Food & Water Watch

*Water Policy Research and Advocacy*

By: Demario Longmire

Food & Water Watch is an advocacy organization, which works to ensure the safety and accessibility of food and water to the nation, including fracking, water privatization, legislative advocacy and grassroots organization support. The shut-off crisis in Detroit is an issue that not only affects many communities members access to clean, healthy, affordable water, but also is connected to issues of food safety and security, the foreclosure crisis, social justice, water privatization and conservation. As an intern, my work with Food & Water Watch has been supportive. The primary goal of my project is to research water affordability programs both as a concept and how this utility structure has been utilized across the nation in other cities. This research has included analyzing legislative documents, conversing with municipal government officials, utility directors, and those directly affected by the shut-offs. The secondary goal of my project is to work with and assist a grassroots coalition known as the People’s Water Board Coalition. The coalition both advocates for stopping the water shut-offs in Detroit, restoring service where it has been disconnected, an income-based water affordability program, maintaining public control of the municipal water system, and conservation of water through a number of ways including outreach and education, decision maker advocacy, door-to-door canvassing and media communications. The People’s Water Board Coalition helps to provide support to community members affected by the water shut-offs. Other tasks in the project included: attending community meetings, participating in rallies, marches, and community events, as well as preparing and submitting Freedom of Information Act Requests.--

Sierra Club

*Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign*

By: Drew Walker

A study by the University of Michigan identified the cities of Ecorse and River Rogue and the 48217 zip code of Detroit as the most polluted areas in the state of Michigan due to the high concentration of industrial polluters in the area. As a result, a large number of residents in these communities, many of which are minorities and/or low-income, suffer from adverse health effects such as asthma and cancer. When minority and low-income communities experience pollution and environmental “bads” at a higher rate than majority communities, there is an environmental justice issue and this project at the Sierra Club seeks to end environmental justice disparities in the Detroit area.

Through active interaction with community members, organizers at the Sierra Club develop programming to educate, empower, and engage those being affected disproportionately by environmental issues. The Sierra Club is currently working with a myriad of other organizations, forming a coalition that will plan and participate in the Detroit March for Justice, being held this October. The March serves as a starting point to discuss and advocate for the various justice issues in Detroit, including environmental, racial, labor, health, and water. The March will aid in the Sierra Club’s overall goal of shutting down dirty power plants in the target areas, bringing air quality in Wayne County back into attainment, and improving the lives of the people the organization serves.

Southwest Detroit Environmental Vision

By: Juan Gutierrez and Shannon Palmer

Every action and movement we make throughout our regularly scheduled routines start with one single act: a deep breathe. Oxygen is an essential part of a balanced lifestyle, as a matter a fact, without it you would have not been able to read up until this point. Air not only provides you with the ability to continue about our daily lives, but it is also a crucial play maker in many other ecosystems. One way or another, all processes that occur in both our lives and nature are tied together. Although, once you start to neglect and pollute the air around you, you are not only hurting yourself, but also the lives of many others. Our project seeks to assess community awareness in Southwest Detroit in regards to diesel truck idling and emissions. As mentioned, our residents have far too often been exposed to the diesel pollution that comes from truck idling. Many of these trucks often traverse through the community after passing over the Ambassador Bridge. The Ambassador Bridge is host to 6 million vehicles annually, and 10,000 trucks daily. With this much truck traffic combined with industry pollution, we have a unique situation that risks the health of many of the residents in Southwest Detroit. According to the American Cancer Society, diesel emissions are classified as a carcinogen which means it can cause cancer. Much of the air pollution predisposes the residents to asthma and other chronic respiratory illnesses. By conducting surveys to gain information about what Southwest Detroit residents and truck drivers know, we can then create a greater awareness and work towards better air quality.
Voices for Earth Justice
Brightmoor Community Member Attitudes Toward Urban Agriculture
By: L’Oreal Hawkes

Urban agriculture in Detroit has been practiced small scale for over 30 years in small isolated pockets in the form of community gardening, animal husbandry, and horticulture. In the last ten years, urban agriculture in Detroit has increased enormously due to the surplus of vacant land and the need of fresh food in a food desert. Small farming operations are starting up with the intention of removing blight and strengthening community relations while promoting food sovereignty. In Detroit’s Brightmoor neighborhood, urban agriculture has transformed part of the heavily abandoned streets into thriving sanctuaries that have given many residents an avenue to learn about food systems, clean up the neighborhood, and provide food for themselves. Though there are many advocates of urban agriculture, there are some long term residents who are opposed to it. We set out to determine the overall attitudes towards urban agriculture in Detroit’s Brightmoor neighborhood by conducting interviews, by going door-to-door, and attending community meetings. Informal door-to-door interviews lasted 15-20 min, depending on interviewee input. After two months of dialogue with over 50 people, we interestingly found no opposition to Urban Agriculture in Brightmoor. In fact, we were surprised at the amount of people whose lives have been positively affected by the Brightmoor Farmway. Overall, we found that a large number of residents support and practice urban agriculture and gardening in noticeable ways like flower and vegetable gardens in their yards, contradicting the narrative that communities are unaware of gardening or urban farming. This notion of a whole community unfamiliar with the benefits of gardening proved to be false. However, we did find that due to the sparsely populated blocks in the neighborhood, most people did not connect with each other until there was a community garden for them to meet centrally.