For more than a decade, Washington’s leading environmental groups have been getting the job done. From protecting sensitive forest habitat to retiring a coal-fired power plant to restoring Puget Sound, the Environmental Priorities Coalition is a leader in passing legislation and securing funding to protect our state, our communities, and our health.

**about the coalition**

The Environmental Priorities Coalition is a network of more than twenty leading environmental advocacy groups in Washington state. Each year, the Coalition comes together to select between two and four issues to advance in the state legislature. Over the last twelve years, the Environmental Priorities Coalition has emerged as a national model and inspired similar coalitions in other states.
The Coalition provides a forum for coordinating and communicating a shared vision for environmental action and pooling together the unique resources of each organization to maximize the voice of the environmental community. In addition to providing a clear set of expectations for decision makers and being able to hold them accountable for their actions, the Coalition coordinates its activities to identify key opportunities and challenges as well as to maximize the effectiveness of each member organization. For example, environmental community lobbyists communicate often and organize shared meetings with the Governor’s staff and key legislators during session. As a result, Coalition member organizations can also unite around important issues that may not be identified as a Priority in a given year. Defending critical environmental laws like I-937, providing needed support for product stewardship bills, and securing needed funding in the budget have all benefitted from the Coalition’s efforts during years when those issues are not formally adopted as a priority.

LESSONS LEARNED

Victories are not automatic with the passage of legislation. Lack of enforcement, ineffective reporting mechanisms, and limited funding can defeat the true intent of a Priority even if a bill is passed.

Building relationships beyond the coalition’s membership to foster robust legislative support can be leveraged beyond the legislative session and used for ensuing work around the issue.

Victories can be had without legislation, but often require budget expertise and creativity.

Multi-year campaigns are required when striving for systemic change. Time is needed to develop relationships, build knowledge about the issue among the public and decision-makers, and create viable solutions.

A defensive Priority can be a powerful tool, but a tool that should be used sparingly to remain effective.

Campaigns may prove more effective at starting a dialogue, educating the public, and developing strategic messaging framework than passing a particular piece of legislation.
PRIORITY CASE STUDIES

case study #1

The 2005 High Performance Green Buildings and 2009 Efficiency First campaigns promoted energy-efficient infrastructure, leading to healthier and more productive built environments. As a result, Washington has been ranked one of the top three states for energy codes by the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy.

case study #2

The 2005 Sound Solutions and 2006 Clean Up Puget Sound campaigns improved water quality and prevented pollution from thousands of septic tanks in the Puget Sound region. As a result, shellfish harvest areas were expanded by 1,656 acres and a source of funding to help address failing septic systems was established.

case study #3

The 2007 Elimination of Toxic Flame Retardants campaign helped Washington pass the first legislation in the nation to ban all three forms of the toxic flame retardants known as PBDEs. Washington’s legislation proved catalyst for change. Experts are now seeing scientific evidence that PBDE levels are decreasing in our natural environment.

case study #4

The 2011 Coal Free Washington campaign proved a historic success that will lead to the retirement of Washington’s last coal-fired power plant, our state’s single largest source of nitrogen oxide, carbon dioxide, and mercury pollution.

conclusions

Over the last twelve years, the Environmental Priorities Coalition has empowered a critical shift in the Evergreen State’s environmental advocacy. The Coalition has learned from its success and failures and evolved to make environmental action more effective. The Coalition’s biggest success, however, was demonstrating the power of collaboration. Pooling resources, recognizing capacity strengths and limitations and managing for those differences, as well as maintaining shared vision and communication strategy has allowed legislators to confidently champion environmental issues rather than feel overwhelmed by the environmental community’s varied expectations. This in turn has produced real gains for the environment.
2003 Mercury Reduction  
2003 Conservation Budget  
2003 Environmental Rollback Defense  
2003 Transportation  
2004 Stopping Toxic Pollution  
2004 Sustainable State Forests  
2004 Protecting Stream Flows  
2004 Efficient and Renewable Energy  
2005 High Performance Green Building  
2005 Cleaner Air - Cleaner Cars  
2005 Sound Solutions  
2005 Phasing Out Toxics  
2006 Launch Electronic Waste Recycling  
2006 Clean Up Puget Sound  
2006 Promote Energy Independence  
2006 Protect Kids’ Health  
2007 Clean-Air/Clean Fuels  
2007 Save Our Sound  
2007 $100 Million for WWRP  
2007 Eliminating Toxic Flame Retardants  
2008 Climate Action & Green Jobs  
2008 Local Solutions to Global Warming  
2008 Evergreen Cities  
2008 Local Farms - Healthy Kids  
2009 Cap and Invest  
2009 Transit Oriented Communities  
2009 Efficiency First  
2009 Invest in Clean Water  
2010 Working for Clean Water  
2010 Sustain Environmental Protections in the Budget  
2010 Safe Baby Bottle Bill  
2011 Clean Fertilizers, Healthier Lakes and Rivers  
2011 Coal Free Future for Washington  
2011 Budget Solutions for Our Environment  
2011 Clean Water Jobs Act  
2012 Pollution Free Prosperity  
2012 Fulfill Our Clean Energy Initiative  
2012 Toxic-Free Kids Act  
2013 Clean Energy Solutions  
2013 Toxic-Free Kids & Families  
2013 Conservation Works  
2014 Big Oil Tax Loophole  
2014 Oil Transportation Safety Act

environmental priorities coalition members

American Rivers  Sierra Club Cascade Chapter
Audubon Washington  Sound Action
Cascade Bicycle Club  Surfrider Foundation
Climate Solutions  The Lands Council
Conservation Northwest  The Nature Conservancy
Earth Ministry  Transportation Choices Coalition
Environment Washington  Washington Conservation Voters
Faith Action Network  Washington Environmental Council
Fuse Washington  Washington Toxics Coalition
Futurewise  Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition
League of Women Voters of Washington  Zero Waste Washington
NW Energy Coalition

The full report *Washington’s Environmental Priorities: A look back at 12 years of leadership by the Environmental Priorities Coalition* provides high level analysis of all past Priorities and more in-depth review of four case studies involving six Priorities. [visit weprotects.org/past-priorities](http://weprotects.org/past-priorities)