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Our summer 2016 update
for members and friends.

GAINING GROUND ON SOLAR

From arrays amid cornfields to panels on urban properties, solar energy systems are being installed across Iowa at an impressive pace. According to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration, Iowa's distributed solar capacity grew 32 percent during 2015.

State and federal policies that expand access to clean energy and maximize benefits have helped drive this growth. Local ordinances that reflect an understanding of the community benefits of solar will be key to maintaining it.



Ground mounted solar energy systems, like the one pictured here in northwest Iowa, offer significant energy cost-savings for their owners as well as many community benefits.

Recently, the City of West Des Moines received a permit request from a resident seeking to install ground mounted solar panels in his backyard. The request prompted the City to begin drafting its first solar ordinance, but also raised concerns about aesthetics. Attempts to address these concerns resulted in an initial draft ordinance that had potential to be prohibitive to solar.

"The Council was concerned that a number of proposed provisions such as height restrictions, setback requirements, mandatory screens and screening material requirements could have, in practice, significantly limited the adoption of solar in West Des Moines," said Climate and Energy Policy Specialist Cindy Lane.

Very few communities in Iowa have adopted local solar ordinances. Knowing the precedent

West Des Moines' ordinance could set, the Council decided to take action.

Through letters, meetings with City staff and attendance at a public hearing, the Council offered feedback aimed at improving the ordinance and strengthening access to solar in West Des Moines. Our comments also emphasized the many benefits of solar, cited strong public support for increasing solar energy in Iowa, and highlighted support for solar under Iowa law. These efforts helped to ensure the final ordinance was significantly less restrictive.

"By continuing to connect the individual and collective benefits of solar energy," said Lane, "we can help ensure the future of solar energy in communities across Iowa is bright." ✨

WHY I SUPPORT THE IOWA ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

Jerry Peckumn
Individual Member,
Former Board Member



Farmer, Board Chair
of Iowa Rivers Revival

Jefferson, IA – Racoon River Watershed

I decided to join the Iowa Environmental Council because I was concerned about the lack of knowledge about water quality. We are not taking care of our natural resources. I saw the Council was standing up for Iowa's natural resources, was impressed by the work they were doing, and decided I wanted to be a part of it.

Before joining the Council, I was active in environmental issues in my county and on a state level. I served on the DNR's Iowa Environmental Protection Commission, which exposed me to conservation and business groups. As a farmer I could see that some agricultural interests would block sound rules. As a farmer I see the soil and water leave the land. We have to find a way to protect our resources for the future.

I support the Council because of the work they do. They are a non-partisan group of people who really care about the environment and what we leave behind for the world when we are gone. I value the people who work for, volunteer at and financially support the Council, because without all of us, none of the Council's successes would be possible. ✨

PROGRESS REPORT

MAKING CONNECTIONS

LEAVE A LEGACY

Help ensure a safe, healthy environment and sustainable future for Iowa. Make a tax-deductible gift to the Iowa Environmental Council today. Also consider including the Iowa Environmental Council in your estate plans.

To give, return the enclosed card or visit iaenvironment.org. You may also contact Development Director Jamie Burch Elliott at burch@iaenvironment.org or 515.244.1194 x202.

For me, Iowa's ecosystem and the relationships that exist between our water, land and air are humbling, inspiring and a reminder that everything is connected. One change, however insignificant it may seem, can have far-reaching effects both good and bad. This same relationship exists between our environment and other issues affecting our daily lives, as well as in the ability of public policy advancements – even when seemingly small – to create large-scale change.

This summer's *Progress Report* is about the connections that exist between our environment, communities, economy, health and quality of life. In it, you'll read about the significance of a solar ordinance in West Des Moines for communities across Iowa, the far-reaching implications of proposed changes to the state's anti-degradation standards, and the varied benefits of and voices speaking for Iowa's largest proposed wind project. You'll learn about what motivates long-time Council

supporter and farmer Jerry Peckumn to increase awareness about the need to care for our natural resources, the threats water pollution is posing to public health and safety, and why we must move Iowa's legislative leaders beyond the status quo.

Many of the environmental, economic and community challenges we face are interconnected. Fortunately, so too are many of the solutions. By building a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of these relationships, we strengthen support for policies that protect our natural resources AND make Iowa a better place to live, work and explore.

Ralph

Ralph Rosenberg
Executive Director
Rosenberg@iaenvironment.org





BATTLING BLUE-GREEN ALGAE

This summer, the Council is building awareness about public health threats at our lakes. In 2015, Iowa experienced a record number of beach advisories due to toxic levels of microcystin produced by blue-green algae blooms, a persistent problem at many of the state's beaches – especially in late summer.

The toxic algae blooms, primarily caused by phosphorus pollution combined with hot temperatures, have a foul odor, create obvious surface scum ranging in color from iridescent blue to neon green, and resemble spilled paint or thick pea soup. The blooms often accumulate in shoreline areas, but microcystin can linger even when blooms become less visible.

Exposure to elevated levels of microcystin can cause a variety of health problems including upset stomach, skin rashes, respiratory problems and even liver damage. Pets that swim in or drink the water are especially at risk: Dogs have been known to die just hours after exposure.

Updates on beach conditions at Iowa State Parks on the DNR's website and via its beach monitoring hotline: 515-725-3434. Information about beaches with frequent blooms is available on the Council's website under the section about our work on clean water. ✨

2016 SESSION IN REVIEW

The 2016 Iowa Legislative Session was marked by increased awareness, discussion and recognition of the need to significantly expand support for water, land and continued clean energy growth in Iowa. Many speculated that perhaps this would be the year our elected officials heeded the call of their constituents and take action on the scale needed to address the urgent – and growing – natural resource challenges facing the state. But when the Legislature adjourned in late April, despite much talk, there was an ultimate lack of meaningful action.

The connection between legislative action and the condition of Iowa's water, land and clean energy future is undeniable, and while this session was disappointing, there were a few exceptions worth noting.

- Maintained, improved & expanded clean energy access**
 This session, The Council helped advance policies that increase access to wind and solar energy via tax incentives, protect distributed clean energy options, and secure sufficient clean energy transmission infrastructure. This included legislation to preserve Iowa's upfront solar tax incentive that a technical error placed in jeopardy, secure a one-year extension of the production tax incentive eligibility deadline for wind and solar projects slated to expire in 2016, maintain net-metering for solar energy and other types of distributed energy that a bill introduced in the House threatened to gut, and a compromise on language that will establish timetables for review and approval of key transmission lines.



Advocates like Sarah (l) and Claire Lohmeier (r), pictured here at Environmental Lobby Day 2016, help connect legislators to local issues and concerns.

- Increased attention on natural resource challenges**
 This session, the Council helped advance protections for Iowa's wild turtles by working with its allies to generate significant public support for bill to give DNR the authority to establish harvest seasons and bag limits, dramatically increased attention on the need to fund the Natural Resources and Outdoor Recreation Trust Fund to support Iowa's diverse natural resources, built support to maintain funding for the Resource Enhancement and Protection program (REAP), and increased support for adopting a comprehensive watershed approach to water quality improvement efforts that emphasizes greater collaboration, accountability and transparency.

Improving our state's environmental policies is not a sprint, but a marathon that requires perseverance and dogged determination. Together, we must keep these issues at the forefront and use our voices – and votes – to compel incumbents and candidates to move beyond the status quo – our future depends on it. ✨

PROPELLING IOWA FORWARD>>



Wind XI offers clear environmental, economic and community benefits.

Iowa's wind leadership is a source of pride for many Iowans, and not without good reason. In 2015, Iowa became the first state in the nation to produce more than 30 percent of its electricity with wind, and a proposal announced this spring could help propel the state to 40% wind energy by 2020.

In April, MidAmerican announced Wind XI, a 2,000 megawatt (MW) wind project. If approved and built, it would be the largest wind project in Iowa.

"Wind XI would help secure Iowa's position as a national wind energy leader and offers clear environmental, economic and community benefits," said Energy Program

DEFENDING AGAINST WATER DEGRADATION

This spring, the Iowa Environmental Council celebrated a win for clean water when an Iowa District Court sided with us and the Environmental Law and Policy Center on a case that compelled the DNR to appropriately enforce Iowa's anti-degradation standards, a pillar of the Clean Water Act designed to prevent unnecessary pollution increases.

However, the ink was barely dry on the judge's ruling when a petition was filed with the Iowa Environmental Protection Commission (EPC) seeking changes to the standards that would directly undermine the ruling, significantly weaken existing water quality protections, and undercut the state's Nutrient Reduction Strategy.

"If adopted, the changes would create a bright-line allowing entities seeking permits to increase water pollution to eliminate less degrading alternatives with costs greater than or equal 115% of less expensive treatments – even if they're deemed affordable and offer significant environmental benefits," said Water Program Attorney Clare Kernek.

Currently, Iowa's anti-degradation standards require permit applicants to consider and appropriately account for the costs and environmental benefits of alternative treatments when evaluating water treatment options – a process known as economic efficiency. A separate analysis that evaluates the community's capacity to implement alternative treatments based on economic factors is also conducted to determine affordability. Less degrading alternative treatments are only required if they have been deemed practical, economically efficient

Director Nathaniel Baer. "This is exactly the kind of project we'd hoped would be announced following the extension of the federal wind energy production tax credit."

State leaders including Gov. Branstad and Iowa Economic Development Authority Director Debi Durham have voiced support for Wind XI. However, approval from the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) is not a given.

The Council and its partners at the Environmental Law & Policy Center jointly intervened in the Wind XI docket, reviewed hundreds of pages of filings and filed a joint testimony in support of the proposal in late June. Witnesses included Baer, Wind Utility

AND affordable. This ensures economic and environmental concerns are balanced.

"The distinction between economic efficiency and affordability is important. We have no interest in trying to bankrupt cities, towns or businesses," said Water Program Director Susan Heathcote. "In some cases, alternative treatment technologies may provide cleaner water and even save communities money."

The Council and several of its allies spoke against the proposed changes at the May EPC meeting. We also called upon advocates to submit written comments opposing the changes to DNR and attend a public hearing on June 29. As a result, over 200 letters were submitted to DNR, and few seats were empty at the hearing. Now, DNR will review comments and present a summary to EPC, which is expected to vote on the proposed changes at its August meeting. In the interim, the Council continues to work to preserve this important protection. ✨



Proposed changes to Iowa's anti-degradation standards would significantly weaken existing clean water protections.

Consulting President Tom Wind and Des Moines Mayor Frank Cownie.

"One of the Council's greatest strengths is its ability to collaborate with individuals and organizations representing varying perspectives," said Baer. "Together, we leveraged our collective knowledge, expertise and influence to show that there is broad support for the project."

While no other parties appear to have explicitly opposed Wind XI, some have proposed changes that could undermine its approval or construction. The Council is shaping its response to these and other comments in preparation for a hearing in August. IUB is expected to issue its decision in September. ✨

UPCOMING EVENTS



2016 Annual Conference
ECOconomics: Dollars, sense & Sustainability
 Thurs., Oct. 6
 DMACC Ankeny Campus
 FFA Enrichment Center
 Ankeny, IA
RSVP at iaenvironment.org

SAVE THE DATE



Environmental Lobby Day 2017
 REAP Day at the Capitol
 Wed., March 29, 2017
 Iowa State Capitol

RECENT EVENTS

Over 200 attendees nodded in agreement with Flint Water Advisory Task Force Co-Chair Chris Kolb as he spoke about the dangers of taking clean water for granted at Pro H₂O – Thirsty for Change, the Iowa Environmental Council's annual event held on June 16 at Noce in Des Moines. Kolb, who also serves as president of the Michigan Environmental Council, was the featured speaker at this year's event, which raised \$21,800 to support our work to protect and preserve Iowa's environment. ✨