



**ANNUAL  
REPORT 2023**



# PEOPLE



# ACTION



# JUSTICE

## CHALLENGES AND VICTORIES



Jeff Carter,  
President & CEO

**2023 was marked by relentless challenges to our environment, but we also celebrated remarkable victories in our campaigns to protect clean water, reduce toxic exposures, and promote efforts to tackle the climate crisis.**

The U.S. Supreme Court dealt a significant blow to environmental protections on May 25, 2023 with its ruling in *Sackett v. EPA*, which removed Clean Water Act safeguards from most wetlands and streams. This anti-science decision favored polluters and put wetlands and streams at risk of pollution and destruction. Fortunately, the Clean Water Act of 2023, introduced on October 18, aims to reverse much of the damage inflicted by this ruling while reaffirming that wetlands and streams are protected water resources. The proposed legislation also emphasizes the commitment of Congress to safeguarding water quality nationwide. Thanks to Clean Water Action members who mobilized to urge Congress to support this vital legislation, we have thousands of submissions to date.

Clean Water Action also made significant progress in 2023 banning dangerous PFAS “forever chemicals,” with Minnesota leading the way passing the strongest PFAS prevention legislation in the country. Signed into law by Governor Tim Walz, this legislation was part of a broader omnibus environment, natural resources, climate, and energy bill and received bipartisan support. Named Amara’s Law in honor of Amara Strande, a young advocate diagnosed with a rare cancer believed to be a result of PFAS contamination, the law bans all non-essential uses of PFAS chemicals. Amara, who testified in support of the bill, passed away in April 2023. Following Minnesota’s example, California, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island also celebrated PFAS wins.

Thanks to proposed Safe Drinking Water Act revisions, we are on the verge of a historic breakthrough in getting lead out of our drinking water. In November 2023 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed full replacement of lead service lines, which remain the largest source of lead in drinking water. With 11 million of these lead pipes still in use, this visionary plan is crucial for



public health and environmental justice, as lead exposure disproportionately affects low-income and minority communities. Full lead pipe replacement has been a core component in Clean Water Action’s work on lead in drinking water for over a decade, and the proposed safeguards, supported by \$15 billion from the Biden-Harris administration’s Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, is expected to be finalized in 2024.

**Other notable highlights of 2023:**

- We collaborated with communities opposing pipelines, wastewater pits, new drilling, fracking, and other fossil fuel infrastructure. Our climate advocacy played a key role in securing billions in new federal investments and achieving significant climate victories across several states, all while thwarting efforts by polluters to undermine state climate policies.
- We initiated a major expansion of our ReThink Disposable program to eliminate single-use plastic pollution. By working closely with businesses and consumers, we advanced new bans, phase-outs, and “zero waste” and “producer take-back” policies aimed at tackling the most harmful products and practices.
- Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund published a report assessing transparency and accessibility in state programs that distribute historic water infrastructure investments in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. Improved practices will ensure that \$50 billion in new funding to upgrade aging drinking water, wastewater, and storm water systems get to the places that need them most. Read our report: [cleanwater.org/SRF](https://cleanwater.org/SRF).

Thank you for your continued support in this important work. Because of you, we made tremendous progress in 2023 for our water and our health. Let’s continue to make a difference.

*Clean Water Fund’s programs are limited to those appropriate to its 501-c-3 tax status and expressly exclude any election or candidate-specific advocacy.*

## In the News: 2023 headlines

**MD: National climate advocacy group updates research on State House fossil fuel lobbyists**

**PA: A collection of environmental organizations are partnering with residents to build new green stormwater infrastructure in neighborhoods**

**MA: New Bedford Creates Programs to Reduce Waste in Businesses**

**California Water Board Releases Drinking Water Needs Assessment**

**After the deluge: Floods may taint more drinking water in California**

**MA: “We still can’t breathe”: Advocates call for relief from air pollution**

**MN: The Afterlife of Amara Strande**

**TX: ‘It’s gross’: Houston police investigating company accused of dumping chemicals into drainage system**

**RI: Tons of recyclables end up in the landfill. What experts say is needed to fix the problem**

**MN: Environmentalists Hope Walz Bolsters Efforts to Strengthen PFAS Policies**

**MI environmental group hails Enbridge suit being ordered back to state court**

**PFAS in Connecticut: What to know about the ‘forever chemicals’ that might be in your water**

**Michigan Data Center Tax Breaks Hit Environmental Opposition**

**NJ: Governor Murphy Announces Nation’s First Environmental Justice Rules to Reduce Pollution in Vulnerable Communities**

**PA: Building on plastic bag ban with an eye toward fees for paper bags.**

**R.I. must stop PFAS pollution before these ‘forever’ chemicals contaminate waterways, and us**

**Lawmakers hope to turn off the tap of PFAS forever chemicals in Massachusetts**

**MD: Baltimore Won’t Expand a Program to Help Residents Clean Up After Sewage Backups**

**DC: “It’s Just Calm”: How Community Organizers Harness Nature For Youth Healing In Ward 8**

## Water Pollution and Drinking Water

We continued to push the Environmental Protection Agency to require drinking water systems to replace all lead service lines. After several rounds of updates to the 1991 Safe Drinking Water Act Lead and Copper Rule over the last 20 years, momentum toward this goal is greater than it has ever been with an EPA proposal presented in Fall 2023. Clean Water Action will continue to mobilize around the comment period on this Lead and Copper Rule Improvements proposal. Water systems across the country have fully replaced lead service lines, are in the process of implementing plans to do so or are considering putting programs in place.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) — the largest investment in water infrastructure in our nation's history — includes \$15 billion to support lead service line replacement. In New Jersey, Clean Water Action and Parents Engaging Parents (PEP) have formed a long-term leadership training and community engagement partnership. This includes the awaited outreach program to inform and sign up residents to take advantage of no-cost lead service line replacements in the Passaic Valley



Water Commission and later in the NJ American Water service areas. This led to the nation's fastest (3 years) and most comprehensive (22,000+) lead service line replacement program.

In Massachusetts, we assisted communities in accessing more than five million dollars in federal and state money to identify and replace lead service lines. We are currently identifying equity gaps in lead service line inventories and working with communities to address barriers to speeding up lead service line replacement.

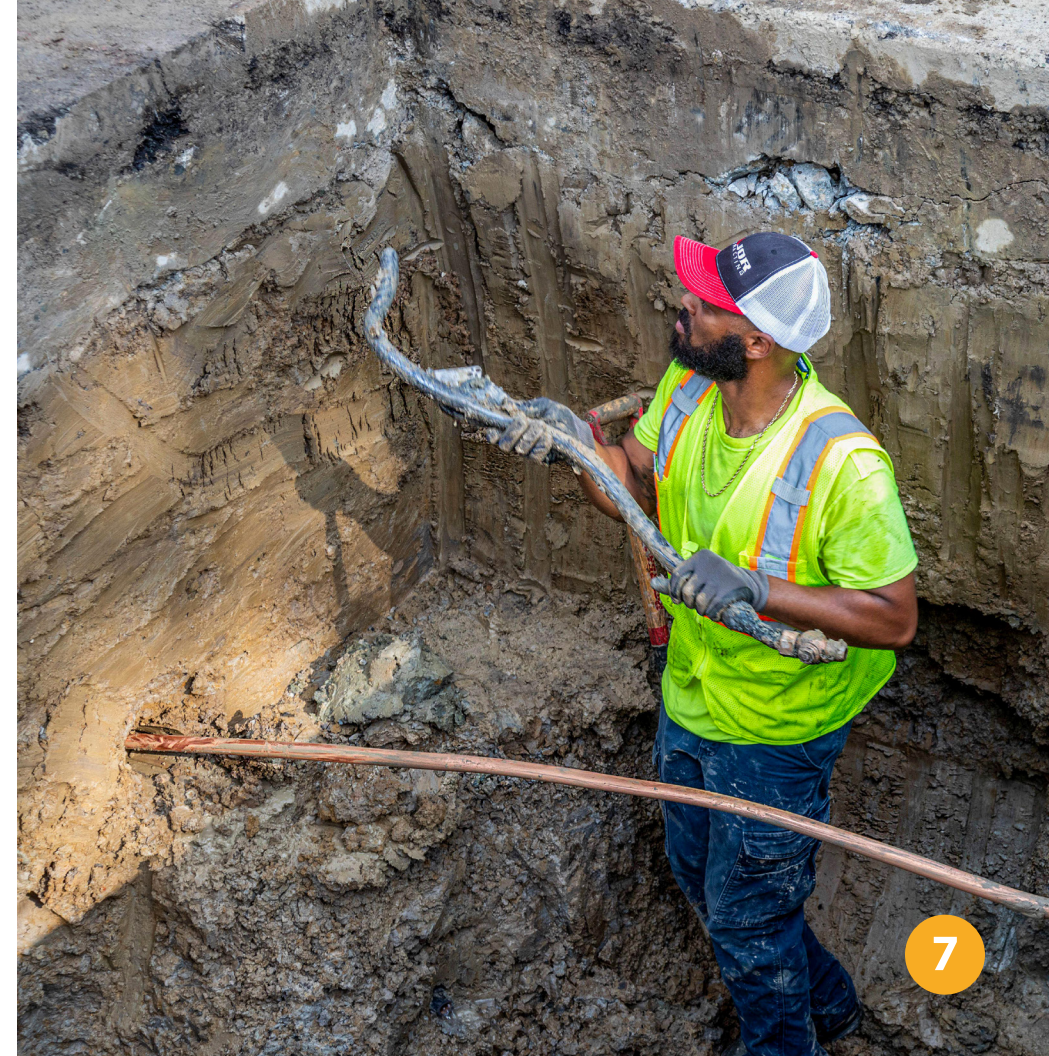
In Minnesota, we have successfully worked with partners to pass state funding to match federal funding that will replace all lead service lines in the state. This, paired with our Healthy Homes presentations in EJ communities, is helping people understand how to combat the dangers lead poses to children (and others in the home). We also helped pass funding to support lead testing and remediation in schools and childcare facilities. In Rhode Island,

we are part of the "Lead Free RI" coalition that is supporting legislation to require replacement of all remaining lead service lines in Rhode Island.

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**Getting the Lead Out:** Lead service lines being replaced in Michigan.



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# Toxic Exposures and PFAS Chemicals



In February 2023, we celebrated a victory that will have real-world impacts on reducing the use of perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), known as “forever chemicals”. One of the most recognized outdoor retailers, REI, announced that it will eliminate PFAS chemicals in textiles and cookware that it sells

starting in fall 2024. Our multi-year effort has mobilized members and others through canvass and communication efforts urging REI to be an industry leader and take this step. Some of our state offices have been working with *Mind the Store* campaign even longer to put the pressure on REI to get PFAS chemicals off the shelves.

In May 2023, our Minnesota team helped pass the nation’s strongest PFAS prevention bill to date, “Amara’s Law,” named after Amara Strande, the young advocate who died fighting for these changes. This bill includes language banning all non-essential use of PFAS, requires manufacturers selling products in Minnesota to disclose if PFAS chemicals are present, and closes a loophole in the 2019 bill that ended the use of PFAS in firefighting foam. In spring, we mobilized to weigh in on EPA’s proposal for the first ever drinking

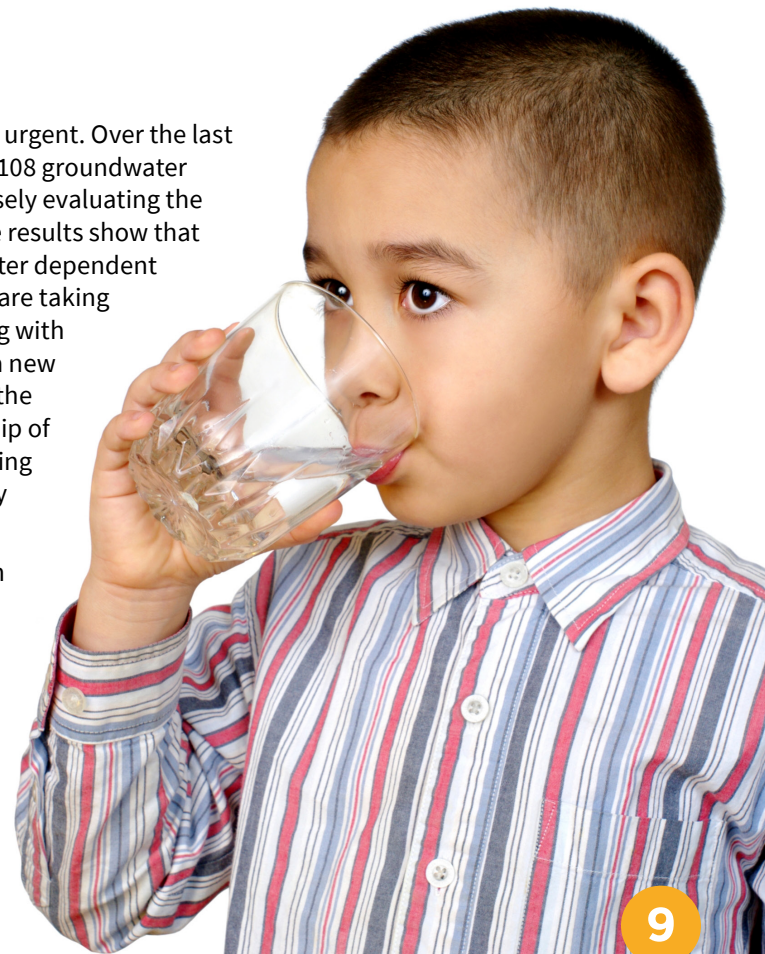
water limits on six PFAS chemicals. During development of the proposal, we provided input to EPA on many aspects, including the environmental justice impacts of PFAS contamination. Our technical comments supported this bold proposal and emphasized the need for equally equitable action to keep PFAS out of the environment in the first place and to get these “forever chemicals” out of use.

**Environmental Justice.** Our environmental justice work is locally driven, with leadership coming from grassroots leaders in the most vulnerable and overburdened communities across the country. This is by design as we work to center environmental justice leaders in determining strategy and positions, often collaborating with BIPOC-led coalitions. All our priority programs incorporate communities that are the most impacted and underserved. Some of our areas of environmental justice work include climate justice, holding polluters accountable through cumulative impacts legislation, getting lead out of our communities and drinking water, zero emissions through reduced air pollution, water affordability for everyone, and advocating for frontline communities impacted by pollution.

In California, Clean Water Action co-wrote the report *Achieving Ground Water Access for All*. With increased droughts, the implementation of the Sustainability Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) and protection of vulnerable Californian

communities dependent on small water systems and domestic wells is urgent. Over the last three years, Clean Water Action has reviewed and analyzed more than 108 groundwater sustainability plans, in every groundwater basin covered by SGMA, closely evaluating the steps local agencies are taking to protect vulnerable communities. The results show that 63% of domestic wells, 60% of agricultural wells and 91% of groundwater dependent ecosystems are not protected under the implementation of SGMA. We are taking steps to address and change this. In Michigan, Clean Water Action along with Soulardarity and other partners in the Public Power Project, released a new report, *Coming Together for Equitable Public Power*. This report details the opportunities and challenges that come along with municipal ownership of energy utilities. Municipal ownership can be a powerful force for ensuring that the needs of communities and ratepayers are prioritized by energy utilities over shareholder profits.

Clean Water Action helped pass the first cumulative impacts legislation in 2020 in New Jersey followed by Massachusetts a few years later and this year Minnesota. We co-led the campaign in New Jersey that secured the strongest Environmental Justice law in the nation, giving the state the power to say no to additional major polluting facilities, as well as set stricter conditions at the time of a permit renewal in BIPOC, low income or language-isolated neighborhoods that are already overburdened by toxic emissions and harms. We are now working to ensure full implementation of these laws in New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, and Minnesota. We have helped introduce similar legislation in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island.

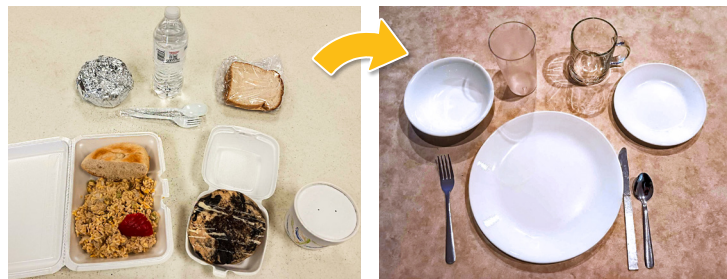


## Sustainability: Re-Thinking Disposable

Since 2011, Clean Water Fund's ReThink Disposable program has successfully helped 13 institutions and more than 380 businesses save \$740,000 and avoid the generation of 22.3 million pieces of disposable packaging items per year. Our goal is to more than double our impact in half the time, by reaching a 50 million-piece reduction of single-use disposable plastic foodware items in the next five years.

We expanded our ReThink Disposable program nationally, adding six states (Minnesota, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, and Pennsylvania) to our existing program in California. In 2024, we plan to expand into Michigan, Texas, Maryland, Virginia, and the District of Columbia.

**Zero Waste:** Many of our state offices have been focusing on shutting down trash incinerators that pollute the air we breathe, and establishing composting programs to divert trash away from our landfills. After years of Clean Water lobbying and testifying, the Maryland Climate Commission voted to remove subsidies for trash incineration. Another Maryland victory was with farm composting, and we are getting composting into schools. In Minnesota we are supporting coalitions to shut down the Hennepin Energy Recover Center in the heart of Minneapolis, and pushing for a speedy timetable. In Connecticut, we are working in a coalition to promote more equitable and sustainable waste management policies that will shut down trash incinerators. In Massachusetts, we



▲ **Before and After:** *ReThink Disposable* partnered with *Franciscan Charities of Newark, NJ* to help their food pantry convert from single-use disposable foodware to 100% reusables. This led to 936,000 disposable items reduced per year, and nearly \$50,000 in savings!

are working with our partners in the Zero Waste Coalition to advocate for enforcement of the state's existing bans to divert more waste away from incinerators and landfills while working with grassroots advocates to oppose the construction or expansion of incinerators such as the Saugus trash incinerator, the oldest in the nation. We will be working to build support with public officials at all levels of government to launch composting programs, reducing waste sent to landfills and incinerators while also reducing potent greenhouse gas emissions. In Rhode Island, we are fighting to pass a "bottle bill," a proven policy solution to increase the rate of recycling of single-use beverage containers and reduce the amount heading to the state's landfill.

## Canvassing and Democracy

At the core of Clean Water Action's mission lies a proven strategy: person-to-person organizing. This grassroots approach — visiting people in their homes, followed by meaningful engagement through phone calls and online conversations — continues to deliver extraordinary results year after year.

In 2023 alone, our dedicated teams reached an astonishing one million households, laying the groundwork for a critical 2024 election season. These efforts included on-the-ground door-knocking campaigns, phone outreach, and a mix of traditional methods like letter-writing and email campaigns. But we didn't stop there. Our digital outreach team sent thousands of texts and emails to members, inspiring them to take action in remarkable ways. Together, they flooded elected and appointed officials with tens of thousands of letters, postcards, emails, and public comments, amplifying the voice of our movement at every level of government.

This relentless, collective effort embodies the spirit of Clean Water Action. Every knock on a door, every message sent, and every conversation held is a step toward tangible victories for our water, our communities, and our future. **This is how we protect what matters most — together.**





*We all live downstream.*

**CLEAN WATER ACTION**'s mission is to protect our environment, health, economic well-being and community quality of life.

Clean Water Action organizes strong grassroots groups and coalitions, and campaigns to elect environmental candidates and to solve environmental and community problems.

**JOIN US!** Together we're making a difference for Clean Water:

- Take action to protect drinking water and clean up polluted waterways;
- Get health-harming toxics out of everyday products;
- Protect our water from dirty energy threats — drilling and fracking for oil and gas, and power plant pollution;
- Build a future of clean water and clean energy;
- Keep our clean water laws strong and effective to protect water and health.

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President & CEO, Clean Water Action

*Secretary:*  
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Chief Financial & Administrative Officer, Clean Water Action

*Assistant Secretary:*  
Margaret Armstrong



*Protecting water and health,  
from watershed to water tap.*

**CLEAN WATER FUND**'s programs reach and involve more than one million households each year through outreach, education, organizing, advocacy and policy action at the local, state and national levels.

Together with Clean Water Action, Clean Water Fund supports the goal of **fishable, swimmable, drinkable water** for everyone.

Priority programs and strategies include:

- Policies that Put Drinking Water First, from watershed to water tap;
- Environmental health solutions that prevent waste and pollution at the source;
- Clean energy and climate solutions that create jobs and protect water.

Clean Water Fund is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit whose programs build on and complement those of Clean Water Action.

Clean Water Fund and Clean Water Action share some staffing and offices and collaborate on programs, including many described in this Annual Report. **Clean Water Fund's involvement is limited to those activities appropriate to its 501(c)(3) tax status.**

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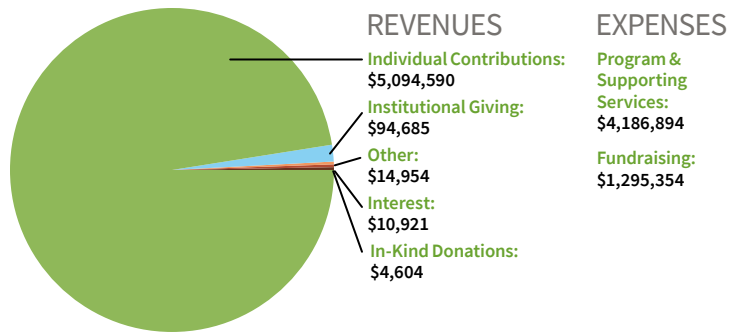
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Dianne Akabli  
Assistant Director of Finance, Clean Water Fund

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*Clean Water Fund's Board is an independent governing body with six current members, all of whom serve as volunteers.*

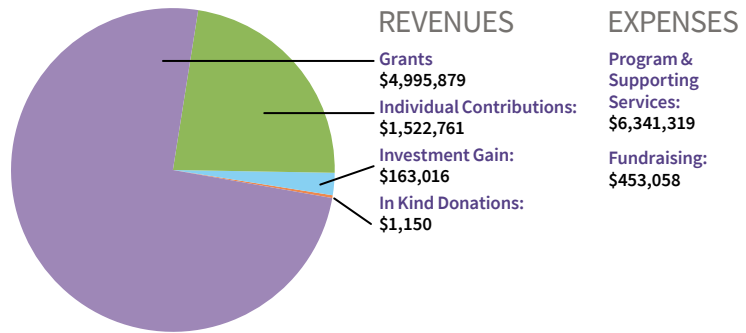
## CLEAN WATER ACTION FY23 FINANCES



Give Confidently. You have our commitment that Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund will be efficient and effective stewards of the resources you provide. Copies of the latest audited financial statements can be obtained online at [www.cleanwateraction.org](http://www.cleanwateraction.org) or [www.cleanwaterfund.org](http://www.cleanwaterfund.org) or by writing the national offices.

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## CLEAN WATER FUND FY23 FINANCES



Headquartered in Washington, DC, Clean Water Action and Clean Water Fund operate programs nationally and locally from a network of state and regional field offices around the country. We have members, donors and activist volunteers in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. Learn more at [www.cleanwateraction.org/states](http://www.cleanwateraction.org/states)



**PROTECT WHAT YOU LOVE**





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