

Election Outcomes and Our Environment: *Short on National Leadership = Long on Creative Collaborations and Strengthening Local Community Fabric*

Clean Water Action in Texas endorsed in a small number of races this cycle, and our endorsed candidates won in 5 of the 7 races we advocated in. We know how to organize to defend policy and regulation on clean water, clean air, and public health protections. Creativity, solidarity, and coalition efforts will be in focus for local, state, and federal campaigns as we navigate an incoming administration in Washington that has a proven record of rolling back said protections. Opportunities will emerge to partner our signature, grassroots member power with leaders in states' attorneys general, governors, mayors, county and other municipal administrations.

We recognize that there will be challenges both known and unknown; the unexpected will crop up and we will rely on longstanding organizational values and current day community-led principles to guide our responses. We are preparing to defend the historically marginalized and overburdened folks and communities in Texas, and redoubling efforts to shore up the strength of our community fabric... tightening the weave to keep our safety nets strong. We need each member's continued support and solidarity as we pledge to work both smart AND hard.

Creative Strategy & Unexpected Leadership: PFAS in Texas

On December 11th, Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton announced a lawsuit against global giants 3M and DuPont for misrepresentations and omissions they made in advertising the safety in consumer products of PFAS "forever" chemicals in brand names like Teflon, Stainmaster, and Scotchgard.

This is an example of an innovative and, perhaps, unexpected path to achieving safer chemical policies for consumers and workers, as well as the receiving air, waters, and lands. As we prepare to see some conventional environmental regulations weakened, alternate strategies and partners will sometimes become our primary path to victories small and large. Stay tuned as the Texas Legislature opens in January, 2025. We will share opportunities to protect Texans from exposure to dangerous PFAS and PFOS chemicals via bills at the Texas Capitol.

Traveler Headlines Clean Water Benefit at Anderson Fair



A joyous, community-powered, multimedia collaboration we are proud of is the September 21st benefit show that local Houston musical group Traveler headlined for Clean Water at the legendary folk venue, Anderson Fair. Clean Water members and music lovers alike gathered to share an evening of artists reflecting our political and human culture. There is something unique and powerful about sharing a space with other bodies, minds, and hearts vibrating to the same musical notes, isn't there? I know that I am recharged and rejuvenated by the experience, and so grateful to our friends in the band and our incredibly generous hosts at the venue. Anderson Fair is one of Texas's longest-running live folk and singer-songwriter venues, showcasing artists since 1970. Aspiring musicians such as Lyle Lovett, Nancy Griffith, Guy Clark, Robert Earl Keen and the like got their starts on this very stage!

During the two sets of all-original music, vocalist Carol Burrus shared one of her songs that reflects on our planetary despair and hope with her melody at once melancholy and hope-filled:

Voice On the Wind

Written/spoken intro:

Mother Earth is in trouble. If we get quiet and listen, we will not only hear her call, but know how to lead ourselves with our hopes and dreams.

Song:

*I hear a voice on the wind, telling me to slow down
Sit a while in the shadows 'til the sun goes down, all the way down.
I hear the darkness speak as colors leave the sky
Let me tell you a story as day turns to night.
Once upon a planet, once upon a time
All this sound and fury were not yours or mine, at the beginning of time
We grew out of the ocean, came out onto the land
We are not more important as woman or man, than the water or sand.
Don't forget to dream, you know what it means
To keep me afloat. Don't give up, don't give up hope.*

*I hear a voice from the mountain, a song upon the wind
It's a voice from our ancient mothers trying to send, to help us to mend.
They say, come together in your sadness, let your tears start to flow.
The salt and the water come through us, into the sea below
Our bodies are part of the ocean, our bodies are part of the land
Remember the precious the sacred we hold in our hand, we must do what we can.*

To listen to the song visit <https://travelerfolkmusic.bandcamp.com/track/voice-on-the-wind>

Austin Energy 2035:

What's Cooking...and What're We Cooking It With?

On Thursday, December 12, Austin City Council voted to accept the 2035 long-range Austin Energy utility plan. There is, as is often the case, good news and bad news. Starting with the good news: the long-range plan included hard-fought amendments with additional commitments to locally-generated solar energy, energy efficiency measures, increased battery storage, and consumer demand-response. Also in the “good news” category is that these were achieved by months-long, targeted efforts by a diverse set of local community groups organizing their members to speak out alongside hard working citizen advisors to the utility. Our members of Clean Water Action added their voices multiple times over the months; our colleagues at Public Citizen, Lonestar Sierra Club, PODER, Austin DSA, Creative Action, Parents Climate Community, AFSCME, Community Powered ATX and more were champions! The democratic process is alive and well, folks!

In the “less-than-good” news category, the approved plan re-opens the door, which was once closed, to having Austin’s electric utility build out additional natural gas powered “peaker units” to answer high demand periods. However, the approval of the plan is not the final step to building gas-generated units. There is hope, yet, that “flipping the switch” on the

upcoming deployment of solar installations on large commercial rooftops as well as the broadening of utility-scale battery storage and efficiency measures will prove plentiful to shore up any currently-forecasted shortfalls.

This follows a successful year-long effort to eliminate a proposed large 1,000 megawatt gas power plant from the plan. Additionally, earlier iterations of the plan included hydrogen powered generation which did not make it into this 2035 plan. This is good news from our perspective simply because we hold that hydrogen-generated electricity should be a tool that sits towards the back of our toolbox and neither deployed yet nor at the community electricity scale. Hydrogen technology remains expensive, power intensive, not community & worker-safety proven, and should be saved to power only the most difficult to decarbonize sectors after greater efficiencies have been achieved with cleaner renewable sources and proven conservation techniques.

All in all, while Austin Energy’s 2035 plan is not perfect and efforts will need to continue to keep new fossil-fuel generation from being built, community-led efforts largely prevailed at minimizing new fossil fuel buildout.

► *Public Citizen’s Kaiba White and her family with the Solar Puppet at the Austin City rally. Ms. White is also a member of the Austin Electric Utility Commission Working Group.*



The (Texas) State of Carbon Capture and Underground Storage

An Illinois site for long term CO₂ storage as a climate change solution has been shut down due to a significant leak. Archer Daniels Midland operates the underground storage site in Illinois that began leaking in October of 2024.

Long term, sometimes called “permanent,” underground storage of CO₂ (CCUS) captured either from an industrial process (think: next-door-neighbor to a coal-burning power plant) or “harvested” from the air has been promoted as a fix for CO₂ emissions which are overrunning our planetary health’s capacity. After 15 years of federal financial support to the tune of billions of dollars of infrastructure and energy funding as well as tax incentives, the technology has not proven itself truly effective or able to stand on its own “market feet.” Therefore, as a second Trump administration approaches, there may be a dramatic reduction in federal funding to help curb government spending. Projects which have been made viable in spreadsheets and models with government funding may no longer stand to profit, and may fade to the background.

ACTION OPPORTUNITY: Clean Water Action is part of a statewide coalition whose efforts have centered around keeping the U.S. EPA as the primary overseers of these “Class VI” permanent injection activities. Our concerns are based on risks to our groundwater resources from oil and gas activities currently regulated by the (oddly named) Railroad Commission of Texas (RRC). Evidence mounts visibly in the proliferation of improperly abandoned “orphan” wells that occasionally rupture into acidic geysers that kill every flora and fauna they reach. Campaign contributions to the three elected Commissioners of the RRC from their regulated industry members grow with a bit less visibility, but indicate leaky barriers there, too.

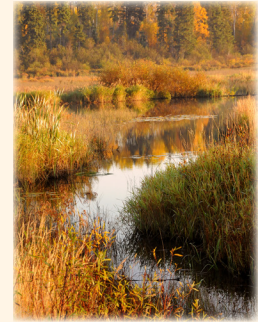
We ask that you consider signing a simple petition whose target is the EPA. The petition states that residents of Texas would like to see the licensing and regulation of the longterm CO₂ injection formations remain with the EPA and not be granted to the Railroad Commission of Texas.

[Please read the text of the petition and consider adding your name and sharing it within your community.](#)



2024 Election Results and Our Work

We're proud of our work to motivate clean water voters in the recent elections. See our state updates in this issue. The impact of the election on our national level work will, unfortunately, be dramatic. The new administration has committed to gutting federal agencies, rolling back health and environmental protections, and to taking us backwards on addressing the climate crisis. Among its priorities are further weakening the Clean Water Act's stream and wetlands protections, despite the devastation already caused by the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Sackett v. EPA*. Both the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate will be controlled by a party now seemingly hostile to strengthening environmental and health protections. Many members are committed to extreme federal budget cuts. We know that despite this rather dire reality, people's voices matter and our work can make a difference. We will be working to oppose anti-regulatory initiatives, to protect the clean water and clean air protections that the public supports, and to stand up for effective government that implements our landmark environmental laws to make people and our communities healthier.



The Safe Drinking Water Act: 50 Years of Progress — But the Work is Never Finished

The Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA) was signed into law by President Gerald Ford on December 16, 1974. The goal of the nation's first comprehensive drinking water law was to reduce risks to public health from drinking water. The law ushered in remarkable improvements and technical innovation in drinking water treatment and distribution. Still, the task is never complete. Clean Water's work around drinking water is focused on ensuring that we maintain the collective commitment to ensuring safe drinking water for all. Priority issues include:

- Making sure SDWA's contaminant limits keep up with health science around long-known contaminants like nitrates and arsenic and that regulations address "emerging" contaminants like microplastics
- Ensuring ongoing federal water infrastructure investments to support local drinking water system improvements and robust budgets for federal and state agency implementation of the law
- Elevating the need to keep pollutants out of our drinking water systems in the first place so that drinking water systems and their customers don't bear all the costs of removing contaminants like the notorious PFAS chemicals

A Win for Our Water: Progress On Getting Lead Out Of Drinking Water. On October 8, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the *Lead and Copper Rule Improvements*, regulations which require full replacement of lead service lines in drinking water systems. Putting lead service lines behind us has been a goal of Clean Water's work.

The vast majority of lead service lines, which bring water from the large water main into the home or building, will be replaced within ten years of the new regulation's implementation. The effort is supported by targeted funding from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, including \$2.6 billion in funding announced in October. "Because of lead's health impacts on children and adults, even at low levels, it is critical to reduce lead exposure wherever we can. We welcome the Biden-Harris administration and EPA's bold action. We can get lead out of drinking water and redouble efforts to eliminate lead exposure from paint, food, and other sources," National Campaigns Director Lynn Thorp said in our press release heralding the announcement.