Annual Report

A recap of our work for our members in 2012
To our members

“I am reminded more than ever that places like the Shore are worth fighting for.”

This fall, our whole state, especially the Shore, was devastated by the impacts of Hurricane Sandy. The storm knocked nearly all of us down, but we are slowly getting back on our feet. We came together as a state to recover, and as the days turned into weeks and the full extent of the damage became apparent, the damage to the Shore was the most shocking. Boardwalks were mangled, houses decimated and towns destroyed. Today, I am reminded more than ever that places like the Shore are worth fighting for.

Sadly, as the effects of climate change continue to become apparent, we can’t assume that this is the worst storm we’ll see. As we rebuild the Shore, we’ll need to incorporate lessons from the storm. We still need to tackle run-off pollution and win more progress on a comprehensive cleanup plan for Barnegat Bay. And we still need to remain vigilant on all environmental fronts. I’m hopeful because in 2012, our combination of research, advocacy and grassroots action led to progress for our air and water.

We investigated the threat to our drinking water posed by waste from dangerous gas drilling known as fracking. We also helped organize a 150 person-strong Lobby Day and rally in Trenton to call for a ban on all fracking waste. Two weeks later, the Legislature passed the ban.

We made a persuasive case against allowing gas drilling near the Delaware River, which would put both “the Gap” and the drinking water for 3 million New Jerseyans in danger. And we joined 800 people in a rally and march to the Trenton State House to call for a permanent moratorium.

And when Gov. Christie unilaterally decided to pull New Jersey out of a landmark anti-pollution program called the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, we led the fight to defend the program. We met with decision-makers, organized over 30,000 supporters to call or email their elected officials, and filed suit against Gov. Christie for failing to solicit public input in his decision. So far, the governor has refused to reconsider, but we’re not giving up.

At the end of the day, our state’s environment needs tenacious defenders, especially in moments like this. Thank you for being one of them. Together, we’ll carry on the fight for years to come.

Doug O’Malley
Interim Director, Environment New Jersey
In 2012, we sought to stop a plan by Gov. Chris Christie to offer developers new exemptions to environmental protections, a plan that would accelerate the loss of New Jersey's open space. After documenting the potential harm, we participated in news conferences and rallies to oppose the governor’s move, helped convince the Assembly to go on record against it, and filed a lawsuit to stop it.

Opposition built to new exemptions for developers

New Jersey is defined by its incredible places, from the Shore to the Pinelands to our northern ridgelines and forests. Yet the Christie administration has pushed policies that could make it easier for shortsighted developers to raze these beautiful places by gaining exemptions from environmental protections. The powerful developer lobby led the cheers for the rollback; Environment New Jersey helped lead the defense of our open spaces.

For example, we filed suit against the governor’s move with help from the Columbia Environmental Law Clinic, arguing that the governor overstepped the Legislature and illegally set up two sets of environmental rules—one for the politically connected, and one for everybody else.

An array of organizations joined us in opposing the rollback, gaining press coverage in papers across the state. The Star-Ledger editorialized against the plan, calling out the “waiver rule” as bad public policy.

We helped convince the Assembly to pass a resolution to overrule the governor’s actions. We also worked to pass a similar resolution in the state Senate. When the rollback went into effect, Environment New Jersey’s Doug O’Malley spoke at a news event and rally condemning the move in front of the Department of Environmental Protection’s building in Trenton. We are continuing our push for action in the state Senate.
In 2011 and 2012, Environment New Jersey spearheaded opposition to Gov. Christie’s unilateral move to pull New Jersey out of the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, a 10-state program that cuts harmful power plant pollution, makes polluters pay, and invests that money in clean energy. Our reports documented the program’s success. Our action and advocacy convinced the Legislature to pass two bills reinstating the program. And we filed suit to stop the governor’s shortsighted move.
Gov. Christie moved backward on clean air, clean energy

New Jersey has some of the worst air quality in the nation, due largely to our addiction to fossil fuels. Worse yet, this same pollution is contributing to global warming which, if left unchecked, threatens to disrupt every corner of our state, causing more extreme floods, droughts and sea level rise at the Shore. As Gov. Christie sought to dismantle one of our best tools to control emissions from power plants, we worked to save it.

13,000 tons of pollution removed from our air

Our research, based on independent analyses, showed that the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative has produced significant benefits for New Jersey, including $151 million in value to New Jersey's economy, 1,800 new jobs, and the removal of 13,000 metric tons of pollution from our air—the equivalent to taking 2,500 cars off the road every year.

By making polluters pay for their emissions and using the proceeds to invest in clean energy, RGGI is also helping solar, wind and other forms of clean, renewable energy grow in New Jersey. For example, William Paterson University, in Wayne, used RGGI revenue to install a massive solar array—one of the largest solar arrays at any college or university in the nation. As a result, the university saves roughly $300,000 per year in energy costs, all while slashing its carbon footprint.

Despite massive support, governor refused to reconsider

Despite all this, Gov. Christie remained stubbornly committed to pulling out of RGGI. We introduced legislation to keep New Jersey in the program, and earned significant support.

- More than 16,000 people called their local legislators, and 18,000 more signed petitions to their representatives, in support of RGGI—a huge outpouring of support. Four hundred people attended Trenton lobby days, flooding the State House with a pro-clean energy message and talking to their legislators face-to-face.

- Back at home, citizens organized rallies, wrote to their local newspapers, and educated their friends and neighbors about the need to stay in RGGI, helping to firm up the Legislature’s resolve to stand up to the governor on this issue.

- Though the pro-RGGI bill passed twice in less than a year’s time, the governor vetoed the bill each time it hit his desk. However, our legal research found a new problem: The governor pulled out of RGGI illegally, without public input. We filed suit. Our case is pending.
The Next Chapter for the Shore

With the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, the fragility of the Jersey Shore became tragically apparent. As we rebuild, we are hopeful we can enter a new chapter of sustainability. The progress we made this year for the protection of the Shore can serve as a hopeful reminder that we can realize a brighter, cleaner and safer future for the Shore.
An urgent call to action
A Rutgers University report released this summer, showed parts of the Shore—specifically Barnegat Bay—faced dire conditions from runoff pollution. In his nearly hour-long testimony to members of the Legislature, Rutgers Prof. Michael Kennish confirmed that ecological decline has been spreading since the 1990s. He called for new steps that will place strict limits on the nutrient pollution that flows into Shore waters.

In the summer of 2012, Environment New Jersey educated and activated tens of thousands of residents around efforts to clean up and protect the Shore. Our staff knocked on over 140,000 doors across the state, talked with over 70,000 people, and met directly with local decision-makers.

Thousands joined our call, prompting Senate action
At the height of Environment New Jersey’s summer campaign, the state Senate introduced a bold plan to better protect the Shore’s natural areas and reduce the pollution that threatens our beaches. Over the course of the summer, Environment New Jersey hand-delivered more than 7,000 petition signatures to state legislators calling for just such an action.

Of course, the biggest challenge facing the Shore right now is recovering after Hurricane Sandy. As we rebuild, we want to ensure that we strike a balance between rebuilding and making sure that we’re using our natural environment—from natural dunes to our wetlands—to help restore and protect the Shore.
In 2011 and 2012, we sought to protect our drinking water and environment from the dangerous form of gas drilling known as “fracking.” We helped derail a plan to allow drilling near the Delaware River. And we won legislative approval of bans on fracking and fracking waste in New Jersey. Gov. Christie vetoed both bills. We remain determined to keep New Jersey safe from fracking.
A dangerous new threat to New Jersey’s drinking water and environment

In Pennsylvania, Ohio and other states, oil and gas companies have trampled forests, contaminated rivers and drinking water supplies, and polluted the air as they employ a “new and improved” technique, known as hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, to drill gas embedded deep beneath the Earth’s surface. In 2012, Environment New Jersey worked to keep fracking, along with fracking waste, out of our state.

Fracking waste ban passed, but governor vetoed

Gas-drilling companies have looked to make New Jersey a destination for their pollution. Recently, DuPont discharged over 1.3 million gallons of fracking wastewater into the Delaware River in Salem County.

Environment New Jersey and our allies mounted an aggressive campaign to ban gas drillers from using New Jersey as a dumping ground for fracking waste.

In June, we joined our allies in organizing a rally and Lobby Day to show support for a fracking waste ban. The legislation passed by strong bipartisan majorities in both houses. In September, however, Gov. Christie vetoed the bill. We immediately called on lawmakers to override his veto.

800 march to protect the Delaware

In 2011 the Delaware River Basin Commission considered a plan to allow fracking within the Delaware’s watershed. Environment New Jersey and our allies strongly opposed the scheme, which would put at risk the drinking water for 3 million people.

In November 2011, more than 800 people turned out for a march and rally to protect the Delaware at the State House. We’re pushing for a permanent moratorium on drilling surrounding the Delaware River.