Annual Report
A recap of our work for our members in 2011
Dear Environment North Carolina members,

There’s no getting around it: 2011 was a hard year for North Carolina’s environment.

This spring, the General Assembly passed a budget that nearly eliminated efforts to preserve green spaces across the state, including unprotected land along the Blue Ridge Parkway. To make matters worse, they imposed new restrictions on the state’s premiere conservation program and limited new environmental rules.

But thankfully, there’s good news to report, too.

Standing together, we convinced Gov. Bev Perdue to veto a bill that promoted drilling off the Outer Banks and fracking near the Deep River.

In the year ahead, we’ll redouble efforts to defend this victory—and continue working to restore state programs to protect the Blue Ridge Parkway and other treasured land throughout the state. I hope you’ll be there with us.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Ouzts
State Director

“Standing together, we convinced Gov. Bev Perdue to veto a bill that promoted drilling off the Outer Banks and fracking near the Deep River.”
Clean air, clean water

We should be able to breathe clean air and drink clean water—without worrying about mercury in our bloodstream or soot in our lungs. Yet industrial polluters spew hundreds of thousands of tons of toxins into our atmosphere every year. In 2011, Environment North Carolina partnered with sister groups across the nation to strengthen and defend bedrock environmental laws.

Pollution limits defended

In 2011, the Environmental Protection Agency moved ahead with efforts to significantly reduce mercury, soot and smog pollution from power plants. Unfortunately, polluters and their allies in Congress launched a coordinated attack to block these critical safeguards.

• To defend the EPA’s proposed pollution rules, we joined affiliates throughout the country and called on Sen. Kay Hagan to defend the pollution rules. Then, at a press event this past Earth Day, we joined forces with U.S. Reps. David Price, Brad Miller and state Rep. Jennifer Weiss to speak out against congressional attacks on the Clean Air and Clean Water acts.

• In March, the U.S. Senate rejected a bill that would have blocked standards for soot, mercury and carbon pollution, and in April, the Senate defeated four more bills blocking the EPA from reducing pollution that causes global warming.
Protecting the Blue Ridge

Driving the Blue Ridge Parkway feels like a trip through a national park, just what its creators intended when they built it more than 75 years ago. Yet two-thirds of the forests and farmlands that surround the Parkway remain vulnerable to development and other harms. Environment North Carolina is working to restore conservation funds to protect these treasured green spaces.

2,000 signatures delivered

We have North Carolina’s conservation efforts to thank for the Parkway’s incredible Blue Ridge views. But in last year’s budget, the General Assembly cut preservation funds by 85 percent, jeopardizing land along the Parkway and across the state.

• The 2011 budget also prevents the state from purchasing vulnerable land along the Parkway, in addition to other threatened tracts throughout the state. Environment North Carolina fought the budget every step of the way, helping to convince Gov. Bev Perdue to issue a veto.

• Environment North Carolina staff and supporters gathered thousands of signatures and organized hundreds of phone calls from constituents in support of open space protection. And, as Gov. Perdue considered the General Assembly’s final budget, the governor received more constituent calls, emails and postcards concerning environmental issues than any other aspect of the budget.

Environment North Carolina canvassers delivered more than 2,000 signatures to Gov. Perdue to keep the pressure on for conservation funding.
... and the Outer Banks

The Outer Banks, with their panoramic ocean views, provide visitors the chance to swim, fish, and observe hatching sea turtles. But these fragile islands are under siege—from rising sea levels, increased development, and a renewed threat of offshore drilling. This year, Environment North Carolina continued its campaign to keep the Outer Banks, and all our beaches, rig-free.

New protections for our beaches

In December of 2010, Interior Secretary Ken Salazar announced the Obama administration’s intentions to protect the Atlantic coast, Pacific coast and eastern Gulf of Mexico from new oil and gas drilling. This year, Environment North Carolina staff and supporters built on this success, mounting a strong campaign to keep rigs off our shores—permanently.

• Big Oil and their allies in Congress launched a concerted effort to re-open the Atlantic coast to drilling, and the president began to backtrack. At the state level, Sen. Bob Rucho passed a bill calling for oil and gas drilling off the Outer Banks.

• In response, Environment North Carolina advocates, along with hundreds of citizen supporters, urged House members to reject the Senate’s call for more drilling, garnering enough votes to sustain Gov. Perdue’s veto, which she issued following a dogged grassroots campaign.

North Carolina can’t afford a spill like the 2010 Gulf disaster. Clean beaches inject $4 into the economy for every $1 that could be earned from drilling.

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Don’t frack North Carolina

The horse pastures, farmlands, and rocky creeks and rivers of North Carolina’s rural Piedmont are a special part of our state. But it’s here that out-of-state oil companies want to drill for gas using a dangerous new practice called fracking. Environment North Carolina is working to stop this risky drilling practice from harming our farms, forests, and drinking water supplies.

Gas drilling could scar rural North Carolina

Out-of-state gas companies are pushing the General Assembly to allow a new, dangerous form of gas drilling in North Carolina. In particular, they’re eyeing land near the Deep River, where fracking could scar priceless scenery and contaminate drinking water. We’re uniting North Carolinians and urging lawmakers to protect North Carolina’s rural landscapes and drinking water from fracking.

• In Pennsylvania, New York and other states where fracking is common, the practice has been linked to more than 1,000 cases of water contamination. It’s also marred landscapes and increased air pollution, and a recent Duke University study found methane contamination in drinking water wells near drilling sites.

• If the state lifts its ban on fracking, a large area of North Carolina—stretching from Durham county down to the South Carolina border—will be at risk. If all of North Carolina’s shale gas reserves were tapped in these areas, drinking water for as many as 2.4 million people could be impacted.

• The area surrounding the Deep River, which includes horse pastures, farmlands and forests, is most at risk. Oil companies like WhitMar have signed leases to explore and drill more than 9,000 acres in Chatham, Moore and Lee counties, near the Deep River.
Governor vetoed bill promoting fracking

Fracking is currently banned across the state. But last year, oil companies and their champions in the General Assembly moved to lift these restrictions by promoting Senate Bill 709, a pro-drilling measure that would tee up a law to allow fracking as soon as 2012.

- At our urging, Gov. Bev Perdue vetoed SB 709. The governor’s decision followed the receipt of thousands of emails and hundreds of phone calls from Tar Heels, many of them Environment North Carolina members, urging her to reject the short-sighted bill.

- Environment North Carolina advocates, along with hundreds of citizen supporters, then turned attention to the North Carolina House in an effort to sustain the governor’s veto. By the session’s end, our advocacy won enough votes to stall the bill and help protect rural North Carolina from fracking.
Clean energy for N.C.

North Carolina’s energy future could be bright—if we make the right decisions today and tomorrow. With nearly as much sunshine as Florida, plus abundant winds off our coast, North Carolina has vast untapped potential to produce clean, homegrown energy and could lead the nation in green energy innovations.

Wind farm announced, solar on pace to beat goal

North Carolina has more potential for offshore wind power than any Atlantic state—and sunshine to spare. Combine that with our world-class research institutions and existing green energy incentives, and North Carolina can charter a clean energy future.

- With considerable thanks to the Environment North Carolina-backed renewable energy standard, investors announced several new green energy projects in 2011—including a wind farm near Elizabeth City and a new solar project in Mount Airy. Utilities are now on pace to fulfill the solar energy requirements of our state renewable energy standard—early.

- Environment North Carolina backed the creation of an offshore wind task force, which will recommend new policies to promote wind power off the coast. We also backed the introduction of bills to double the state’s solar energy requirement.

- Installing more efficient light bulbs and thicker windows are just a few of the ways North Carolinians can take steps at home to reduce energy consumption and our reliance on dirty energy. Environment North Carolina Research & Policy Center distributed tips to more than 50,000 residents on how Tar Heels can plug into clean energy.
New law provides cleaner, more efficient buildings

The homes and buildings where we live and work account for more than 70 percent of our total electricity use. Yet half of what the average homeowner in North Carolina pays in monthly electricity bills could be eliminated with simple improvements in design and construction—like thicker insulation, better windows, and more efficient lighting.

• Backed by a broad coalition that included Environment North Carolina, the state Building Code Council voted to require these low-cost measures in new buildings, making new homes 15 percent more efficient, and new offices 30 percent more efficient.

• Big developers opposed the adoption of these new building codes, necessitating another push to make these rules final in 2011. Environment North Carolina staff met with lawmakers, produced fact sheets, and helped beat back a last-minute attempt to gut the standards, helping to ensure that the new building codes will go into effect next year.

Above left: Offshore wind potential for N.C. Above right: The new green buildings law will save the average new homeowner more than $200 each year and reduce pollution throughout North Carolina.