



Parks, Air, & Water

Northwest Indiana Protector Project

Northwest Indiana is a unique and extraordinary place, home to diverse communities, Lake Michigan shoreline, National and State Parks, and globally rare dune and swale ecology. This beauty is interspersed with massive polluting industrial facilities, including three steel mills, an oil refinery, and chemical plants.

In late 2022, ELPC launched the Northwest Indiana Air, Parks, and Water Protector Projects. We are working to ensure industrial facilities play by the rules and implement the latest modern emissions control technologies to reduce pollution and protect public health. ELPC, in partnership with long-time environmental advocates and community groups, have taken several significant steps toward improving the environmental quality of this region:



Cowles Bog, Indiana Dunes National Park

BP Whiting Oil Refinery

In February 2024, a series of leaks caused by equipment failures and a power outage, prompted the plant to shut down and burn off excess product, resulting in increased pollution, sky-high flames, and smoke for miles. ELPC & partners



BP Whiting Refinery flares & smoke, Feb 2024

helped galvanize 100+ community members to attend meetings with the Indiana Department of Environmental Management, as residents called on the state to do more. We reviewed BP's draft air permit, identified numerous serious defects, filed formal comments to IDEM with a broad coalition of local groups, and even met with EPA Region 5 representatives to discuss our concerns. The BP Whiting Refinery's Clean Water Act permit is also up for renewal, so we are currently reviewing the draft and working on comments calling for stronger protections, especially given these recent operational failures.

Maya Energy

In May 2023, ELPC represented Gary Advocates for Responsible Development (GARD) in a complaint arguing that IDEM had violated residents' civil rights by approving a waste processing facility near the Black neighborhood of Glen Park, across the street from a k-12 school. In 2024, the funding fell apart, and the project was disbanded.

Carmeuse Lime

In November 2023, ELPC filed formal comments identifying numerous problems with this facility's draft water permit. Fortunately, in April 2024, we learned that in response, IDEM issued a violation notice against the facility and required it to update its stormwater pollution prevention plan. This update will help protect Lake Michigan.





Cleveland-Cliffs Steel Mills

Cleveland-Cliffs operates two steel mills in Northwest Indiana, in Burns Harbor and East Chicago's Indiana Harbor. After years of permit violations, the Burns Harbor mill had a particularly disastrous discharge in 2019 of ammonia and cyanide that killed 3,000 fish and closed Indiana beaches. ELPC and the Hoosier Environmental Council filed a Clean Water Act lawsuit and won! In 2022, we reached a successful settlement that will help prevent such a disaster from happening again and secure additional land for the neighboring Indiana Dunes National Park. We have continued to keep our eye on Cleveland-Cliffs facilities ever since.



Cleveland-Cliffs Burns Harbor facility

When the Indiana Harbor facility water permits were up for renewal in 2023, ELPC and partners filed formal comments focused on disregard for environmental justice, outdated technology and requirements, and a harmful mercury variance. ELPC attorneys also requested tighter air permits for both the Burns Harbor and Indiana Harbor locations, focused on requiring installation of modern, better technologies to reduce air pollution and force Cleveland-Cliffs to internalize the environmental and public health costs of the steel mill's operation on Northwest Indiana communities and Lake Michigan. Working with partners, we called for public meetings, galvanized community members to come out in force, and met with EPA Region 5 to follow up on our concerns.

Coke NESHAMP Regulations

Coke ovens are a significant source of benzene and other hazardous air pollutants. In 2023, ELPC submitted comments to EPA's proposed revisions to the Coke Oven National Emission Standard for Hazardous Air Pollutants (NESHAP). Fortunately, new stronger standards were finalized in May of 2024, affecting the Gary Works and Burns Harbor facilities, in particular.



Hoosiers Protest Air Pollution

Ozone Attainment Status

Ozone levels are increasing and that the largest sources of the precursors to ozone (NOx and VOCs) are Indiana's steel mills along the lakeshore. However, Indiana proposed taking no further action to reduce ozone levels to attain EPA's health-based standard. In June 2023, ELPC filed formal comments, and in September we wrote to EPA calling for tighter scrutiny.

U.S. Steel Mills

Gary, Indiana was founded on U.S. Steel, and the company's plants in Northwest Indiana continue to be major economic drivers for the region and major polluters. ELPC has advocated for stronger air and water permits for the Gary Works and Midwest facilities by petitioning for public meetings, creating factsheets, writing blogs, organizing attendees, and filing public comments. Fortunately, in the final water permit for the U.S. Steel Gary Works facility published September 2024, IDEM heeded our concerns and made improvements that will help improve compliance, reduce confusion, and protect clean water.

