

SPECIAL EDITION

# Maine Environment

Natural Resources Council of Maine



## 2008 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES for protecting Maine's environment

**T**hey're back! The 186 members of the Maine State Legislature are back in Augusta for what is generally referred to as the "short session"—the second year of the 123rd Legislature. Between now and mid-April, our state lawmakers have a lot of work to do—and so do we.

As described in the next few pages, the Legislature this year has an opportunity to enact bills that would help homeowners save money through mandatory energy codes for residential home construction, protect children from toxic chemicals in toys, ensure that Maine does not become the target of coal power plants that contribute to global warming, and restore a once-burgeoning alewife fishery population to



We cannot do our work without the help of supportive legislators, coalition partners, and, most importantly, our members and activists across Maine. The legislative process is remarkable, and Maine people play a vital role. Time and again, we hear from legislators that the voices of their constituents have a big influence on how they vote. If you are not part of NRCM's "action network," we encourage you to sign up today at [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org). You'll receive up-to-the-minute news on our priority bills as well as opportunities for you to help ensure a positive outcome on them.

We also encourage you to consider coming to Augusta on Tuesday, March 11th to participate in our annual Citizen Action Day. Please

mark your calendar if you think there is any chance you will be able to attend, please



the St. Croix River. We also anticipate important legislation emerging from the Governor's Wind Power Task Force, which we will work hard to enact.

These will be our highest priorities, but we also will be providing testimony, talking with legislators, and working to affect the outcome of at least a dozen other bills. Bad bills that would weaken Maine's environmental safeguards emerge in every session, and you can be sure that NRCM's staff will do everything in our power to prevent any roll-back bills from being enacted.

contact us for more information. Our Citizen Action Day will provide you with an opportunity to learn about major pieces of environmental legislation, meet with NRCM staff and with your elected representatives, and play a part in the protection of Maine's environment through our participatory democracy. In addition, you'll have a good time—as has consistently been the case with participants in the past.

With your help, we will continue to protect what's special about Maine.

—Pete Didisheim, Advocacy Director

### Join us for Citizen Action Day March 11th in Augusta

On Tuesday, March 11th, join us for Citizen Action Day here at NRCM headquarters (3 Wade Street, Augusta, just a block from the State House).

Come learn more about NRCM's priority legislation and what you can do to help make sure these bills become laws that protect our environment and our children. You'll have the chance to meet with others who share your values—and to meet your elected officials and share with them your position on the issues. Mark your calendars now and contact Caitlin Cleaver for more information at (800) 287-2345 ext. 270 or by emailing Cait at [Caitlin@nrcm.org](mailto:Caitlin@nrcm.org). See you March 11th!



Visit our website: [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org)



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# Natural Resources Council of Maine 2008 Priority Bills in the Legislature



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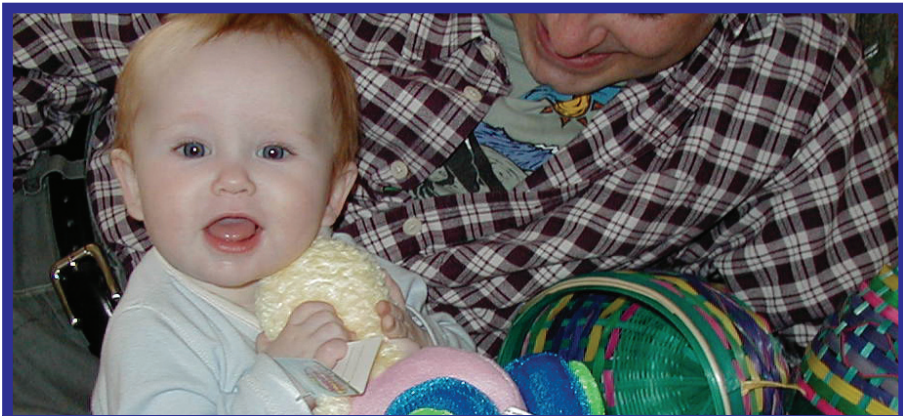
## SAVING ENERGY AND MONEY THROUGH SENSIBLE BUILDING STANDARDS FOR NEW HOMES

(BILL NOT PRINTED AT PRESS TIME)

Heating bills are skyrocketing this winter, as hard-earned dollars pour out of state to buy oil and gas. Despite our harsh winters and high heating bills, Maine is the only state in New England that lacks a basic building energy code for new home construction. "An Act to Promote Home Energy Conservation" would help solve that problem.

The bill sets a reasonable minimum standard to ensure that new homes constructed in Maine do not waste energy. The bill establishes tax incentives for high-performance buildings that exceed this standard and informs home buyers whether the home they are purchasing is energy-efficient. The environmental impact of homes is enormous: Residential energy use accounts for more global warming pollution than the commercial or industrial sectors.

"This legislation would save energy, save money, and help reduce global warming pollution," says NRCM Clean Energy Project Director Dylan Voorhees. "Creating energy-efficient homes to begin with will protect consumers, and help ensure that they are not stuck paying through the nose for fuel and renovations."



ALLISON WELLS

## PROTECTING OUR KIDS FROM TOXICS IN TOYS AND EVERYDAY PRODUCTS

(LD 2048)

During the past holiday season, there was a spate of news stories about toxic chemicals and lead in children's toys. Of all the consumer products that we want and expect to be safe, products used by children are at the top. It has become increasingly clear that the federal government is not doing enough to protect consumers and children from toxic products. That is why a bipartisan group of legislators has introduced "An Act to Protect Children's Health and the Environment from Toxic Chemicals in Children's Products" (LD 2048).

The bill requires disclosure of toxic materials and the use of safe substitutes, when available and affordable, for products containing high-concern toxic chemicals to which children are exposed.

Children are especially vulnerable to toxic chemicals as their bodies are developing rapidly and they are prone to put products into their mouths. Scientific research has linked low-level chemical exposure to learning disabilities, reproductive harm, hormone problems and cancer. "The good news is that safer alternatives to toxic ingredients are widely available," according to NRCM Toxics Project Leader Matt Prindiville. "This legislation will help ensure that Maine protects children from toxic chemicals that should never be allowed to be used in toys and other products."



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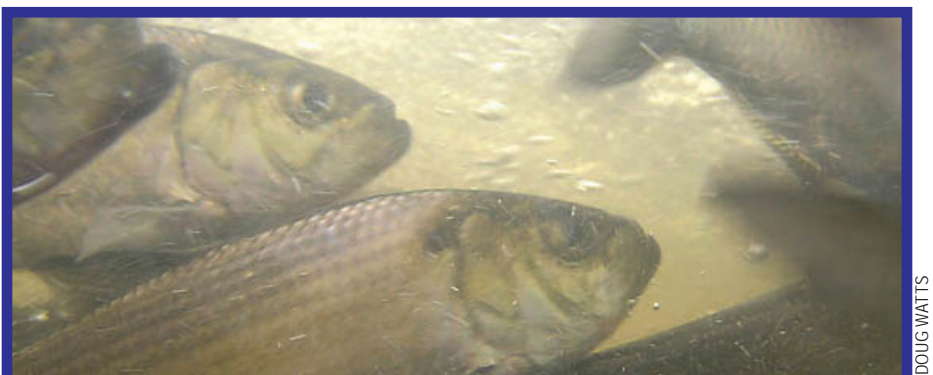
## CURBING GLOBAL WARMING POLLUTION FROM COAL PLANTS

(LD 2126)

A recent proposal to build a two million-ton-per-year "coal gasification" power plant and diesel fuel refinery in Wiscasset revealed a major loophole in Maine law: despite its role as the primary global warming pollutant, CO<sub>2</sub> is still not regulated as an air pollutant. The Wiscasset plant would have emitted 5.4 million tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year – more than all other electrical power plants in Maine combined. Citizens of Wiscasset rejected the plant, but the developer could try again.

NRCM joined with the many individuals and organizations who were opposed to the Wiscasset coal plant. That is why we support a new bill aimed at preventing power plants such as this from being built in Maine. The bill would require the Maine Board of Environmental Protection to set carbon dioxide emissions standards for new power plants and refineries built in Maine.

Coal combustion or gasification results in the release of 45 percent more CO<sub>2</sub> than natural gas, and 33 percent more CO<sub>2</sub> than oil to create the same amount of electricity. "This legislation level the playing field for new sources of energy, helping ensure that Maine does not become home to power plants that are major new sources of carbon emissions," says NRCM Clean Energy Project Director Dylan Voorhees.



DOUG WATTS

## RESTORING ALEWIVES TO THE ST. CROIX RIVER

(LD 1957)

Twenty years ago, the St. Croix River had an annual population of more than 2.6 million alewives – a fish in the herring family that serves as a critical component of Maine's river ecosystems. Alewives are a vital source of food for a broad range of other fish and wildlife, including cod, haddock, bass, trout, salmon, ospreys, eagles, kingfishers, mink, otter, and seals. But the St. Croix alewife population crashed following a 1995 decision by the Maine Legislature to prevent alewives from passing at two dams on the St. Croix River.

"An Act to Restore Diadromous Fish to the St. Croix Watershed" seeks to restore the alewife run by allowing native alewives to reach their historic spawning grounds in the St. Croix River watershed. The closing of the river came at the request of a handful of fishing guides in Washington County who believed that growing numbers of sea-run alewives had caused the collapse of Spednic Lake's smallmouth bass populations in the 1980's. Since that time, peer-reviewed science has demonstrated that the presence of sea-run alewives poses no threat to smallmouth bass in the St. Croix drainage. In 2007, only 1,300 fish returned to the river due to the closure of fish passage.

Alewives are not only an important species as part of the natural ecosystem, they also are economically valuable as the primary bait source for Maine's lobster industry. "Passage of this legislation will help restore a healthy ecosystem and will benefit the fishing and lobster industries," says NRCM Staff Scientist Nick Bennett.

## Other Legislation of Interest

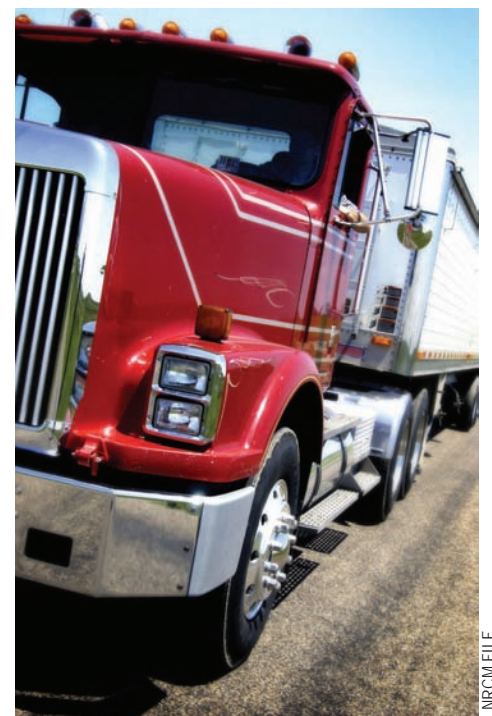
**Promoting Wind Power Development** NRCM Advocacy Director Pete Didisheim is a member of the Governor's Wind Power Task Force, which is expected to produce a final report and recommendations in early February. The Task Force was created to come up with a plan for making Maine a leader in wind power development while protecting what is special about Maine and ensuring that Maine people benefit from an expanding base of wind farms in the state. The Task Force recommendations will be turned into legislation and could form the basis for a long-term strategy for reducing Maine's dependence on fossil fuels through increased wind power.

**Steps Toward a Coherent Energy Policy** In the face of high energy costs, lawmakers have introduced many different pieces of legislation with a broad range of proposals that would boost renewable energy, increase energy efficiency, curb energy costs, provide funding for home energy audits, and more. The Governor is expected to introduce his own energy bill, which may include recommendations from the Wind Power Task Force but likely would include several other provisions as well. NRCM will closely track all of these bills and will seek enactment of those that help reduce the adverse impacts of energy use on our environment, economy, and human health.

**Curbing Sprawl Through Historic Building Redevelopment** Shopping centers, "big box" stores, and commercial development keep spreading out across the Maine landscape, even as beautiful downtown buildings lay vacant. An important approach to helping curb sprawl is to encourage the reuse of historic buildings as an alternative to "greenfield" construction. A federal tax credit program has been successful in helping spur the redevelopment of vacant or underutilized mills, warehouses, public buildings, and other old structures. But those funds have been significantly reduced. Legislation introduced last year, and carried over to this session, would create a tax credit for redevelopment of Maine's historic buildings to help revitalize our downtowns.

### Putting the Brakes on Idling Vehicles

Thirteen states have enacted laws that penalize drivers who leave their vehicle engines running while they are parked. A bill has been introduced to add Maine to that list. NRCM will testify in support of the legislation. The proposed approach for Maine is aimed at non-passenger vehicles and would limit idling to five minutes per hour for diesel-powered commercial trucks and some vehicles that run on gasoline. We have all experienced the exhaust fumes of trucks idling at gas stations, in parking lots, and on street corners. This bill would help put an end to that unnecessary source of air pollution and wasted fuel.



### Regulating Air Pollution from Outdoor Wood Boilers

The Department of Environmental Protection was directed last year to develop regulations for outdoor wood boilers, which have become a source of heat for some homeowners, and a source of air pollution for their neighbors. The rules that were developed will come back to the Legislature for enactment. DEP will require that new wood boilers sold after 2008 meet emission standards and are installed with adequate setback and smoke stacks requirements, but the rules do little to address pollution from existing units. We will advocate to require improvements to or removal of existing units that don't comply with standards necessary to protect public health.

## The Making of Maine's Laws

*A brief summary of how concerns become law*

- 1) A legislator sponsors a bill, sometimes requested by a constituent, nonprofit group (like NRCM), or even the Governor.
- 2) Legislative staffers help draft bill to ensure correct format.
- 3) Bill is numbered, assigned to committee, printed, and scheduled on the committee calendar for a public hearing.
- 4) Committee holds public hearing, receiving testimony from anyone who has a position on the bill.
- 5) After public hearing, committee holds work session to address details and disagreements. Later, committee members vote on the bill.
- 6) The bill and accompanying amendments reported to floor of the House or Senate.
- 7) The following legislative day, bill gets second reading, may receive floor amendments. Once passed in one chamber (House or Senate), it's sent to the other.
- 8) If amended in second chamber, bill is sent back to first chamber for a vote with amendment. A conference committee may be asked to work out a compromise acceptable to both chambers. The bill approved when passes both chambers.
- 9) Governor has 10 days to sign or veto bill. If during legislative session the Governor has not signed or vetoed the bill within 10 days, it becomes law. If the Legislature has adjourned, bill does not become law. Once new session starts, bill becomes law in three days unless Governor vetoes it.
- 10) Bill becomes law 90 days after the end of the session. A bill that is vetoed can become law if it is overridden by a two-thirds vote of members present in both chambers.



For more details on the law-making process, visit our website at [www.nrcm.org/project\\_statehousewatch.asp](http://www.nrcm.org/project_statehousewatch.asp).

# Meet NRCM's Outreach Team

*Your direct line on issues you care about most*

NRCM's outreach staff are available to help you take action to protect Maine's environment. Whether you need tips for a letter-to-the-editor, fact checking for your testimony, or a friendly word of encouragement, our outreach staffers are here for you.



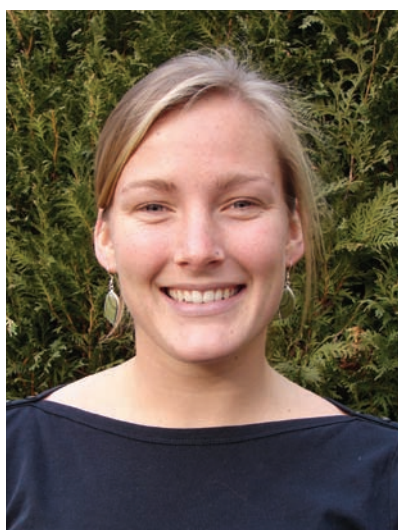
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## JOIN OUR ACTION NETWORK



Trey Grenfell speaking at the Plum Creek public hearing in Augusta.

### Your voice is the most important one lawmakers need to hear.

Stayed informed about most important environmental issues by joining the NRCM Action Network. You'll have many opportunities to help make a difference.

- ⚡ Influence crucial decisions at the State House.
- ⚡ Receive email alerts informing you when legislation is pending and your legislators need to hear from you.
- ⚡ Participate in special events.
- ⚡ Join with people who share your values in protecting the nature of Maine.

### You choose how and when to help.

- ⚡ Write letters, make phone calls, or send emails to your legislators and other decision-makers.
- ⚡ Write letters to the editor of your local paper.
- ⚡ Submit comments, attend hearings, even testify at public hearings on issues that are most important to you and your family.
- ⚡ Volunteer for the Natural Resources Council of Maine.

Join online today at [www.nrcm.org](http://www.nrcm.org), email us [takeaction@nrcm.org](mailto:takeaction@nrcm.org), or call Caitlin Cleaver at (800) 287-2345 ext. 270. **Make your voice heard!**