



Protecting the Midwest

ELPC 2024 Report



ENVIRONMENTAL LAW
& POLICY CENTER

Protecting the Great Lakes and Midwest's Wild & Natural Places



Turning Power Plants to Parklands & Renewables in Michigan

ELPC recently announced a breakthrough with Consumers Energy, conservation groups, and leading elected officials to redevelop the Daniel E. Karn retired coal plant site on Saginaw Bay in Michigan. This exciting greenway plan will restore public access to the Saginaw Bay & River waterfront that has been behind the plant's fences for decades, opening opportunities for recreational use, conservation, and public enjoyment. Consumers Energy will also be developing 85 megawatts of solar on the site that is already hard-wired into the electricity grid. ELPC's Power Plants to Parklands + Renewable Energy (P2P + RE) initiative is setting an innovative precedent to be replicated in transforming retired coal plant sites in Michigan, across the Midwest, and nationally.



Stopping a Toxic Waste Dump on Chicago's Southeast Side

ELPC's public interest attorneys are litigating in federal court and other public forums on behalf of the Alliance of the Southeast and Friends of the Parks. We're fighting to stop the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' proposed 25-foot-high toxic dredged waste dump along the Lake Michigan shoreline on Chicago's Southeast Side. It would put the lake and residents at risk in an environmental justice community that is already overloaded with toxic pollution, especially as the shoreline is increasingly battered by more intense storms and heavy waves due to climate change. Moreover, this lakefront site was long ago promised to be capped, restored, and converted into a public park for all to enjoy. The lakefront is for people and parks, not more toxic pollution.



Protecting Wetlands in Illinois

The U.S. Supreme Court's misguided Sackett decision curtailed federal jurisdiction to protect wetlands under the federal Clean Water Act. ELPC is stepping up in Illinois and other Midwest states to protect vital wetlands and community waterways.

Expanding Federal Wilderness in Michigan's U.P. & Southern Illinois

ELPC is leading the Keep the U.P. Wild coalition, with hundreds of organizations and businesses to expand federal Wilderness protections for 50,000 acres in Michigan's Upper Peninsula. We're also on the verge of achieving additional protections for 12,000 acres in the Shawnee National Forest.

Climate Solutions

Clean Energy and Transportation

Grid Equity & Energy Justice

ELPC achieved two big wins this year pursuing a more just transition to clean energy. Thanks to ELPC's legal intervention in Michigan, Consumers Energy is now required to perform innovative analysis on energy justice and reliability. Similarly, in Minnesota, Xcel Energy's new integrated distribution plan aims to improve grid efficiency, reliability, and equity.

Taking on Coal in Iowa

ELPC is working to shut down coal plants in Iowa. Shifting away from fossil fuels will save money while reducing air pollution and fighting climate change. ELPC is focused on transparency for everyday Iowans, pushing for long-term energy planning to put the state on the right path toward cost-effective clean energy and an end to misleading utility programs.

Improving Illinois Transportation

The transportation sector is now the largest source of carbon pollution. Public transit that works well is essential for avoiding pollution from cars, while improving mobility and equity. Illinois' public transit system, however, is facing a fiscal cliff that could lead to 40% service cuts if lawmakers don't act. ELPC is working with civic, transportation, community, and policy leaders to achieve much-needed governance reform and funding to keep the trains and buses running and improve for the future. ELPC and partners are advocating for a more sustainable renovation of the iconic North DuSable Lake Shore Drive that can reduce barriers to accessing Lake Michigan, improve lakefront park space, and prioritize public transit with rapid bus lanes. ELPC is also engaged to save Chicago's intercity bus station, which is a vital affordable and sustainable transportation option for travel across the Midwest.

Advancing Passenger Rail

Modern, fast, comfortable, and convenient passenger rail service throughout the Midwest will reduce pollution, improve mobility, and boost the regional economy. The new Borealis train serving Minneapolis-Milwaukee-Chicago is exceeding ridership expectations by nearly double. ELPC is working on improving and creating new rail lines through Indiana, Ohio, and Illinois, while celebrating new funds for the Chicago Hub Improvement Program to modernize Union Station as a nexus for the regional network.

Funding Electric School Buses

ELPC's longtime leadership in advancing electric school buses is paying off with the new \$5 billion federal Clean School Bus program. ELPC has been working with schools, parents, and community groups to bring 1,435 new EV school buses to 200 school districts across the Midwest. They are reaching urban and rural communities alike, to protect kids from dirty diesel emissions and reduce greenhouse gas pollution.



Cleaner Air, Safer Water, Healthier Communities

Stopping Toxic Algae Outbreaks

ELPC is working to reduce pollution from Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs), stop toxic algae, and protect clean water in multiple Midwest states. In Ohio, the lawsuit continues as we push the state and federal government to finally develop a cleanup plan necessary to remedy Lake Erie's toxic algae. In Michigan, when the state created stronger standards for large-scale animal agriculture and opponents filed a lawsuit, ELPC stepped in to defend the state's good efforts, and won in the Michigan Supreme Court! In Wisconsin, we're analyzing winter application of CAFO waste, which is particularly dangerous for water quality, and holding state regulators to account to make sure the CAFO permits they are issuing protect the environment and local communities.

Protecting People, Parks, and Lake Michigan in Northwest Indiana

Northwest Indiana has an extraordinary mix of people and communities: the iconic Indiana Dunes National Park, and the Lake Michigan ecosystem, alongside huge polluting oil refineries and steel mills. ELPC attorneys are in courts and regulatory agencies working to reduce air and water pollution and clean up the environment for all. ELPC represented the Gary Advocates for Responsible Development to stop a proposed waste-to-energy plant that would have worsened air quality, and we are engaged to tighten up Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act permits on the biggest polluters for cleaner industry.

Defending Clean Water & Wetlands in Iowa

Right-wing groups filed a federal court lawsuit in Iowa seeking to invalidate the "Swampbuster" program in the 1985 Farm Bill that has protected wetlands nationwide for nearly four decades. ELPC attorneys are representing the Iowa Farmers Union as intervenors to keep the Swampbuster programs working well.



Support ELPC:
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A message from **ELPC's Board Chair and Executive Director**

What a year! Here's some good news, and, indeed, **some great news that you will read about in this report.**

Breakthrough in Power Plants to Parklands + Renewable Energy Project in Michigan – Innovating & Replicating:

Coal plants are retiring throughout the Great Lakes region, and all are on lakes and rivers. That valuable lakeshore and riverfront property has long been hidden behind utility gates and fences. ELPC envisioned a once-in-a-generation opportunity to regain these Great Lakes shorelines for public parks and greenways – for beaches, hiking and biking, boating and fishing, and just playing in the outdoors. And, we're working with the utilities to develop solar energy and battery storage on these plant sites that are already hard-wired into the electricity grid. This Power Plants to Parklands + Renewable Energy (P2P+RE) Project is a new vision for these historic coal plant sites. In this report, you will read about a breakthrough with Consumers Energy on the retired Karn Coal Plant. This is an exciting and innovative precedent that can be replicated in transforming the hundreds of retired coal plant sites across the Midwest and nationally.

Stopping Toxic Threats in Environmental Justice Communities: ELPC takes on the big, important battles, representing local groups in communities that are already overburdened by toxic pollution. On Chicago's Southeast Side, we're challenging the Army Corps of Engineers' plans to build a towering toxic dredged waste dump along the shores of Lake Michigan. In Northwest Indiana, we're holding the large steel manufacturing, oil refining, and other facilities accountable for their air and water pollution. Everyone has a right to breathe healthy clean air, drink safe water, and live in communities without toxic threats.

Driving Climate Solutions and Clean Energy: ELPC attorneys and technical experts are engaged before Public Utilities Commissions across the Midwest. These backrooms are where the arcane "rules of the road" get set to either modernize the distribution grid for more solar energy, to set fair rates, and to accelerate climate solutions, or not. The rules set in one- or two-year hearings impact how our energy system works for decades. ELPC attorneys and policy advocates are leading the regional charge for a cleaner, more modern, and more distributed electricity grid for the future.

At ELPC, we don't throw up our hands. **We roll up our sleeves.** We develop **sound strategies.** **We play to win,** and **we get things done** that make a real difference.

Our Great Lakes, our Midwestern communities, our treasured landscapes, and the future of our planet deserve all that and more. Thank you for all you have done to partner with and support ELPC. And, thank you for all that you will continue to do. Let's work together and make a difference together for people, our communities, and for our planet.

~ **Howard & Manny**



Howard A. Learner

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ELPC Staff enjoying the outdoors at the annual staff retreat in Wisconsin

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