League Activity

LWVIL’s main focus with regard to state water policy was supporting legislation that would ban asphalt sealcoats that contain coal tar sealant. Organic compounds in these sealants are toxic to human, animal, and aquatic ecosystem health. Local Leagues were asked to discuss co-sponsorship of the coal tar ban bill during their Legislative Interviews. When some local Leagues reported that their legislators asked for more information, LWVIL President Mary Kubasak responded directly with follow-up letters. Ultimately, co-sponsors were added to the bill, but it failed to pass. Some local Leagues were involved in promoting a ban of coal tar sealants in their own municipalities and other governmental units, and that work is ongoing.

A new state law will help to determine lead levels in drinking water in Illinois. It requires water testing at schools and daycare facilities and also requires mapping of service pipes that may be at risk of leaching lead.

Through the “Rooting for Clean Water” program funded by an Illinois Coastal Management Grant, approximately 1000 flyers on the role of native plants in helping to clean water and 100 bumper stickers were distributed to local Leagues, members, and others along the Lake Michigan coast. A very successful workshop was held in August, 2016 with a bus tour of a Wilmette prairie and several home landscapes to learn about how to use native plants. Hundreds of additional materials provided by the LWV Lake Michigan Region, our collaborator in this project, were distributed to and through Illinois Leagues outside of the coastal area. A Power Point presentation was developed along with the project, and is remains available to garden clubs and other groups that would like to learn about native plants’ role as nature’s water treatment plants.

A second IL Department of Natural Resources grant was awarded to fund the acquisition of watershed models. These teaching tools will be used to explain stormwater runoffs role in water pollution. They will be used in public outreach throughout 2017.

Legislative Activity:

- Submitted comments on the proposed Total Maximum Daily Load standards for Mercury and PCBs in Lake Michigan Nearshore Waters to the Illinois EPA in February, 2016. Very significant reductions of both pollutants are required to meet federal water quality standards. League comments emphasized that a strong implementation plan is needed, and that the Waukegan Generating Station and coal-fired power plants in neighboring states create air pollution that must also be addressed to achieve healthier water.
- Testified on behalf of the Cook County League in favor of an Ordinance creating a safe Pharmaceutical Disposal program for the county. An amended version passed on October 26, 2016.
- TFA issued requesting comments to the Canadian Minister of Environment and Climate Change expressing strong opposition to the proposed Ontario Power Generation nuclear waste repository near the coast of Lake Huron.

Outlook

Advocacy will continue on measures to prevent coal tar pollution. Support for a new state bill banning coal tar products, HB2958, is anticipated. Local Leagues are continuing advocacy in their communities for local bans.

The federal Clean Water Act (CWA) is at risk, and will require monitoring and will probably warrant our advocacy. The U.S. EPA administers the CWA, the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, and other federal water protection programs. Funding for these programs will need defending. The 100 Day Plan of the new administration also includes eliminating the Waters of the U.S. Rule under the CWA. In recent years, the League worked for adoption of the Rule, and will likely oppose efforts to eliminate it going forward.