Annual Report

A recap of our work for our members in 2010
Environment Texas responded to each development by uniting members and making our voices heard in the face of fierce opposition.

Sometimes, one year can change a lot.

At the outset of 2010, the BP oil rig had not yet exploded in the Gulf, and adequate regulations protected most of our waters.

Then, oil spilled from the BP rig washed up onto the Gulf Coast; and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality implemented new rules allowing for more E. coli in rivers and lakes.

To both developments, we responded by uniting members and making our voices heard in the face of fierce opposition. After the BP rig exploded, we generated hundreds of thousands of petition signatures urging safer—and fewer—rigs in the Gulf. In addition, we took an active role in organizing Texas’ “Hands Across the Sand,” part of the largest demonstration against offshore drilling the world has ever seen. Ultimately, we helped win new safety provisions for existing rigs and a seven-year ban on drilling along the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

With our help, members also took action against new rules weakening our state’s clean water standards. Along with Environment Texas staff, supporters voiced concerns to state committees, inundated statewide news sources with letters to the editor and made reasoned appeals to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in favor of clean, healthy waters.

Finally, members and supporters stood by our side as we pressed the state to save the Whooping crane and acted to sue ExxonMobil for repeatedly violating the Clean Air Act at its Baytown refinery—the nation’s largest.

I’d like to offer my sincere thanks for your support. With you by our side, I look forward to confronting the challenges and seizing the opportunities the new year will present.

Sincerely,

Luke Metzger
Director, Environment Texas
Preserving Texas

From the desert wilderness of Big Bend, to the clear, spring-fed waters of Barton Springs, Texas’ wild spaces are an integral part of our state’s heritage—one we should preserve for our children’s children, from the endangered ocelot’s native thornscrub, to the piney woods of east Texas. Over the course of 2010, Environment Texas fought to keep these spaces wild by collecting petition signatures, meeting with state officials, and advocating for expansions to state and national parks.

Barton Springs, critical habitats better protected

Our natural areas provide us with clean, plentiful water and beautiful landscapes. They also protect the wild creatures that call Texas home. It’s time for our elected officials to provide the planning and resources we need to preserve Texas for future generations:

• With just 25 ocelots left in the United States, these beautiful wild cats need a safe place to call home—but with 95 percent of their historic thornscrub habitat demolished, they have few places to go. Environment Texas joined WildEarth Guardians to call on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to invest $60 million in expanding two national wildlife refuges in southern Texas.

• Last March, the Austin City Council approved the purchase of 13.6 acres of land to add to the Barton Creek Wilderness Park, protecting land alongside swimming holes at Twin and Sculpture falls. The purchase was financed by an Environment Texas-backed bond measure that voters approved in 2006.

• On March 11, the Aransas Project, of which Environment Texas is a member, filed a federal lawsuit demanding that the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality protect Whooping cranes. Irresponsible water withdrawals are wrecking their habitat. In order to protect the endangered cranes, the lawsuit seeks to stop big business from taking too much water from our rivers.
Fewer rigs off our coast

For three months, we watched in horror as BP’s Deepwater Horizon rig spewed more than 200 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. But, thanks in part to our advocacy, the Obama administration announced intentions to ban drilling in the eastern Gulf until 2017 and enact stricter safety standards for oil rigs.
After the BP spill:  
A plan to protect the Gulf Coast

In the weeks following the BP spill, oil contaminated 580 miles of coastline from Texas to Florida, proving catastrophic for local wildlife—from oil-soaked pelicans, to dolphins choking on fumes, to the sea turtles who nest in the Gulf’s warm waters. It could take decades for the ecology and the economy of the Gulf Coast to recover. As we begin the long process of cleaning up the spill, compensating those affected, and rebuilding the Gulf Coast, we must ensure that a crisis of this magnitude never happens again.

**400,000 stand strong against new drilling**

As the oil spill unfolded in the Gulf of Mexico, Environment Texas’ federal oceans advocate, our Gulf organizer, and dozens of other Environment America staff members worked around the clock to build support for Gulf restoration efforts and for a bill that would permanently protect our coasts and beaches from new offshore drilling:

- In June, we joined our allies across the country in delivering 400,000 comments to the Obama administration, calling for the reinstatement of the moratorium on new drilling in the eastern Gulf of Mexico.

- Meanwhile, our supporters opened their homes and their checkbooks to help Gulf coast residents affected by the spill. Throughout the summer, people in Texas and at least 27 other states organized Gumbo for the Gulf dinners to raise funds in support of BP disaster relief and our efforts to prevent future spills.

- Our members also took part in Hands Across the Sand protests, joining the international demonstration that declared outrage at the BP tragedy and drew a line in the sand against new drilling.

**Clean beaches: Worth $4 for every $1 from drilling**

Last fall, we continued our work by releasing a new report comparing the value of clean beaches to the potential value of the oil off our coasts. According to our research, clean beaches inject $4 into the economy for every $1 that could be earned from offshore drilling.

- The report, “Too Much at Stake,” also highlights the special marine ecosystems, treasured beaches, and extraordinary marine life in our waters. Our coasts are lined with beaches visited by tens of millions annually. And, our oceans have sea grass beds, kelp forests, submarine canyons, rich fishing grounds, shallow corals, and deepwater corals, all of which can be damaged by oil spills.

- Mike Gravitz, our federal oceans advocate, has testified before the president’s Oil Spill Commission three times, urging them to abandon plans to expand offshore drilling up the Atlantic coast. And thanks to our Gumbo for the Gulf fundraisers, he was able to fly four Gulf business-owners and one fisherman to Washington to lobby decision-makers against new drilling.

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*Photo credits: (page 3 clockwise from top) Ed Schipul, Flickr; Brian Epstein, IBRRC, Flickr; Kris Krug, Flickr; (page 4, from bottom) The Pug Father, Flickr.*

*Top: Chef and author Anthony Bourdain lent his support to Environment America’s Gumbo for the Gulf fundraisers.*
In 2010, nearly two-thirds of Texans lived in places where air is unhealthy to breathe. Pollution from power and industrial plants, cars and trucks, and even ships docking in Texas ports are making many Texans sick and marring our scenic vistas. To bring blue skies back to Texas, Environment Texas is standing up to some of our worst air polluters in federal court.
Thousands of violations at Baytown: Exxon suit gathers momentum

Environment Texas filed a lawsuit against ExxonMobil Corporation in December 2010, after the company illegally released 8 million pounds of excess pollutants over the past five years at its Baytown refinery. Employing the same strategy that allowed us to force Shell Oil and Chevron Phillips to clean up their facilities in 2009 and 2010, we’re exercising our right under the Clean Air Act to demand compliance with the law.

Proceedings officially underway

Environment Texas’ lawsuit states that equipment breakdowns, malfunctions, and other incidents at the Baytown refinery resulted in millions of pounds in illegal pollution. Earlier this year, two such “emissions events” occurred on the same day. Since last summer, we’ve made considerable inroads in federal court, alongside allied organizations:

• Environment Texas and the Sierra Club informed the Exxon Mobil corporations last July they planned to press charges for Clean Air Act violations at the Baytown refinery. Legal proceedings officially began in December.

• At the same time, we’ve put a spotlight on Exxon’s disregard for federal law, attracting news outlets to Baytown and generating media coverage across the state and country, including a feature in the Wall Street Journal.

Almost 15,000 people live within three miles of the Baytown refinery—and Exxon makes a bad neighbor:

• The 2,400-acre complex in Baytown is located about 30 miles east of downtown Houston and consists of an oil refinery—at 562,500 barrels processed per day, the nation’s largest—and two petrochemical plants. Residential neighborhoods are less than one mile downwind of each facility.

• ExxonMobil’s persistent violations and abysmal safety record have resulted in the release of more than 8 million pounds of excess air pollutants over the past five years, including toxic chemicals such as benzene and 1,3-butadiene.

• Environment Texas member Stuart Halpryn, who lives adjacent to the plant, recalled an incident in early 2009, when an accident in the complex resulted in an overwhelming chemical stench that hung over his family’s home for days. In the days that followed, his family became sick with fevers, congestion and sleeplessness.
New efficiency standards

New recommendations for greener buildings could save Americans $40 billion by 2030, spur our economy with new, green jobs, and slash our global warming emissions by 200 million metric tons each year by 2030. But first, we need to actually adopt these requirements. Set last October by the International Code Council, the code revision recommends all new buildings be 30 percent more efficient. We’re working now to make sure cities across Texas implement these rules.

Bringing the standards home

Buyers of new houses will pay more than $2,500 for heat and electricity every year. In addition to the unnecessarily high expense, the excess energy means more pollutants released into the air and an enhanced threat to our climate and public health. It’s time for Texas to make a change.

- Nearly 40 percent of the nation’s energy use is spent on powering buildings. Much of this energy is wasted through energy inefficiencies such as leaky windows and poor insulation. This strains our economy with unnecessarily high energy bills and results in long-term environmental damage.

- Environment Texas built support for the building code improvements, reaching out to cities with strong green building standards and urging them to send full delegations to the International Code Council in Charlotte, N.C., where they could lobby for widespread implementation. Clean Energy Associate Joyce Yao worked closely with the city of Houston, which played a leading role in winning the new standards.

- Environment Texas is now working to save Texans hundreds of dollars on their utility bills every year, and put our state on a path to a cleaner, more efficient future. While these energy-saving improvements can be applied to existing buildings, it’s more cost-effective to simply build them smarter and better.
E. coli in water

On the surface, Texas’ many rivers, lakes and swimming holes offer us a natural playground—especially in the dog days of summer. We can paddle down the Trinity River, wade in Barton Creek, and fish in Lake o’ the Pines. But under new rules, some Texas creeks and bayous will be allowed to contain 16 times more E. coli than before. In response, we organized members and delivered thousands of signatures to state and federal agencies, demanding cleaner water in Texas.

One thousand call for stronger standards

Hundreds of our streams, rivers and lakes are too polluted for swimming and fishing—and the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality has implemented new rules that would actually increase their pollution. For example, under these recent changes, streams that are popular for wading—but not swimming—could contain five times as much E. coli as before. In response, we rolled out a new campaign asking the EPA to overturn the new rules:

• Last summer, when the TCEQ released the weakened standards for water quality, we sprung into action, filing official comments to the state agency, opposing this rollback to our clean water laws.

• When the TCEQ still refused to budge on the statewide standards, we took our case straight to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, asking them to halt implementation of the weakened water quality rules. We met with EPA officials directly and gathered more than one thousand signatures to Diane Evans, who works in the EPA’s Dallas office.

• Environment Texas also helped alert the media and public to the threats, getting letters to the editor published in newspapers around the state and releasing a new report on pollution generated by factory farms such as Pilgrim’s Pride in northeast Texas.

Citizen support is the cornerstone of Environment Texas. Thousands of Texas citizens supported Environment Texas and the Environment Texas Research & Policy Center by making membership contributions in 2010. The members listed below were particularly generous in backing the organizations’ research and advocacy. Names that appear in italics denote Monthly Supporters. These members provide stability to the organizations’ resources through our monthly giving program.

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- Houston Endowment
- Energy Foundation
- Cynthia and George Mitchell Foundation
- Jacob and Therese Hershey Foundation
- Trull Foundation

Financial information
The charts below represent the combined financial information for Environment Texas and Environment Texas Research & Policy Center for the Fiscal Year 2010.

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