From the Director

To be an environmentalist, you’ve got to wrestle with a conundrum: We need bold action on a short timeline ... with broad public support.

We need to do a lot, quickly, to preserve a livable planet. But progress has to earn and sustain the support of the people in order to last—so progress doesn’t often come in one big swooping action. It usually comes one small-ish victory at a time.

At Environment Oregon, we acknowledge the conundrum—and we embrace it. We believe in bold action on a large scale. But we work every day at the local, state and national levels to build, step by step, the support this action demands. Each college, city or state that deploys more renewable energy helps win more people over to the possibility of a world that runs on the sun and the wind. Each company or state that phases out a single-use plastic product shows more people a way to end harm to ocean wildlife from plastic pollution.

These victories are smaller than the challenges demand. But as their pace picks up, their summary effect grows. A year ago, California became the second state to commit to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity. Now, there are six states with such commitments, plus Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C. Back in 2016, California banned single-use plastic bags. In 2019, five more states banned plastic bags, and Maine, Maryland and Vermont banned plastic foam take-out containers. Like all social changes, environmental solutions have tipping points.

Our natural world faces serious problems, and we’ve got to solve them. Our strategy is to make sure that each victory opens a door to the next. Thanks for being with us on the journey.

Sincerely,

Celeste Meiffren-Swango
State Director, Environment Oregon
Clean Water & Air

Through our Clean Water & Air program, our staff and members tackled problems ranging from the Trump administration’s attempts to roll back clean water standards, to industrial discharges that violate the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts. Below, you’ll find reports on our Get the Lead Out campaign and our work to protect Oregon’s clean air and water from federal rollbacks.

The grades are in: Report finds states are failing to ensure safe drinking water for our children

MARCH 21, 2019: Lead contaminates the water coming out of drinking fountains and taps at schools across the country, and at least 22 states aren’t doing enough about it.

“Get the Lead Out,” a study published March 21 by our research partners Environment America Research & Policy Center and U.S. PIRG Education Fund, examined the policies of 31 states and Washington, D.C., and assigned grades based on how well they protect children from lead in drinking water at school. Twenty-two states earned an F grade with only Illinois and D.C. grading above the C range. Oregon received a C+.

“Waiting for more tests to confirm that our children are drinking water laced with lead is unconscionable,” said John Rumpler, senior director of our national network’s clean water campaign. “It’s time to get the lead out.”

Environment Oregon and our national network are working in Oregon and more than a dozen other states to protect drinking water for millions of children by advancing policies to proactively get the lead out.

Victory for clean air and water: Gov. Kate Brown signs Oregon Environmental Protection Act into law

MAY 29, 2019: Oregonians can now breathe easier, without the threat of federal rollbacks for their air and water.

On May 24, Gov. Kate Brown signed HB 2250, the Oregon Environmental Protection Act into law, adopting the federal environmental standards of the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts that were in place and effective as of Jan. 19, 2017, the last day of the Obama administration. This act protects those standards under state law, even if the federal government rolls them back.

“We thank Gov. Brown for signing the Environmental Protection Act into law to ensure clean air and water for future Oregonians, said Environment Oregon State Director Celeste Meiffren-Swango. “We are proud to stand with the governor and our coalition to ensure Oregon’s protections on clean air and water for our state’s environment, natural resources and public health.”

The act will go into effect Jan. 1, 2020.
Above: Rob Sargent toured the nation’s first offshore wind farm on Block Island, R.I. (upper left). Below: Our national network campaigned for 100% renewable energy across the country, from California (left) to Florida (right).
Clean, Green & Renewable Energy

With support from Environment Oregon’s members, our national network promoted energy efficiency in our homes, educated city leaders about solar, and fostered the development of wind power. Here are updates on our network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign and our research arm’s “Shining Cities” report.

Six states are now committed to 100% clean energy

JULY 1, 2019: In 2018, only one state had committed to 100 percent clean energy. Six months ago, there were two. Now there are six.

In June, Maine and New York became the latest states to pass laws committing to 100 percent zero-carbon electricity, joining Hawaii (2015), California (2018), New Mexico (March) and Washington state (May). Puerto Rico and Washington, D.C., have made similar commitments.

“Within less than a year, four states have said, ‘If California can do it, so can we,’” said Rob Sargent, director of our national network’s 100% Renewable Energy campaign. “We’re urging decision-makers across the country to join the 100 percent renewable movement and put the United States back on the world map as a climate leader.”

Our network helped win the laws in California, New Mexico, Washington and Maine. We’re also advocating for 100 percent renewable energy laws in Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, Florida, Michigan, Illinois and Minnesota.

Solar power is growing fast. These cities are shining the brightest.

APRIL 9, 2019: Solar power is booming in dozens of major American cities.

“Shining Cities 2019,” researched by Environment America Research & Policy Center and released on April 9, found that solar energy capacity more than doubled in 45 of America’s 57 largest cities in the past six years. The report’s main event? The latest ranking of America’s top solar cities. Los Angeles topped the list for the second year in a row, and San Diego, Phoenix, Honolulu and San Jose rounded out the top five.

“Cities are rapidly adopting solar energy and driving the renewable energy transition across the country, bringing pollution-free power to our homes, schools and workplaces,” said Emma Searson, director of our national network’s Go Solar campaign.

The report also found that solar is not just a Sun Belt phenomenon. Other leading cities include New York City; Indianapolis; Washington, D.C.; Trenton, New Jersey; and Ypsilanti, Michigan.
This year, Environment Oregon staff and members sought to save the bees from toxic pesticides, and put wildlife over waste by banning some of the worst forms of plastic pollution.
Conservation

Our network’s staff and members sought to save the bees from toxic pesticides, and to spare Arctic wildlife from oil and gas exploration and drilling. Below, find more on our national network’s efforts to protect wildlife from plastic pollution and revive the country’s best conservation and recreation program.

Oregon Senate splits on plastic: Votes to ban bags but not foam

JUNE 16, 2019: In a single day, the Oregon Senate took one step forward against plastic pollution, but opted against taking another.

On June 11, the Senate passed a statewide ban on single-use plastic grocery bags. Just moments later, the Senate came just one vote short of passing HB 2883, a statewide ban on food containers made of polystyrene, commonly known as Styrofoam.

“Plastic pollution is one of the most pressing issues facing Oregon’s rivers, oceans and wildlife,” said Environment Oregon State Director Celeste Meiffren-Swango. “Environment Oregon canvassers working on our Wildlife Over Waste campaign have talked to tens of thousands of Oregonians who support banning polystyrene foam takeout containers and cups. It’s clear that reducing plastic pollution resonates with Oregonians.”

With the governor’s signature, Oregon became the sixth state in the country to ban plastic grocery bags. Environment Oregon will keep raising awareness of the need to reduce plastic pollution, and we hope the Legislature will try again to pass the foam ban in next year’s short session.

More than 123,000 join the call to save the bees

JULY 26, 2019: Wherever you go, you’re likely to find people who have heard about the decline in bee populations and are willing to do something about it.

That was our experience this summer, as our national network sent canvassers across the country to knock on doors, write letters and meet with lawmakers in support of restrictions on the class of pesticides called neonicotinoids (or neonics), which are known to kill bees. Their message resonated. As of this writing, more than 123,000 people have sent messages to governors and state legislators calling for action.

“If we want to save the bees, one of the first things we need to do is stop using the pesticides that are killing them,” said Steve Blackledge, director of our national network’s Conservation program.

Decision-makers took notice, from Idaho, where the governor’s office requested a meeting with Steve, to Texas, where the state Parks and Wildlife Department agreed to stop using neonics in state parks.
Above: Staff from our national research partner Environment America Research & Policy Center, along with their allies, delivered 350,000 public comments in support of federal Clean Car standards to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. Below: Andrea McGimsey and Environment America Research & Policy Center staff hosted a tour of an electric bus facility (upper middle and bottom right).
Global Warming Solutions

Environment Oregon worked with other state groups in our network to reduce carbon emissions from power plants, transportation and other sources. Here’s more on what our network did to promote state-level action across the country and defend strong pollution standards for cars and trucks.

Oregon lawmakers approve bills to promote solar, ‘green-zoning’

**JULY 16, 2019:** Two new bills would give more Oregonians a chance to go solar and move to more livable communities.

As the session closed in June, the state Legislature passed two bills aimed at climate change. The Solar for All bill establishes a new rooftop solar rebate program, making solar more accessible and affordable to Oregonians. The Green Zoning bill promotes environmentally responsible development by removing, in cities with more than 10,000 people, bans on “middle housing”—medium-sized parcels that contain up to four housing units.

“Both of these bills are critical to the fight against climate change,” said Environment Oregon State Director Celeste Meiffren-Swango. “Solar for All will help Oregonians move away from fossil fuels, while Green Zoning promotes compact urban development to help reduce home energy use, sprawl and transportation-related greenhouse gas emissions.”

Environment Oregon also supported the cap and invest bill that failed to pass the state Senate this spring.

The Oregon legislature failed to take action on climate change

**JULY 1, 2019:** A proposal to establish a cap-and-invest program to curb greenhouse gas emissions to the level scientists say is necessary to stave off the worst impacts of climate change was an important step to ensuring that Oregon is doing our part to solve this global crisis. Unfortunately, the climate bill became the epicenter of partisan antics, which ultimately ended in the bill’s demise.

“This is a disappointing outcome given that climate change is an urgent and important issue, and a majority of Oregonians supported the proposal,” said Celeste Meiffren-Swango, state director with Environment Oregon. “Our kids deserve better. The people of Oregon deserve better.”

Oregonians, no matter their political views, want clean air, clean water and a livable planet for their kids. Environment Oregon will keep working to make sure that we are bringing everyone along with our vision for the future and that our elected leaders prioritize protecting the environment and our quality of life.
Our staff (partial list)

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