems.”

Four out of five Americans hit by recent weather disasters
New report says global warming to bring more extreme weather
After a year that saw many parts of the country hit by scorching heat, devastating wildfires, severe storms and record flooding, a new Wisconsin Environment report documents how global warming could lead to certain extreme weather events becoming even more common or even more severe in the future. The report found that, already, four out of five Americans live in counties affected by federally declared weather-related disasters since 2006.

Included in this tally of weather-related disasters is the Groundhog Day Blizzard, which was so severe that Gov. Scott Walker declared a state of emergency in 29 counties. The storm caused approximately $1.8 billion in damage nationwide and caused 36 deaths.

More extreme weather in store
The report shows that the United States has experienced an increase in heavy precipitation events, with the rainiest 1 percent of all storms delivering 20 percent more rain on average at the end of the 20th century than at the beginning. This trend toward extreme precipitation is projected to continue in a warming world.

“The bottom line is that extreme weather is happening, it is causing very serious problems, and global warming increases the likelihood that we’ll see even more extreme weather in the future,” said Nathan Willcox, our federal global warming program director. “We must do everything we can to cut the dangerous carbon pollution that is fueling global warming.”
Summer Report
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Farm to School works for our environment

We should grow our food in ways that help protect and preserve our environment, not ways that damage it. Unfortunately, agriculture today is dominated by factory farms that endanger our lakes and streams and contribute to air pollution by transporting food over long distances.

That’s why Wisconsin Environment is calling on state leaders to help change this by funding Wisconsin’s Farm to School Program, which connects Wisconsin schools with nearby farmers who grow food in more sustainable ways.

Most of the food sold in supermarkets and restaurants comes from factory farms, which pollute our waterways with runoff and our air with truck exhaust. Abusing our environment to fill shelves with low-quality food is unacceptable. We must break this cycle by encouraging the expansion of sustainable farms, which improve the health of our air, water and families.

We need safe, sustainable farms and local, healthy food for our kids.

To learn more about our campaign for sustainable agriculture and to tell your legislators to restore programs that promote local, sustainable farms, visit our website: www.WisconsinEnvironment.org.