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Illinois environmental history: The lead-up (1960s) to the passage of Illinois environmental protection act

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Abstract

This study explores the critical environmental challenges faced by Chicago and Illinois in the 1960s, marked by severe water, air, and land pollution. This crisis threatened public health, limited recreational opportunities, and sparked urgent demands for action. The research examines the complex interplay between unregulated industrial activities, public health concerns, and evolving regulatory responses, culminating in the landmark 1970 Illinois Environmental Protection Act. Drawing on media investigations, ecological studies, and citizen activism, the paper sheds light on the pivotal forces that shaped environmental policy in a heavily industrialized state. Importantly, it argues that the success achieved in Illinois regarding the passage of the Environmental Protection Act was facilitated by the combined efforts of citizen activists, media personnel, and environmentalists. Beyond a historical account, the research offers valuable insights into the development of environmental governance, policy formation, and the dynamic relationship between industry, society, and the environment, contributing to ongoing academic discourse on these crucial topics.

Keywords: Knowledge, mother, children, upper respiratory tract infection

Introduction

Throughout the history of the United States, rapid industrialization and urbanization occurred with minimal regulations governing the release of pollutants and contaminants into the environment by industries and businesses. This lack of oversight contributed to various environmental issues. Air and water pollution were merely two of the problems caused by industrialization practices in the country. For decades, industries routinely disposed of most of their wastes by dumping them directly into lagoons or rivers, burying them in pits, or sending them to landfills without proper containment measures ^[1] The country noticed the detrimental effects of industrial pollution in the 1960s, particularly the polluted Cuyahoga River in Ohio and other rivers across the nation. River fires and environmental issues, including air pollution, compelled the United States to enact the Environmental Protection Act in 1970. The Cuyahoga River fire on June 22, 1969, was the main catalyst that led to the passage of the Environmental Protection Act of 1970. This destructive fire engulfed the entire river and reached heights as high as a five-story structure. In the same year, the United States passed the National Environmental Protection Act, and Illinois enacted the Illinois Environmental Protection Act (I.E.P.A.).

Before the enactment of the I.E.P.A., Illinois had an environmental cleanliness program under the supervision of a division within the Illinois Department of Public Health. The existence of this pollution department division within the public health department highlighted Illinois' commitment to safeguarding its residents' well-being. However, Steven N. Klein characterized the state's earlier environmental protection efforts as "haphazard at best" ^[2] Klein reveals that part-time, unpaid volunteers ran the initiative making it ineffective ^[3]. The pollution department's efforts faced constraints due to underfunding of the program, limiting their ability to effectively protect the environment. The lack of a separate body to enforce environmental pollution regulations forced the board to assume the dual roles of lawmakers and enforcers, raising doubts about their fairness. Furthermore, the program's rules did not apply to the industrial city of Chicago, effectively exempting a major contributor to environmental contamination. It was as if no environmental laws or institutions existed to address the issue, particularly in Chicago, since the pollution program

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excluded the large industrial city. Although the environmental protection institutions at the time grappled with numerous challenges, they strived to solve the environmental problems to the best of their limited capacities. This paper argues that the population of Illinois recognized the environmental problems in the 1960s and, consequently, took actions that compelled authorities to work on resolving the issues before the passage of the I.E.P.A.

Illinois passed the I.E.P.A. to protect the state's environment. The state enacted this act following the passage of the National Environmental Protection Act in 1970. The urgency with which the governor signed this act after the National Environmental Protection Act suggests a need to address specific environmental problems in Illinois. This research investigates the environmental issues that existed in Illinois during the 1960s, the public's perception of the problem, the actions taken by the population, and the Illinois government's response before the I.E.P.A.'s enactment. Guiding questions for this research include: What environmental problems did Illinois face during the 1960s? Was there any activism or actions to solve these environmental issues before the 1970s? And what actions did the government take? The established knowledge that legislative actions have a direct relationship with reality suggests Illinois faced environmental challenges in the 1960s. A state cannot pass an act without a preceding issue or circumstance that necessitates remedial action. Furthermore, the speed with which a state adopts a national law demonstrates the law's importance to that state.

While this research provides a general overview of environmental issues across Illinois, it will primarily focus on Chicago, the state's industrial metropolis. The study will also examine other industrialized cities that faced considerable environmental challenges during the period. The investigation will concentrate on the specific environmental problems that plagued Illinois in the 1960s, analyzing their nature, causes, and impacts. Furthermore, the research will explore the various actions and initiatives undertaken by the public, activists, and government entities to address, mitigate, or raise awareness about environmental pollution before 1970. Particular attention will be paid to grassroots movements, protests, and lobbying efforts that aimed to compel authorities to take action against environmental degradation. The study will also examine the measures implemented by the state government, such as regulations, enforcement mechanisms, and public awareness campaigns, to tackle the environmental problems prior to the enactment of the I.E.P.A.

Historical discussions on the environmental problems that plagued Illinois before the 1970s are scarce. Existing scholarly documents on environmental issues focus primarily on legal and scientific aspects. Scholarly legal writings have concentrated on evaluating the effectiveness of legal systems in combating environmental problems prior to the 1970s. From a legal perspective, proving that an individual caused environmental harm under the common law of nuisance during the 1960s was relatively straightforward^[4]. Before the 1970s, the common law of nuisance facilitated the straightforward determination of environmental pollution cases, aiding in the mitigation of the problem. Immel asserts that during the 1960s, before the enactment of the I.E.P.A., the attorney general utilized the court system as a means to combat environmental issues^[5].

According to Immel, by January 1969, every major source of unregulated pollution in Illinois had been identified, and some form of administrative or legal action had been taken to address it^[6]. The articles discussed and numerous legal documents concerning environmental pollution in the 1960s raised the question of whether the legal system was utilized effectively to mitigate environmental issues^[7].

Scientific documents concentrated on investigating the extent of environmental problems and exploring their potential causes. James C. Vaughn's research revealed that the severe pollution of the Chicago River prompted the population to abandon it and rely on Lake Michigan instead. Consequently, as the population shifted from the Chicago River to Lake Michigan, the pollution levels in Lake Michigan escalated to 260/100 ml in 1967 and continued to rise throughout the century. The contamination of Lake Michigan affected the Calumet River and its tributaries due to their interconnectedness^[8]. The study "The Sedimentary Record of Environmental Contamination in Horseshoe Lake, Madison County, Illinois" unveiled that industrial development in Illinois, which began approximately 110 years ago, had gradually contaminated rivers over time. The authors of the article identified companies such as St. Louis Stamping Company, Granite City Steel Company, National Lead, and Hoyt Metal as contributors to water pollution in Illinois. Furthermore, this study revealed that animal and human waste have also contributed to the pollution at Horseshoe Lake^[9]. These and other discussions regarding environmental pollution highlight the extent of environmental issues and the progress achieved in addressing them^[10].

The preceding discussion unveils the scarcity of extensive historical accounts on environmental issues in Illinois, specifically in Chicago, during the decade leading up to the enactment of the I.E.P.A. This research paper aims to bridge this historical gap by offering a comprehensive and analytical examination of the environmental problems that plagued Illinois in the 1960s. The available scientific and legal documents guided the paper and provided the necessary evidence to substantiate its arguments and shed light on the environmental history of Illinois.

Environmental Issues in Illinois before the 1970s

Before the 1960s, neither Illinois nor the United States paid much attention to environmental issues. During this decade, however, the nation became increasingly aware of environmental problems like air and water pollution, as well as land degradation. These issues weren't unique to Illinois; they plagued the entire country. Industries dumped their waste directly into waterways, while sewage treatment was inadequate, further polluting the water. Air pollution stemmed from several sources, including car exhaust and industrial emissions. Farming practices contributed to land degradation as crops and new techniques led to topsoil erosion. The vast scale of the environmental problems made it clear that solutions were urgently needed.

Industrial activities and inadequate sewage disposal heavily polluted Illinois' waterways. This was especially evident near Horseshoe Lake, where industrial operations significantly increased heavy metal concentrations starting in the 1940s. Businesses like National Lead Industries, which operated a lead smelter from the early 1900s to the 1970s, were major contributors to this pollution^[11]. Horseshoe Lake's contamination began in the 1940s, as

scientific analysis confirms. A 15-year study (1950-1964) found severe water contamination in southern Lake Michigan from Illinois' Calumet area cities and industries^[12]. The investigation also showed that Chicago and the Metropolitan Sanitary District discharged industrial waste and sewage into the Sanitary Drainage Canal, which connects to the Chicago River^[13]. Calumet's industrial history concentrated environmental problems in its waterways. Manufacturers there displayed a concerning attitude, waiting for enforcement actions before taking any steps to comply with water pollution regulations^[14]. Land disposal of industrial waste continued well into the 1950s, and the conversion of Lake Calumet's north end into a landfill significantly worsened water contamination.^[15] The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare reported the Grand Calumet River was biologically dead and the area's streams were severely polluted^[16]. A 1967 assessment by Robert J. Bowden identified U.S. Steel, Inland Steel, and Youngstown Sheet and Tube as the Calumet region's next biggest polluters^[17]. Inland Steel reportedly discharged a staggering amount of pollutants daily in 1965, releasing 2,400 pounds of cyanide and 107,000 pounds of iron into the rivers. U.S. Steel was no better, dumping 63,000 pounds of oil into the waterways every day^[18]. By 1968, sewage from cities along Lake Michigan's shore between Chicago and Milwaukee polluted the lake with a staggering 256 million gallons daily^[19]. Adding to the problem, Abbott Laboratories near Chicago dumped 700,000 gallons of untreated waste directly into the lake each day^[20]. The agricultural revolution also played a role^[21]. Decades of heavy silt runoff from farms choked rivers, reducing their depth and altering their color. A 1975 Chicago Tribune article by John Husar explored these issues. Husar argued that Illinois' water woes began in 1902 when the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal diverted highly polluted water into the state's waterways^[22]. He claimed this raised river levels, creating stagnant backwaters and destroying vast areas of bottomland forest. "Meanwhile," Husar noted, "forests were cleared, and wetlands and backwaters were drained and converted to farmland."^[23] Illinois ultimately lost half its new bottomland lakes (around 120,000 acres), further silting up the remaining lakes^[24]. Husar's account suggests that farming practices gradually degraded Illinois' water quality well before the 1970s^[25]. A scientific investigation conducted in 1964 revealed that Chicago suffered from the highest level of air pollution compared to northwest Indiana and Milwaukee^[26]. Several factors contributed to Chicago's severe air pollution during the 1960s. A high population density concentrated a significant number of vehicles and industrial activities within a limited area. These vehicles, particularly those lacking proper emission controls, released harmful pollutants into the air. Additionally, the production of electric power relied heavily on coal-fired plants, which emitted large quantities of airborne contaminants during the burning process^[27]. The study further revealed a troubling connection between air and water pollution. Researchers pointed out that airborne pollutants can settle onto the surface of water bodies, thereby contaminating them. Chicago's sinter facilities, used in steel production, were identified as a significant contributor to this problem. These facilities emitted a staggering 10,000 tons of pollutants directly into the atmosphere, contaminating not only the air but also nearby lakes, including Lake Michigan^[28]. In 1969,

the Attorney General's office singled out Witco Chemical Corporation as a major source of air pollution in Chicago. The company's operations were found to be emitting unpleasant fumes, vapors, and a variety of harmful chemical substances. These emissions not only created a public nuisance with their offensive odors but also posed a significant health risk to the surrounding population^[29]. A study revealed that Chicago's south-side Hyde Park-Kenwood neighborhood suffered from the highest average levels of sulfur dioxide compared to other areas of the city. This concerning level of air pollution made it the most heavily polluted neighborhood in Chicago^[30]. Vehicles emerged as a major culprit in Illinois' air pollution woes. Data compiled by the Chicago Tribune revealed a troubling statistic: transportation sources were responsible for a staggering 2 million tons of air pollutants annually. This accounted for a hefty 53.3% of all air pollutant emissions in northeastern Illinois. These findings firmly placed cars as the primary source of air pollution in Chicago^[31]. Much like water contamination, air pollution rose to prominence as a major environmental concern during the 1960s. This growing awareness spurred residents, scientists, and medical professionals to take action and curb this growing threat.

While the New Deal era under President Franklin D. Roosevelt saw a national focus on land degradation and soil conservation efforts, Illinois continued to grapple with soil erosion in the 1960s^[32]. This seemingly contradictory situation stemmed from a confluence of factors. Firstly, the state's agricultural revolution and its prominent role as a national agricultural powerhouse played a significant role. John Husar, an expert on the issue, argued that the widespread cultivation of cash crops with shallow root systems significantly contributed to soil erosion and the subsequent flow of silt into lakes and waterways. His statement exemplifies this point: "The bulk of the state, a staggering 20 million acres, is dedicated to corn and soybeans. These shallow-rooted plants are major contributors to the erosion crisis we face."^[33] Husar's observation underscores the statewide nature of the cash crop issue, highlighting that it wasn't confined to a specific city. John Husar further criticizes large-scale farming practices for their role in displacing and even driving native animal populations to extinction. He pinpoints the large-scale production of cash crops, particularly corn and soybeans, as the root cause^[34]. These crops replaced traditional barnyards that once housed cows and horses. Husar argues that the decline of barnyards directly translates to a decline or even complete disappearance of barnyard animals from the landscape. Beyond livestock, Husar highlights the farming revolution's detrimental impact on forests. In another piece exploring the environmental consequences of these practices, Husar incorporates the perspectives of farmers and scientists. Discussing the extinction of wildlife and the devastation of water bodies, he emphasizes, "In just the past 15 years (referencing 1964), the character of the land our grandparents knew has been significantly altered."^[35] This statement underscores the rapid pace of environmental degradation caused by large-scale farming practices.

The limited discussions and revelations regarding specific environmental problems in Illinois, encompassing air and water pollution, as well as severe land degradation, paint a concerning picture. The sheer magnitude of these issues underscores the urgent need for a collective response from

the state and its citizens. This context sheds light on why Illinois would swiftly adopt the federal Environmental Protection Act upon its passage. The environmental problems discussed above undeniably had a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of Illinois' population. These issues likely served as a significant catalyst for the state's environmental awakening and subsequent embrace of stricter environmental regulations.

Effect of Pollution on the Population of Illinois

Environmental degradation throughout history has invariably come back to harm humans, and the problems that plagued the United States, particularly in Illinois, exemplify this principle. Water contamination emerged as a major public health threat, contributing to the spread of diseases like tuberculosis. Air pollution also wreaked havoc on residents' health, causing respiratory problems, lung cancer, and other ailments. Mrs. Sharon Denny, a resident at 2716 South Sacramento Avenue, spoke out about the devastating impact of air pollution on her family, including her three young children between the ages of 2.5 and 5. [36]. She reveals that "nighttime air quality is poor." [37]. My children suffer terribly. They wake up and sneeze for 15 minutes straight, struggling to breathe. When they sneeze, the mucus is often black, indicating irritation in their throats," said Mrs. Denny [38]. This is not an isolated case. A comprehensive 1966-1968 study by the University of Illinois Department of Preventive Medicine and Community Health examined the health of 511 Chicago seniors in relation to air pollution [39]. Researchers found a clear and significant link between high sulfur dioxide levels and worsened lung disease symptoms [40]. Dr. Bertram W. Carnow, the study director, concluded, "The data suggests a strong possibility that high daily sulfur dioxide levels aggravate symptoms and trigger flare-ups in elderly individuals with advanced bronchitis." [41]. The accounts above illustrate the devastating impact of environmental pollution on Chicago's elderly. Chicago doctors highlighted the long-term consequences, emphasizing that newborns, asthmatics, and older adults with chronic respiratory or heart conditions were especially vulnerable [42]. Dr. William R. Barclay, head of the Tuberculosis Institute of Chicago and Cook County, stated that air pollution "worsens the suffering of lung disease patients and drives up medication and doctor visit costs [43]. He added that many emphysema sufferers are forced to flee the city seeking cleaner air [44]. Mrs. Fred Witten meir, residing at 4107 Monticello Avenue, reported that strong fumes from a nearby building were wafting into her apartment, causing health problems for her children and necessitating medical treatment for herself [45]. Pollution in local rivers also robbed Illinois communities of recreational activities. For instance, the district of Highland Park was forced to close its beaches due to pollution levels, disrupting residents who enjoyed swimming [46]. Chicago attorney Michael L. Sklar, denied access to the beaches due to the closure, and even filed a lawsuit against the North Shore sanitary district, seeking reimbursement for the \$6 beach usage fee he had paid [47]. These experiences, along with many others, fueled a wave of activism urging authorities to address Illinois' environmental problems.

Activism to Solve the Pollution Problems Prior to 1970s

Public outcry against environmental problems in Illinois manifested in numerous ways before the Environmental

Protection Act. This included individual complaints, lawsuits, and campaigns like the *Chicago Tribune's* 'Save the Environment' initiative. In 1967, Tribune reporters Casey Bukro and William Jones spearheaded the 'Save Our Lake' campaign to tackle pollution in Lake Michigan and other waterways [48]. Its iconic symbol - a hand blackened by pollution - served as a stark reminder of the issue's severity. The campaign pinpointed the Indiana harbor as the primary culprit, contributing a staggering 70% of industrial waste dumped into the lake [49]. Tribune reporters dramatically demonstrated this by plunging a hand into the harbor, only to retrieve it coated in thick grease and oil [50]. Aiming to galvanize public support, the campaign distributed free stickers with a purchase option for businesses and organizations [51]. These stickers served as a visible symbol of the fight for a cleaner environment. Additionally, the campaign produced a magazine titled "Save Our Lake: A Chicago Tribune Campaign to End Contamination of Lake Michigan." [52] Featuring color photos and evidence of both Lake Erie's environmental decline and the illnesses linked to Lake Michigan's pollution, the magazine resonated deeply with the public [53]. High demand for the publication underscored the seriousness with which Chicagoans viewed the environmental crisis of the 1960s. In recognition of their efforts, the Chicagoans for Pure Air and Water honored Tribune journalists William Jones and Casey Bukro, along with other dedicated individuals like P. Venema, Robert Warden, Dr. Howard A. Tanner, and Dr. Wayne H. Tody, for their unwavering commitment to environmental protection [54].

Expanding their reach, *Chicago Tribune* reporters sought the perspectives of national and federal government officials outside of Illinois on the pressing environmental issues facing the United States. Casey Bukro interviewed Walter Hickel [55], who emphasized the urgent need to tackle water pollution, a problem he believed had been ignored for far too long (20-30 years) [56]. Despite expressing no initial focus on Illinois' pollution during the interview, Hickel seemingly changed course weeks later. He sent a letter to authorities urging them to prioritize cleaning the state's rivers and environment [57]. In his letter, Hickel stated, "I recommend that the Illinois State Sanitary Water Board take appropriate action in accordance with its water pollution control program and state and local laws to ensure the implementation of the pollution abatement program and compliance schedules for the industries under its jurisdiction." [58]. Hickel alluded to the ongoing initiative he planned to submit to Congress for approval, enabling the federal government to partner with states and municipalities in addressing environmental concerns [59]. The conversation with national stakeholders demonstrates that the *Chicago Tribune* took environmental issues seriously and aimed to effect national change in areas where environmental problems existed. The *Chicago Tribune* also brought Illinois' environmental challenges into the national conversation about water pollution, drawing the federal government's attention to another significant area of contamination. This diversion of focus to the Illinois problem is exemplified by Hickel's assertion that Chicago is "the epicenter of one of our worst water contamination areas and challenges [60].

In the mid-1950s, university professors, ecologists, and geographers like Chicago geographer Gilbert White

pioneered the environmental movement ^[61]. These academics infused the movement with intellectual substance, which drew emotional resonance from the university setting ^[62]. The era's free-speech battles, civil rights marches, and anti-war protests further fueled this environmental activism. Anti-materialism emerged as its defining characteristic since the mid-1960s, culminating in a statewide campus teach-in on Earth Day in April 1970 ^[63]. Students from Illinois universities embraced the ongoing quest for a clean environment and reduced water contamination within the state ^[64]. At the University of Illinois, engineering students primarily formed the group Students for Environmental Controls. When asked about their motivation, co-chairman Herman Slevering stated, "We aim to demonstrate that the stream can be an asset and a source of beauty." ^[65]. Seventy engineering students from the University of Illinois undertook the cleaning of the Boneyard Creek as a class project. By the conclusion of the cleanup effort, they had removed truckloads of abandoned bicycles, metal drums, beer cans, and various other trash ^[66]. The students aimed to restore the once beautiful stream that inspired the university's location to its former glory ^[67]. Students welcomed the opportunity to shift their focus from the Vietnam War issue to something new of national appeal, and the environmental cause proved a suitable replacement ^[68].

Recognizing student interest in environmental issues, the federal pollution control administration hosted a student lecture titled "Water Pollution and Environment" at the Prudential Building auditorium on December 28 for 700 college students from Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan ^[69]. The seminar elected five students to form a regional student council on pollution and the environment. These five students were tasked with advising H.W. Poston, the regional director of the federal Pollution Control Administration, on pollution problems ^[70]. Additionally, each of the nine regional Student Council on Pollution and Environment (S.C.O.P.E.) groups elected one member to form a national S.C.O.P.E. committee that would advise Secretary of the Interior Walter Hickel on environmental matters ^[71]. At Northwestern University, students formed Northwestern Students for a Better Environment to aid in resolving environmental issues in Illinois and Chicago ^[72]. Northwestern University hosted the first environmental teach-in, "Project: Survival." ^[73] Students actively raised awareness about environmental problems, researched solutions, and took action where possible. Their contributions significantly impacted Illinois' environmental movement.

Before the 1970s, general community members in Illinois began taking an active role in combating the state's environmental concerns. The Tuberculosis Institute of Chicago and Cook County founded a citizen coalition committee to strengthen air pollution control regulations in the Chicago region ^[74]. This initial air pollution committee comprised seventy members and was formed to gather data for more effective air pollution control board meetings ^[75]. They also aimed to challenge actions that would further exacerbate the environmental problems introduced by the government. Residents of DuPage County recognized the importance of assisting in resolving environmental issues and pressuring stakeholders to take significant actions to reduce pollution. Locals in DuPage founded the DuPage Environmental Council, consisting of residents committed

to combating air and water pollution in the area. ^[76]. This anti-pollution movement was led by Mrs. Jane Heckman, and more than forty individuals participated ^[77]. The new organization established four committees, each concentrating on a particular environmental concern. The first committee focused on clean streams, with the responsibility of collecting information to guide researchers in examining streams ^[78]. Miss Terese Kelly led this committee, comprised of high school and college students from the surrounding area, to help educate locals about pollution issues ^[79]. Robert O'Brien presided over the law enforcement committee, which ensured the enforcement of environmental pollution laws ^[80]. This committee emphasized state, national, and county laws related to local pollution issues. They also identified unenforced laws and wrote to the appropriate authorities requesting enforcement ^[81]. These activities were not limited to the above groups, over 30 groups formed by the general population in Illinois opposed environmental problems. During the process of passing the Anti-Pollution Bill in the 1970s, thirty citizen groups mobilized and formed a caravan that traveled to Springfield and supported the Environmental Protection Act ^[82].

In summary, prior to the 1970s, Illinois witnessed a groundswell of activism aimed at addressing pollution issues. From individual complaints to organized campaigns like the Chicago Tribune's 'Save the Environment' initiative, residents took multifaceted approaches to combat pollution. The 'Save Our Lake' campaign, spearheaded by Tribune reporters, brought attention to the severity of pollution in Lake Michigan and surrounding waterways, rallying public support and spurring awareness. Engagement with national figures like Walter Hickel highlighted Illinois' environmental challenges on a broader scale. Additionally, the involvement of academia and student-led initiatives showcased a commitment to restoring natural habitats and combating pollution at the grassroots level. Community coalitions and organizations emerged to advocate for stricter regulations and enforcement, further amplifying the call for environmental action. Ultimately, these collective efforts laid the groundwork for significant legislative milestones, such as the passage of the Environmental Protection Act, marking a pivotal moment in Illinois' environmental stewardship journey.

Political Discussions on the Environmental Problems Prior to the 1970s.

In the 1960s, the Water Supply and Pollution Control Division of U.S.P.H.S. and concerned members of Congress drafted legislation to tackle water pollution issues ^[83]. They enacted a law establishing the Great Lakes Illinois River Basin Project, a study of lakes like Lake Michigan and the Illinois River Basin ^[84]. The enactment of the Water Pollution Control Act led to the establishment of the Federal Water Pollution Control Administration in 1966, which opened a regional headquarters in Chicago to address water pollution issues comprehensively. Indicative of the significance of resolving the environmental issue prior to 1970, the governor of Illinois invited the governors of Wisconsin, Michigan, and Indiana to a four-state conference to review Lake Michigan's water quality ^[85]. The Sherman House hosted this four-state conference on water pollution in Lake Michigan, which included representatives from Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan. During the

conference, Governor Kerner stated, “We have taken and are taking concrete actions to rid Lake Michigan of polluted waters originating from Illinois.”^[86] Governor Kerner urged authorities from neighboring states and the federal government to support Illinois’ ban on dumping dirty materials into Lake Michigan and federal rules regulating water pollution^[87]. Additionally, he asked state and federal leaders to address pollution issues in the state^[88]. Governor Kerner also stated that Illinois committed to the November referendum on the billion-dollar bond proposal for air and water pollution management^[89] Senator Ralph Tyler Smith of Illinois was among the various important political figures who publicly acknowledged the environmental problem and declared their desire to assist in its resolution. He addressed the environmental issue by stating, “I feel that environmental contamination is one of the most severe problems we face.”^[90] He added that he was drafting legislation to bring us back from the brink of environmental catastrophe^[91]. The above reveals ongoing political discussions in the 1960s on actions to curb the existing environmental problems^[92].

Prior to the 1970s, courts also served as a means to combat pollution. According to Allen A. Freeman, the deputy attorney general of Illinois, “history has demonstrated that too much time has been wasted in the past on hearings with polluters, while the public bears the repercussions.”^[93] He disclosed that the hearings proved ineffective, and after wasting much time deliberating, the court remained the only option^[94]. Various parties, including the attorney general, official entities, and private individuals, filed numerous lawsuits to combat and eliminate environmental problems, such as water and air pollution. The Corps of Engineers utilized lawsuits to enforce environmental purity by suing three enterprises in the Calumet region for daily pollution of the Calumet River. In the 1960s, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Corps of Engineers, establishing a legal mechanism to address stream pollution. Some individuals, such as Feder and Sklar, sued industries and groups causing environmental pollution. In *Feder v. Perry Coal*, the plaintiff argued that the gases, fumes, and smoke caused harm to him, his poultry, cattle, crops, and dwelling, and requested the court to prohibit the Coal industry from operating^[95]. Michael L. Sklar filed a lawsuit in the Lake County Circuit Court against the North Shore sanitary district for polluting Lake Michigan, seeking \$5 million in damages^[96].

In a landslide vote (98-31), the Illinois House empowered the Attorney General to crack down on air and water pollution statewide^[97]. This new law granted the Attorney General the authority to intervene when local authorities failed to address flagrant polluters and to pursue harsher penalties when necessary^[98]. Under the law, polluting businesses could face shutdowns of up to 21 days, with fines mirroring those for air pollution: a maximum of \$5,000, \$200 per day for continued violations, and even jail time (up to 6 months)^[99]. The Attorney General wasted no time wielding this new power^[100]. In a landmark case, William J. Scott targeted the American Asphalt Paving Company for its air pollution. Citing the severe impact on residents, he ordered the company to install odor-control equipment by September 16th^[101]. Additionally, Scott filed suit against United States Steel Corporation for water pollution caused by airborne dust and gaseous materials settling into waterways. William J. Scott, the Attorney General, singled out United States Steel Corporation’s South Works for

spewing massive amounts of dust and harmful gases into the air during steel production^[102]. His lawsuit demanded a court-ordered deadline for the company to install pollution control systems and impose hefty fines: \$5,000 for the first day and \$200 daily until the violations ceased. This action brought Scott’s total environmental lawsuits to 22^[103]. Scott also targeted Witco Chemical Corporation for persistent air pollution violations. He filed suit, recommending a \$5,000 fine and daily penalties of \$200 for continued offenses^[104]. In a bold move, Scott used his authority to sue major automakers, alleging a conspiracy to suppress the development of pollution-control technology for cars^[105]. He sought triple damages on behalf of the state and its residents, along with a mandate requiring similar devices on all new vehicles sold in Illinois^[106]. Finally, Attorney General Scott used his 1969 powers to sue the North Shore Sanitary District and its board for polluting Lake Michigan^[107] These aggressive legal actions throughout 1969 demonstrably pressured industries to reduce pollution and implement measures to curb their environmental impact.

Conclusion

During the 1960s, the United States faced environmental challenges that had a profound impact on Illinois, particularly in its urban epicenter, Chicago. These challenges encompassed the degradation of water bodies like Lake Michigan, the Calumet River, and the Chicago River, as well as air pollution rendering it hazardous to inhale. Additionally, soil erosion ravaged vast stretches of land. These environmental crises had diverse repercussions on the populace, severely affecting public health and curtailing recreational activities. For those directly impacted, daily life became increasingly burdensome.

Health issues stemming from these environmental woes included ailments such as tuberculosis, lung cancer, and complications for individuals with asthma, emphysema, and chronic heart and lung conditions. Moreover, contamination of water bodies deprived residents of recreational pursuits such as swimming.

Recognizing the gravity of the situation, the Illinois populace initiated concerted efforts to draw attention to these environmental concerns. The Chicago Tribune played a pivotal role in elucidating the extent of pollution through investigative reporting, shedding light on governmental actions or lack thereof. Additionally, academic figures including university professors, ecologists, and students played crucial roles in addressing environmental issues. Students were educated on ways to contribute practically, undertaking initiatives to clean specific sites.

Community mobilization furthered these efforts, with groups formed to investigate environmental issues, educate the public on pollution mitigation, and advocate for environmentally friendly policies. Concurrently, government bodies and influential individuals acknowledged the environmental crisis and embarked on remedial actions. The legal system was utilized to challenge polluters and compel them to cease harmful practices. The Illinois House empowered the Attorney General to prosecute environmental offenders, a mandate effectively utilized to curb pollution before the I.E.P.A.

Governor-led initiatives and policy deliberations also played a significant role in mitigating environmental degradation. The collective efforts culminated in the passage of the Illinois Environmental Protection Act (I.E.P.A.) shortly

after the National Environmental Policy Act (N.E.P.A.), underscoring the state's commitment to environmental stewardship.

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