

Voting for Change

The dust has settled from the Minnesota legislative session, and Clean Water Action's focus in Minnesota has shifted to the primary (Tuesday, August 11th) and general elections (Tuesday, November 3rd). Clean Water Action works to get pro-environment candidates elected, which has resulted in powerful legislation like Amara's Law — the nation's most comprehensive ban on toxic PFAS "forever chemicals." The issues that impact Minnesota have expanded on multiple fronts: defending Amara's Law against attacks from industries which manufacture or use PFAS; blocking or restraining the onslaught of hyperscale data centers which threaten our water, energy grid, farmland, and residential properties; banning toxic pesticides like paraquat dichloride and expanding protections for imperiled wild rice fields; and finding a better path forward for waste management to be less reliant on incinerators and landfills.



Clean Water Action and its allies got close to passing progressive laws on data centers, pesticides, and waste management during this past legislative session, but the state needs more pro-environment legislators in both major parties to get these policies over the finish line. You can find the endorsement list [here](#) of candidates Clean Water Action believes will be environmental champions for Minnesota and usher in policies to protect our environment for future generations.

TAKE ACTION! As one of our endorsed candidates for the Minnesota Senate likes to say, "citizen" is a verb more than a noun; voting for candidates who will stand up for the environment and stand against dismantling our democratic process and institutions sometimes just isn't enough.

Clean Water Action encourages you to [check out our action page](#) on our website, which makes it easy to send messages to your legislators, urging them to protect our environment and finite resources. Legislators work hard to represent their district and constituents, so it's critical to let them know that you support these policies and actions.

National PFAS Conference

In early June, State Director Avonna Starck attended the National PFAS Conference in Tucson, Arizona. This gathering brought together scientists, advocates, students, and impacted community members from across the country to confront one of the most pressing environmental health challenges of our time.

The conference served as a critical space for connection and collaboration, uniting individuals who share a deep commitment to addressing the PFAS crisis. Attendees engaged through a dynamic mix of panel presentations, lunch-and-learns, and group dinners. These formats are designed to encourage not only the exchange of information, but the building of lasting relationships across disciplines and sectors.

The breadth of topics covered reflected just how far-reaching the PFAS problem truly is. Discussions explored federal and state responses to PFAS contamination, including where policy has advanced and where significant gaps remain. Researchers shared the latest findings on the health impacts of PFAS exposure, with dedicated sessions examining how these chemicals affect pregnancy, lactation, and early child development — a reminder that the consequences of inaction fall hardest on the most vulnerable. Additional panels addressed how PFAS moves through the environment, underscoring the complexity of cleanup and containment efforts. Notably, the conference also took up the emerging issue of PFAS usage in data centers, which was a timely conversation as the technology sector's environmental footprint comes under greater scrutiny and Clean Water Action's work to combat this upcoming water crisis ramps up.

Minnesota's presence at this national conference carried particular weight. As the state that passed Amara's Law, which is widely recognized as the country's most comprehensive ban on PFAS, Minnesota has become a model for bold, proactive policymaking on this issue. That leadership positions Minnesota voices



▲ *This year's conference highlighted the important role states can play in this battle for clean water. States from across the country came together to share policy wins and strategic planning.*

as essential contributors to national conversations about what meaningful PFAS regulation can and should look like. When other states and advocates are asking what's possible, Minnesota's example offers a concrete answer.

Conferences like this one matter because the PFAS crisis does not respect state lines or sector boundaries. The chemicals have been found in drinking water, soil, food packaging, firefighting foam, and now the infrastructure powering our digital lives. Solving it requires exactly the kind of cross-sector, multi-disciplinary collaboration this gathering fosters — researchers informing advocates, advocates informing policymakers, and impacted communities ensuring that lived experience stays at the center of every conversation.

Avonna's participation reflects an ongoing commitment to showing up where the work is happening and bringing those insights back home to Minnesota.

At this year's National PFAS Conference, Indigenous voices took center stage, offering powerful perspectives on the ongoing PFAS crisis. Tribal speakers emphasized their sacred role as water protectors while confronting the harsh reality of environmental injustice. Their communities disproportionately bear the burden of contamination, despite contributing least to the problem. They called attention to the compounding inequities of costly remediation efforts that strain under-resourced communities, urging policymakers to center Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty when creating a meaningful path toward clean water.

The Threat of Hyperscale Data Centers

Large-scale data centers, also known as “hyperscale” data centers, are massive facilities that house rows and rows of servers for anything from cloud storage to artificial intelligence (AI) processing power. Given the applications and purposes of these hyperscale data centers, they need to run 24/7, 365 days a year. Minnesota is no stranger to smaller data centers, but these hyperscale data centers would be a new beast for the state to wrangle.

Clean Water Action supports a moratorium (ban) on new hyperscale data center construction in Minnesota, along with rigorous and robust regulations to rein in the intense resource demands of these facilities — most notably the energy and clean water use. For example, the hyperscale data center in Farmington proposed by Tract, a Colorado-based developer, is [slated to have a 708-megawatt \(MW\) capacity](#), meaning it could use up to 708 MW per day. That is equivalent to the daily energy use of approximately 538,000 Minnesotans, *roughly the populations of Minneapolis and Bloomington combined*, and 21 times the population of Farmington. Further, Tract stated in its environmental review for the proposal that the facility could use more than 2.35 million gallons of water per day — the equivalent daily usage of more than 45,000 Minnesotans. A spokesperson for Tract said the company has [refined](#) its water use projections since the environmental review was completed, and the actual amount is not expected

to exceed 137,000 gallons per day — a roughly 94% decrease — which should certainly raise questions as to why the estimate was so high to begin with and whether the revised number can be trusted.

And that’s just one hyperscale data center. There are currently more than a dozen other projects proposed around the state, most notably in Hermantown (Project Loon by Google), Monticello, and Pine Island (Project Skyway by Google). While Google has said their projects will bring new renewable energy generation with them and new technology will allow for less water usage, there are still significant concerns with these facilities. Water recycling, for example, reduces overall water usage, but then evaporation ponds are frequently utilized for the discharged water. Clean, drinkable water goes into the hyperscale data center, and water with chemical additives comes out — only to sit in a pond and evaporate into the air and potentially leach into the ground.

Hyperscale data centers pose too many risks to Minnesota to barrel forward, especially without enhanced regulations, and the order of operations is completely backwards. Minnesota should build out its clean energy infrastructure and shore up [emerging groundwater concerns](#) before entertaining these resource-hungry facilities. [Join us in saying no to hyperscale data centers.](#)



◀ Clean Water Action, coalition partners, and other opponents of hyperscale data centers during a rally at the Minnesota State Capitol on Feb. 18, 2026.

ReThink Wrap-Up

As we head into summer, we are wrapping up another season of helping communities “ReThink” their relationship with single-use plastics (SUPs). The food service industry is one of the largest generators of SUP waste, which is why we started ReThink Disposable — to address the problem at the source. ReThink Disposable aims to tackle the plastic crisis by reducing SUPs in the food service industry and supporting a shift toward reusable systems.

Through this program, we work directly with food providers to identify opportunities to eliminate unnecessary disposables and transition to reusable alternatives. We provide training, technical assistance, and mini-grants to help partners implement reusable systems that reduce waste, lower costs, and create long-term solutions. In total, we are preventing over 20,000 lbs. of plastic waste from entering the waste stream and saving participants over \$40,000 *each year*.

We’ve partnered with a wide range of food providers, including restaurants, schools, and event venues, while also working with local governments across the state to address single-use plastics on a broader scale. Each project demonstrates that small changes in daily operations can lead to meaningful reductions in plastic waste and support a more sustainable future. By shifting away from throwaway items and investing in reusables, ReThink Disposable helps organizations save resources, engage their communities, and create lasting change.



▲ Drop off day is always exciting for our ReThink organizers and participants! Our ReThink Organizer, Morgan, is dropping off reusable mugs to a participating cafe, Fawkes Alley.



We recently completed a pilot project at Duluth East High School to introduce reusable utensils into their breakfast program. Serving over 200 breakfasts daily, the school was able to demonstrate how reusable systems can work on a large scale. The pilot was a huge success, reducing single-use waste while engaging students throughout the process, even expanding the program to include composting infrastructure.

Based on this success, we will be expanding reusables into their lunch service next school year, serving over 1000 meals every day.



NATIONAL UPDATES

EPA Proposes to Roll Back PFAS Drinking Water Protections

In 2024, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized the nation's first drinking water standards for six toxic PFAS "forever chemicals," a major victory for public health after years of advocacy. Now, the Trump administration is proposing to rescind protections for PFHxS, PFNA, GenX chemicals, and PFAS mixtures while also creating a pathway for some water systems to delay compliance with the remaining PFOA and PFOS standards until 2031. PFAS contamination has been found in drinking water sources across the country and exposure to these chemicals has been linked to cancer, immune system suppression, developmental harms, and other serious health effects.

Clean Water Action strongly opposes these rollbacks. Communities should not be forced to wait longer for protection from toxic chemicals in their drinking water. Instead of weakening safeguards, EPA should accelerate efforts to prevent PFAS pollution at its source, hold polluters accountable, and strengthen protections for public health. During the public comment period, Clean Water Action is mobilizing members and allies to urge EPA to reject these proposals and maintain strong federal drinking water standards for PFAS. [Take action today](#) before the comment period closes July 20, 2026.

Honoring Excellence in Lead Pipe Replacement

On June 23rd, the Lead Service Line Replacement Collaborative recognized 16 people and programs leading the charge to remove lead from the nation's drinking water systems. During the recognition ceremony, Lynn Thorp, President of Clean Water Action and Lead Services Line Replacement Collaborative Steering Committee member, presented the block of awards related to excellence in community engagement, ensuring equal access to replacement, promoting public health protection, and other aspects of program design that reflect a collaborative approach to getting the job done. Read more [here](#).



Our National Campaigns Team is excited to welcome two fellows for the summer from the Yale Environmental Fellows Program and the Yale Conservation Scholars-Early Leadership Initiative: **Jagur Parks** and **Brandi Williams**.

As part of their first week, they had the opportunity to visit Climate Action Campaign's unique pop-up, the Museum of Unnatural Disasters. This moving exhibit highlighted how extreme climate events are affecting us all through artifacts and survivor stories.



EPA's Latest Giveaway to the Coal Industry

Clean Water Action has worked on securing stronger wastewater limits for coal plants for more than 13 years. In 2024, EPA finalized long-overdue protections to help control the hundreds of millions of pounds of toxic pollution being released by coal plants each year. Yet, in December 2025, EPA extended compliance deadlines by up to five years, prolonging the release of dangerous pollutants into our waterways. Now, in a second giveaway to the coal industry, EPA is proposing to weaken federal wastewater standards at up to 113 coal plants across the country. The proposed rule would threaten drinking water, damage critical ecosystems, and put the health of communities across the country at risk.

During the comment period, we spoke out at meetings with EPA, mobilized thousands of comments urging EPA to withdraw its plans, and coordinated a [community comment letter](#) with nearly 65 national, state, and local organizations opposing the rule. Thank you for helping us push back against EPA's latest giveaway to the coal industry.

Juneteenth and Environmental Justice: Juneteenth is a celebration of liberation, resilience, and the ongoing struggle to ensure that the promise of freedom is realized for everyone. As part of our efforts commemorating this important day, we're proud to highlight the environmental justice work happening across Clean Water Action. Read about it in [our latest blog](#).



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