



GREAT RIVERS
ENVIRONMENTAL
LAW CENTER

SPRING 2026 REPORTER

WE'RE SUING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

FIGHTING TO PROTECT THE LEGAL FOUNDATION OF FEDERAL CLIMATE POLICY

On February 12, 2026, the Trump administration repealed the EPA's endangerment finding — the legal cornerstone of federal climate regulation for nearly two decades. Without it, the EPA loses its primary authority to regulate the emissions driving climate change. **We are fighting back.**

OUR CLIENTS IN THIS MATTER

Missouri Coalition for the Environment

Metropolitan Congregations United



Image credit: Shutterstock

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center has filed suit against the EPA on behalf of Missouri Coalition for the Environment and Metropolitan Congregations United, challenging the repeal as unlawful. This is not a rollback of one regulation. It is an attempt to remove the foundation that makes federal climate protection possible.

We covered the endangerment finding in depth in our Fall 2025 Reporter. If you missed it, you can catch up at [greatriverslaw.org/newsletter](https://www.greatriverslaw.org/newsletter). Stay tuned for updates as this case moves forward.

This Issue

We're Suing The Trump Administration

Page 1

A Letter From Leadership

Page 2

The Right to Clean Air

Page 3

Fighting Fire with...Chemicals

Page 4

Defending Essential Ecosystems

Pages 5

A History of Protecting Parks

Page 6 & 7

Save The Date

Page 7

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center
4625 Lindell Blvd • Suite 200 • St. Louis, MO 63108
(314) 231-4181 • www.greatriverslaw.org

MADE WITH 30% RECYCLED MATERIAL



OUR MISSION

Our organization safeguards natural resources, advocates for clean energy and environmental justice, and assists communities in protecting their health through expert legal support.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Wallis Warren, *Chair*
Dhruv Mitroo, *Vice Chair*
Andrew Bouquet, *Treasurer*
Steve Mahfood, *Secretary*
Villie Appoo
David Bohm
Garrett Broshuis
Kally Coleman
David Coonrod
Cynthia Holmes
Cristin Levine
Debbie Njai
Henry Robertson
Rebecca Weaver

Louise Green, *Honorary*
Yusha "Tom" Sager, *Emeritus*

STAFF

Dulamsuren Bayarsaikhan
Office Manager, Bookkeeper

Natalie Johnson
Executive Director

Zac McMillan
*Director of Development
and External Relations*

Bob Menees
Staff Attorney

Bruce A. Morrison
General Counsel

Sarah Rubenstein
Staff Attorney

Caitlin Stiltner
Staff Attorney

A LETTER FROM LEADERSHIP

In January, I found myself in a room full of environmental allies at a regional climate summit, listening as familiar concerns about climate and community rose to the surface. A week later, I was in a very different room, sitting with my fellow Rotary Club members, having a thoughtful and practical conversation about climate change, what it means for our communities, and what we should be doing about it now.

What caught my attention was how naturally it happened. We were talking about large load tariffs and data centers, not at a conference, not among environmental professionals, but at Rotary. That felt like something worth paying attention to.

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center exists for exactly that moment, when concern becomes conversation and conversation is ready to become action.

We are intentional about meeting people where they are, through community lawyering, policy advocacy, and direct legal action that translates shared concern into concrete protections for land, air, and water. The partners we work alongside do not always call themselves environmental organizations, but they understand what is at stake, and they are ready to act.

That readiness is what energizes me. This past year, we built partnerships that would not have seemed obvious on paper, and we are seeing what becomes possible when unexpected allies work toward the same goal.

I hope the stories in this newsletter send you back into your own communities ready to keep the conversation going.

With appreciation,

Natalie Johnson
Executive Director



THE RIGHT TO CLEAN AIR

DO FACTORIES HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO NEARBY NEIGHBORS?

Who is responsible when a factory's fumes and emissions begin to affect the people living nearby? The Clean Air Act serves as the first line of defense against industrial air pollution, but it was not designed to catch everything.

Some facilities fall below federal emissions thresholds and are therefore exempt from federal permits and oversight entirely.

These are known as *de minimis sources*.

When that happens, the responsibility for monitoring and enforcement falls to State and local governments. And when they fail to act, there is no backstop.

For many years, residents of the Indian Meadows neighborhood in Olivette, Missouri have reported serious health impacts from strong chemical fumes as well as noise and light pollution around the clock, suspected to be coming from a nearby steel galvanizing facility. These are not minor inconveniences. One resident told us about watching schoolchildren walk off the bus and straight into the haze, day after day.

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center is concerned that the facility is violating numerous county ordinances, failing to comply with its permit conditions, and is endangering the health of the people who live nearby. While the facility has operated in this area for decades, residents say the problems have grown significantly worse in recent years.

While St. Louis County claims that the facility is in compliance with its permits and County ordinances, the County also admits that it has not done any air testing or monitoring, and has not recorded noise levels from the facility throughout the night. It is difficult to claim compliance when the basic work of verification has not been done.

The residents of Indian Meadows deserve to breathe clean air, sleep through the night, and live in their homes without their health being compromised every day. We will keep fighting for the people who depend on us to do so.

OUR CLIENTS IN THIS MATTER

Concerned Citizens of Olivette

WHAT IS A "DE MINIMIS SOURCE"

In environmental law, *de minimis* sources are facilities that fall below certain emissions thresholds and are exempt from certain federal requirements under the Clean Air Act.

That doesn't mean the potential for harm doesn't exist.

The cumulative effect of many such sources can still have a measurable impact on the environment — and on the people living nearby.

MAKE A LONG-LASTING IMPACT WITH A MONTHLY GIFT

Now more than ever, protecting our environment and the health of our communities requires steady support. By making a monthly donation, you provide the reliable funding needed to power our legal efforts—defending the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the places we love. To set up your monthly gift, visit greatriverslaw.org/donate, scan the QR code, or call us at 314-231-4181 x1007.



FIGHTING FIRE WITH...CHEMICALS

WHEN AN EMERGENCY RESPONSE BECOMES AN ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS

The environmental costs of coal stretch far beyond what comes out of a smokestack. Sometimes the damage comes from what happens when things go wrong, and from what happens when the people responsible choose to look away.

In August 2021, a fire broke out underground at the Sugar Camp Mine in Franklin County, Illinois. Rather than following the approved emergency evacuation and firefighting plan, mine officials concealed the fire from federal safety regulators and continued mining operations.

WHAT ARE PFAS?

You may have heard them called "**forever chemicals.**" Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances, or PFAS, are synthetic compounds used in thousands of consumer and industrial products since the 1950s, valued for their non-stick and heat-resistant properties.

Because they do not break down naturally, they accumulate in the environment and in the human body over time. We are only beginning to understand the full scope of the harm they cause, including impacts on the immune system, thyroid, liver, and kidneys, as well as potential long-term effects on infant development during pregnancy.

While there is currently no prohibition in Illinois on the use of firefighting foam containing PFAS in emergency incidents, the risks to public health and the environment still exist.

OUR CLIENTS IN THIS MATTER

Prairie Rivers Network
Sierra Club

The fire burned for days. When it was finally addressed, a significant quantity of firefighting foam was injected into the mine along with large amounts of water to put it out.

That foam contained PFAS. The mixture eventually ran off into nearby streams and creeks. In August 2025, the mine's manager pleaded guilty to conspiring to defraud federal safety regulators in connection with how the fire was handled. The environmental damage, however, did not resolve itself in a courtroom.

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency cited the mine for numerous Clean Water Act violations after testing confirmed the presence of PFAS in the runoff and nearby creeks. Mine personnel acknowledged causing the release, but asserts it was unavoidable to prevent loss of life, personal injury or severe property damage.

Joining the Illinois Attorney General, Sierra Club and Prairie Rivers Network filed suit against the mine, with legal representation provided by Great Rivers Environmental Law Center and Albert Ettinger. We are working with an expert witness to ensure that the remediation plan the mine negotiated with the Attorney General is properly carried out, and gathering discovery to better understand the scope of the contamination and the appropriate size of a penalty.

When industry negligence poisons the water that communities depend on, someone has to make sure the full cost of that harm is accounted for. That is what we are here to do.



DEFENDING ESSENTIAL ECOSYSTEMS

EPA NARROWS PROTECTIONS ON WATERS OF THE US

For decades, the Clean Water Act has served as the foundation of federal water protection in the United States. But the scope of that protection has never been fully settled, and right now it is being narrowed in ways that could have lasting consequences for wetlands across the country.

OUR CLIENTS IN THIS MATTER

Missouri NAACP

In May 2023, the Supreme Court ruled in *Sackett v. EPA* that federal water protections apply only to waters with a "continuous surface connection" to navigable lakes and rivers. The decision removed federal protections from roughly half of all wetlands in the United States overnight. Then, on November 17, 2025, the EPA and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers proposed a new rule that removes still more protections, opening a 45-day public comment period that closed on January 5, 2026.

We submitted comments in opposition to the proposed rule, both on behalf of Great Rivers Environmental Law Center and in partnership with the Missouri State Conference of the NAACP, highlighting the harm this rule would cause to communities and ecosystems across Missouri and Southern Illinois.

The EPA frames the proposed rule as providing greater "regulatory certainty" by clarifying the definition of waters of the United States. In essence, this rule is designed to narrow the definition so that more land is available for development with less federal oversight.

The legal logic driving these changes is rooted in commerce. Under the Supreme Court's framework, waters are protected based on their connection to interstate commerce (i.e., navigable rivers, major lakes, coastal waters). Wetlands that do not directly connect to those waters fall outside federal jurisdiction, regardless of their ecological value. Because some wetlands do not serve the purpose of interstate commerce, the argument goes, they do not warrant federal protection.

We disagree. The value of a wetland is not measured by its proximity to a navigable river. When wetland protections fail, communities face flooded neighborhoods, contaminated drinking water, and a degraded environment that affects everyone. Great Rivers Environmental Law Center will continue to advocate for the strongest possible protections for the waters and wetlands of Missouri and Southern Illinois, and continue fighting for the people and wildlife left most vulnerable when those protections disappear.

WHAT IS A WETLAND?

Marshes, swamps, bogs, fens. Coastal, freshwater, tidal, inland. Wetlands come in many forms, but several things are common among them.

Wetlands provide flood control, support an incredibly diverse array of plant and animal life, clean our water, and capture carbon from the air. Because of this, they are an indispensable part of a healthy environment.



A HISTORY OF PROTECTING PARKS

HOW WE HAVE ADVOCATED FOR PARKLAND SINCE OUR FOUNDING

Since the Center was founded in 2002, we have been dedicated to protecting parkland throughout Missouri and Southern Illinois. Parkland matters sit at the intersection of environmental protection and civic rights, which is exactly where Great Rivers Environmental Law Center often does our most important work.

Each time a park in our region has been under threat, we have collaborated with communities to make sure that they are a part of the conversation. The goal has always been the same, though the path has looked different each time.

How are we helping today?

While Proposition P protects St. Louis City parkland from being sold without voter approval, the city of Florissant has no equivalent protection. When they arranged a land swap with a private developer, trading a portion of Koch Park for Missouri River adjacent land, residents were frustrated by the lack of transparency and loss of parkland close to their homes.

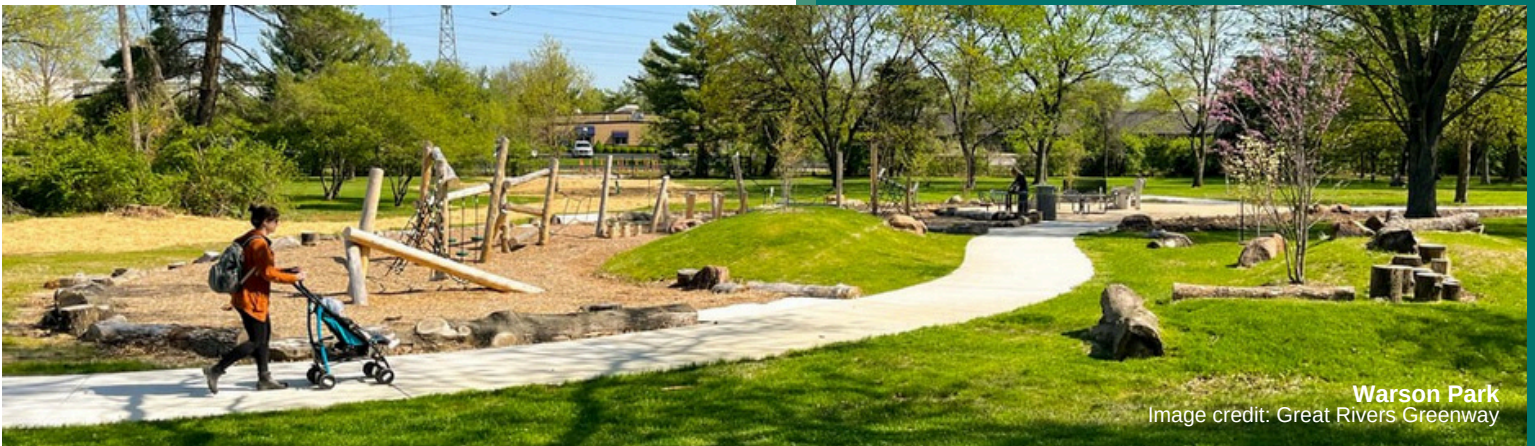
In 2025, we partnered with Open Space STL to draft a ballot petition and proposed charter amendment requiring any disposition of parkland in Florissant to be decided by a vote of the people. During the signature collection process, the city expressed willingness to work with us on agreed-upon language, ultimately committing to place the matter on the April 2026 ballot. That work is ongoing, and we are encouraged by the community energy behind it.

Buehler Park, 2006: When the city of Rolla moved to sell to a commercial restaurant chain, we stepped in to fight the sale. Believing that arguments about environmental harm alone would fall short, we shifted to the importance of preserving the legacy of Henry Buehler, the park's namesake. We won in the Court of Appeals.

Forest Park, 2006: When BJC HealthCare sought to expand into a section of Forest Park, we argued that the government should not buy or sell public land without a vote from the taxpayers. That argument led directly to Proposition P, a St. Louis ballot initiative requiring voter approval before the city may sell, lease, or repurpose land principally used or held out for use as a public park.

Warson Park, 2014: When the city of Olivette moved to sell the park for development, residents gathered enough petition signatures to put the decision to a public vote. The City Council then refused to put it on the ballot. We filed suit on behalf of Olivette residents, and a trial court judge ordered the city to include it.

Creve Coeur Lake Park, 2017: When the St. Louis County Executive sought to sell a portion of the park for a pro hockey practice facility, we used our expertise to ensure that the parkland would stay as land used for public outdoor recreation.



Warson Park
Image credit: Great Rivers Greenway

Separately, in October 2025, the St. Louis City Board of Aldermen authorized the sale of Interco Plaza without submitting the decision to voters, arguing that no vote is needed since Interco Plaza was never formally designated as a park by ordinance or deed restriction.

OUR CLIENTS IN THIS MATTER

Open Space STL
Henry Robertson

However, that loophole does not exist. The City Charter contains no such language, and if the city could simply redefine what counts as a park to avoid a public vote, Proposition P would be rendered meaningless and no park would truly be protected.

In January 2026, we filed suit challenging the sale on behalf of Open Space STL and Henry Robertson, a St. Louis resident and former Great Rivers Environmental Law Center attorney who was personally responsible for many of the wins described herein. There is something fitting about that. The work he helped build is now worth fighting for in court, and he is still in it. We are asking the Circuit Court to declare Interco Plaza a public park as defined by the City Charter, to block any sale without voter approval, and to require the city to place the proposed sale on the ballot.

Parks are among our most valuable shared resources, essential to community health, green space preservation, and protection from unchecked development. Our commitment to defending them, and to ensuring that citizens remain part of that defense, is as central to our mission today as it was when we opened our doors in 2002.

SAVE THE DATE

JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION

Mark your calendars for an evening at the The Sheldon for our signature event, the Great Rivers Environmental Law Center’s Annual Celebration!

**Great Rivers Environmental Law Center
Annual Celebration & Fundraiser**
Sunday, September 27 from 5:00pm - 7:30pm
The Sheldon

Great Rivers Environmental Law Center extends our special thanks to our 2025 sponsors, including our signature sponsor,

STLRB FAMILY FOUNDATION

with added support from:



Consider Sponsoring Our Event

2026 Sponsorship opportunities are now available—join us in making an impact!
Visit greatriverslaw.org, today.



- DAVID & NANCY BEDAN
- ANDREW & KASSIE BOUQUET
- GARRETT & ALICIA BROSHUIS
- JUTTA Z. BUDER
- KAY DREY
- LEONARD DREY
- LYNN AND STEVE GLAUBER
- DANA & KIM DANN-MESSIER
- ESLEY I. HAMILTON
- CYNTHIA S. HOLMES & AL TRETTER
- L-A-D FOUNDATION
- STEVE MAHFOOD & ELIZABETH PETERSEN
- MONETA GROUP
- MORELOCK BUILDERS & ASSOCIATES
- LINDEN MUELLER
- JOHN & SUSAN RAVA
- HENRY ROBERTSON
- ROCK SPAN FARM
- SANDY & SUE ROTHSCHILD
- MARK & LYNN SABLEMAN
- SARAH RUBENSTEIN & BOB DUBINSKY
- JIM WILSON & MARY BETH LAYTON
- TERRY WITTHAUS AND CYNTHIA ECKELKAMP
- WORLD WIDE TECHNOLOGY FOUNDATION

