LWVIL Issues Briefing 2016: Climate Change: Water
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LWVIL has continued educating the public about nonpoint source water pollution with local Leagues. Over the past year, one source of such pollution, coal tar sealants, has become a focus. Pavement sealcoats that contain coal tar pitch have been identified as the largest source of polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) in urban lakes. PAHs cause cancer and birth defects, and are also toxic to aquatic life. While state legislation (HB 2401) that would ban the sale and use of coal tar sealants has failed to gain necessary support, local governments are filling the breach by adopting local bans.

Algal blooms in Illinois waterways and the Mississippi River are caused by excess nutrients entering from agricultural runoff and wastewater treatment plants. In 2015, the IEPA and other state agencies released the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy, a plan to reduce nitrate-nitrogen by 15% by 2025 and phosphorus by 25% by 2025. No new regulations are planned; compliance will be voluntary. An administrative rule clarifying that the Clean Water Act (CWA) applies to small streams and wetlands went into effect in August, 2015, with the support of the League. Implementation of the rule has been impeded, however, by lawsuits from other states. Congress has also attempted to damage the effectiveness of the CWA, recently passing legislation that would have fundamentally changed federal water regulations were it not for the President’s veto.

The state budget impasse threatens cleaner water in Illinois through cuts of conservation programs and by hold-backs of federal funds to clean water programs. The state risks losing federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds, a program the League has supported since its inception.

Actions since March 2015

June 2015 Convention adopted Nutrient Pollution in Illinois Waterways as an Action Priority
July 2015 Asked LWVUS to sign on to a letter requesting continued GLRI funding
Nov. 2015 Issued TFA requesting calls to Senator Kirk to express disappointment with his co-sponsorship of an anti-CWA bill

Anticipated Activity in 2016

Efforts to educate the public about the dangers of coal tar sealants, to support a state ban, and to assist local Leagues that choose to work on local bans will continue in 2016. LWVIL will monitor state implementation of the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy and educate local Leagues on local impacts of nutrient pollution and Strategy compliance.