

Iowa PIRG

CITIZEN AGENDA

A Report To Members Of Iowa Public Interest Research Group

Save Our Wild Forests

Iowa PIRG's Last Stand On Forests

With one of the most important land conservation initiatives in American history on the Bush administration's chopping block, Iowa PIRG has joined forces with dozens of environmental advocates to save the Roadless Area Conservation Rule. The administration announced its intent to repeal the Roadless Rule on July 12.

According to Preservation Advocate Tiernan Sittenfeld, "The administration has unleashed another assault on our last wild forests, once again siding with the timber industry over the American public."

Iowa PIRG helped win the Roadless Rule in 2001, which protected the last wild areas in our national forests—58.5 million acres in 39 states—from most logging and road-building. Decades of scientific study, 600 public hearings, and a record-setting public comment period supported the rule's passage.

But the Bush administration has consistently undermined the rule, including exempting Alaska's Tongass National Forest, the country's largest, last December.

The administration's plan would allow governors to petition the federal government to protect roadless areas of national forest in their states—or to propose logging, mining and drilling in these places.

More than 120 members of the House of Representatives and 24

senators, including Iowa Sen. Tom Harkin, sent letters to the President opposing the repeal of the Rule.

Iowa PIRG is working with other state PIRGs, the Heritage Forests Campaign and others to alert the public and encourage citizens to make their views known. Sittenfeld and her allies are calling on the administration to withdraw its repeal and keep the rule intact. ■



Alicia Suprenant

PROTECTING WILD FORESTS—Tiernan Sittenfeld, a preservation advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, speaks outside the Capitol about the Bush administration's weakening of the Roadless Rule.

No More Mercury

600,000 Tell White House To Get Tough On Mercury

A record number of Americans have joined Iowa PIRG in publicly opposing a Bush administration plan to delay critical reductions in mercury pollution from power plants.

During a 5 month comment period, more than 600,000 citizens objected to the administration's plan in e-mail, postcards and letters to EPA Administrator Michael Leavitt.

"We can do better. We already have the technology to virtually eliminate mercury emissions from power plants. But the Bush administration is allowing big energy

companies to dictate what should be a common sense decision to protect our children's health," said Emily Figdor, a clean air advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, at a June 29 news conference held outside the White House to deliver the comments. Figdor was joined by spokespeople for Physicians for Social Responsibility, Sierra Club and Clean Air Trust.

Figdor cited EPA estimates that one in six women of childbearing age have enough mercury in their blood to put a fetus or breast-feed-

Member Action

✓ MERCURY
Visit www.iowapirg.org to e-mail Sens. Chuck Grassley and Tom Harkin. Urge them to oppose the Bush administration's dangerous mercury plan.

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Vol. 3, No. 1

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■ New Voters Project

Iowa PIRG Sponsors Project To Get Young People Into The Habit Of Voting

Youth voting in this country has declined over the past two decades—which is bad news for a democracy. In 2000, only 36 percent of the eligible population between the ages of 18 and 24 voted in national elections.



NEW VOTERS PROJECT—The New Voters Project is working to turn around the trend on youth voting by registering students and others to vote, and mobilizing young people to turn out to vote.

That's why Iowa PIRG and other state PIRGs, with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts, are sponsoring the largest youth voter mobilization campaign in history—the New Voters Project.

Right here in Iowa, organizers based out of regional offices in Des Moines and Iowa City are fanning out throughout the state in one of the biggest efforts in the country.

"The strength of a democracy is measured by the participation of its citizens, especially its younger citizens," said Ivan Frishberg, a New Voters Project organizer.

A Winning Strategy

The New Voters Project is a non-partisan voter registration and get-out-the-vote campaign focused on 18- to 24-year-olds, with a goal of registering 300,000 new voters nationwide before the November elections.

But the key to the project isn't just size and breadth; It's strategy. Research shows that young people are more effectively persuaded to vote when they're asked by another young person, as opposed to the celebrity gimmicks and endorsements common in media youth voter mobilization efforts.

That's why the New Voters Project is sending thousands of young organizers and volunteers onto hundreds of college campuses and into communities across the country.

By demonstrating that, with the right approach, new young voters will come to the table, the New Voters Project will encourage politicians to address the issues that affect young people in elections.

And, more importantly, these new voters will likely continue to vote, election after election, strengthening America's democracy. Research shows that people who start voting at a young age will continue to vote throughout their lives.

History Of Success

The state PIRGs are not strangers to this type of voter outreach. Over the past 30 years, the state PIRGs have been involved in a number of

nonpartisan efforts to register voters, get voters out to the polls, and help ease barriers to voting.

- In 1984, the Student PIRGs were instrumental in establishing the National Student Campaign for Voter Registration.

- In 1993, the state PIRGs helped pass the National Voter Registration Act—better known as Motor Voter—to enable people to register to vote when they apply for or renew a drivers license, to make registration forms available at social service agencies, and to expand mail-in voter registration.

In 1995, the first full year of implementation, more than 11 million citizens registered to vote or updated their voting addresses under the law. This figure represents the largest increase in voter registration since the practice was established.

- And, in 2002, the state PIRGs won regulations that encourage every college and university receiving federal funds to include voter registration materials as part of the enrollment process.

To learn more, please visit the New Voters Project Web site at www.newvotersproject.org. ■

Member Action

✓ VOTE

Help get out the vote. Ask a young person you know to accompany you to the polls this November.

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Distributor: UMB Distribution Services, LLC 7/04

News Briefs

House Blocks Subsidies For Tongass Roads

Iowa PIRG and other state PIRGs played a key role in winning a June 16 vote to stop taxpayer subsidies for construction of new logging roads in Alaska's Tongass National Forest.

Voting 222 to 205, the U.S. House adopted an Iowa PIRG-backed amendment to a key appropriations bill, cutting as much as \$35 million for construction of logging roads in America's largest national forest.

The amendment was offered by Rep. Steve Chabot (Ohio) and Rep. Tom Andrews (N.J.), cochair of the "Green Scissors" caucus, a group that seeks to cut wasteful, anti-environment spending in the federal budget.

The Tongass is the largest intact coastal temperate rainforest left in the world. In the past 20 years, the Forest Service has wasted more than \$750 million of taxpayer money by building roads to allow private companies to log in the Tongass.

This victory is particularly important in light of the Bush administration's exemption of the Tongass from the Roadless Area Conservation Rule (see page 1).



TONGASS NATIONAL FOREST—Advocate Navin Nayak calls for an end to taxpayer subsidies for logging in the Tongass.

Iowa PIRG hopes to work with champions in the Senate on a similar amendment. ■

Consumers Allowed Free Credit Reports

A new law enacted in July—the Fair and Accurate Credit Transactions Act—will allow consumers to get free credit reports from all three national credit bureaus with one request via phone call or Web site visit.

Consumers should make full use of this new right, as Ed Mierzwinski and Alison Cassady, both of Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, demonstrated in a June report on credit bureau accuracy, "Mistakes Do Happen."

In their study of credit reports, one in four reports had errors serious enough to cause a consumer to be denied credit.

More than half of the reports contained personal demographic identifying information that was misspelled, long-outdated, belonged to a stranger, or was otherwise incorrect.

Almost one-third of the credit reports contained credit accounts that had been closed by the consumer but incorrectly remained listed as open.

While decrying the Federal Trade Commission's decision to phase in the right to free credit reports too slowly, Mierzwinski said, "A consumer's best defense is to check up on the credit bureaus by taking full advantage of their right to receive a free copy or their credit report every year." ■

Health Threat Posed By Toxic Flame Retardant

A commonly used flame retardant is a threat to human health and should be phased out, according to "Body of Evidence," an Iowa PIRG



CREDIT REPORTING MISTAKES—Ed Mierzwinski, a consumer advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office, released "Mistakes Do Happen," a report documenting errors by credit bureaus. The report found one in four consumers surveyed had mistakes serious enough to be denied credit.

report. The report was released by Meghan Purvis, a toxics and environmental health advocate in Iowa PIRG's Washington, D.C., office on Feb. 18.

Manufacturers of common household products add decabrominated diphenyl ether (Deca) to plastics or fabrics to make them resist the spread of fire.

But a growing body of evidence shows that exposure to Deca may cause adverse health effects, including damage to the nervous system and impaired motor skills.

Research shows Deca can break down into the types of flame retardants banned in the European Union and California because of their bioaccumulative and toxic properties.

Just six weeks after the report release, Reps. Hilda L. Solis (Calif.), Diana DeGette (Colo.) and Lynn Woolsey (Calif.) introduced the Toxic Flame Retardant Prohibition Act (HR 4076) to phase out and label certain brominated flame retardants, including Deca.

Purvis helped to build support for this legislation and efforts in Congress to reform U.S. toxics policy more broadly including requiring safety testing of chemicals before they are introduced to the market. ■

Iowa PIRG Citizen Agenda

is published three times a year in June, October and January by Iowa Public Interest Research Group. Members contributing \$25 or more receive Iowa PIRG Citizen Agenda. \$1.25 of your contribution pays for the newsletter; the rest goes to public interest research, advocacy and other expenses. For information on membership, contact Iowa PIRG, 3111 Ingersoll, 2nd Floor, Des Moines, IA 50312 or e-mail info@iowapirg.org. Information about Iowa PIRG is also available on the web at www.iowapirg.org.

IOWA PIRG



■ No More Mercury

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ing baby at risk of learning disabilities, developmental delays and other serious health problems. Eating contaminated fish is the primary way people are exposed to mercury.

While industrial sources have reduced their emissions of mercury by more than 90 percent within a few short years, power plants—the single largest source of mercury emissions—continue to emit unlimited amounts of mercury into the air.

Yet under the Bush administration's plan, power plants would emit more mercury than current law allows and would do so over a much longer period of time.

"In short, the Bush plan offers too little, too late to protect children from mercury exposure," said Figdor.

Since it became public, news reports have uncovered serious irregularities in the development of the Bush administration's plan.

For example, sections of the proposal were taken verbatim from memos written by Latham & Watkins, a law firm that represents several large electric utilities, and West Associates, which represents 20 power and transmission companies in Western states.



MOTHER'S DAY "STROLLER LOBBY"—Iowa PIRG, other state PIRGs and Clear the Air organized a delegation representing over 100 mothers and mothers-to-be who met with White House staff to urge the administration to take stronger action to protect children's health from toxic mercury.

In May, the EPA Inspector General opened an investigation into the proposal's development. The proposal also has sparked controversy in the halls of Congress.

In April, 45 members of the U.S. Senate urged the EPA to strengthen the mercury plan. In June, 184 members of the House of Representatives sent a similar letter.

Iowa PIRG continues to work to press the Bush administration to drop its mercury proposal and instead finalize a plan to reduce mercury emissions by 90 percent by 2008, as the law requires. ■

■ Iowa PIRG

Iowa PIRG is an advocate for the public interest. When consumers are cheated, or our natural environment is threatened, or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, Iowa PIRG speaks up and takes action. The organization uncovers threats to public health and well-being and fights to end them, using the time tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. Iowa PIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects our environment, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

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Iowa PIRG Citizen Agenda is the report of Iowa Public Interest Research Group, Inc. (Iowa PIRG), sent to Iowa PIRG members three times a year. Printed on recycled paper.

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