

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [February 8, 2021]



**Our weekly bulletin collects and digests news of the past week.
Contributions welcome.**

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

The Guardian: [Every executive action Joe Biden has signed—and what they do](#)

The president has signed a number of executive orders during his first weeks in office, ranging from the pandemic to immigration.

New York Times: [Virus variant first found in Britain now spreading rapidly in U.S.](#)

The coronavirus variant B.1.1.7 was first found in Britain and is more contagious than the original strain, with its transmission rate being 30-40% higher than other common variants. It is doubling every 10 days in the US, with researchers predicting it could become the dominant strain in the US by March. Increased social distancing measures and rapid vaccine distribution will help contain this variant.

New York Times: [US health experts: Vaccines will increase by spring](#)

US health officials predict both the supply of vaccines and their successful distribution will increase over the next couple of months. The last 7-day average for vaccination was 1.4 million shots per day, and 10.5 million doses are being shipped to states each week. Moderna and Pfizer have deals with the US government to provide enough of the vaccine to have 200 million people vaccinated by the summer, but this could improve as they consider production changes to increase dosages per vial.

NPR: [“Just cruel”: Digital race for COVID-19 vaccines leaves many seniors behind](#)

As vaccine doses become available to seniors, a lack of consistent information and singular method of distribution from state to state and sometimes even county to county, malfunctioning websites, and phone lines, as well as long lines plague vaccine distribution efforts across the country.

Scientific American / E&E News: [NASA names its first climate advisor](#)

Gavin Schmidt, an expert in climate modeling, will help ensure the Biden Administration has crucial data to inform its emissions reduction goals.

Space News: [White House to realign responsibilities for space policy oversight](#)

The Biden administration is giving the White House National Security Council oversight responsibilities for space policy, giving credence to speculation that the National Space Council will be discontinued. The White House in a Feb. 4 memo said the National Security Council from now on will issue “national security memorandums” to replace the former administration’s space policy directives as “instruments for communicating presidential decisions about national security policies of the United States.”

Science: [Death of EPA’s controversial “censored science” rule delights researchers](#)

A federal judge in Montana recently struck down Trump-era legislation that limited EPA use of medical studies that relied on confidential patient medical information. The legislation had mandated that regulatory decisions, such as those relating to water or air pollution, rely on publicly available data. The case was brought to court by the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), the Montana Environmental Information Center, and Citizens for Clean Energy.

Smithsonian: [U.S. cities are underestimating carbon emissions, new research shows](#)

48 cities featured in a recent US study were found to have underreported their carbon emissions by an average of 18% from 2010-2015. If this average holds true for the majority of US cities, that would add an additional 129 million metric tons each year to nationwide emissions. Most underreporting occurs due to different measuring techniques applied city to city as there is no established nationwide framework for estimating carbon emissions.

The Guardian: [Tensions rise as rival Mars probes approach their final destination](#)

The probe Hope orbiter from the United Arab Emirates, the Tiawen-1 spacecraft from China, and the rover Perseverance from the US are all set to reach Mars within the next couple of weeks. Mars’ distance and thick atmosphere pose additional challenges compared to moon landings, resulting in half of Mars missions failing since the 1960s. The Hope orbiter was sent to study the weather on Mars and create a map of its atmosphere, the Tiawen-1 hopes to conduct a global survey using radar to penetrate beneath Mars’ surface, and Perseverance will look for microbial life as well as habitable conditions that might support life.

New York Times: [McKinsey settles for nearly \\$600 million over role in opioid crisis](#)

McKinsey & Company gave sales advice to pharmaceutical companies involved in the opioid crisis including Purdue Pharma and the OxyContin manufacturers. It will pay a \$573 million agreement for helping “turbocharge” opioid sales and advising companies to continue selling the drugs after criminal charges in 2007 of misleading doctors and regulators about their risks. The settlement involves 47 states, 5 territories, and the District of Columbia, with additional separate deals in Washington and West Virginia.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [Indiana Republican Sen. Mike Braun will support Biden's EPA pick, but not his agenda](#)

While Braun is a fan of Biden’s nominee, he does not feel as positively about the new administration’s climate policy. In 2019, Braun partnered with Sen. Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat, to introduce the first-ever bipartisan caucus in the Senate

dedicated to fighting climate change and finding climate solutions. He worries that some of Biden's actions, such as getting back into the Paris Climate Accord, means losing members of the caucus and will make it impossible to recruit new ones.

IndyStar: [Amid fierce debate, here are the facts about Indiana's wetlands program](#)

A bill that would repeal Indiana's wetlands protections has been the subject of intense debate this legislative session, raising lots of questions about wetlands and the state's current regulations. Builders and developers are pushing to eliminate the protections, which they consider costly red tape. But environmental advocates say the law is needed to prevent flooding, protect water supplies and preserve wildlife. As the measure progresses through the General Assembly, here are the facts on Senate Bill 389.

South Bend Tribune: [Authors of bill to eliminate Indiana's wetlands protections have ties to building industry](#)

All three authors of the legislation run companies that are members of the Indiana Builders Association, the group leading the lobbying effort for the bill on behalf of homebuilders and developers. Two of those lawmakers are current or former board members of the organization.

Indiana Environmental Reporter: [Indiana Carbon Market Bill passes first hurdle in state Senate](#)

A bill backed by farmers and environmentalists establishing the state's first carbon market has passed its first hurdle toward becoming a law. Senate Bill 373, authored by three Republicans, establishes a carbon market registration program that facilitates carbon market trading in the state. Carbon markets allow companies to offset the amount of greenhouse gases they emit by purchasing carbon credits worth a certain amount of carbon dioxide emissions.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

Common Dreams: [Biden on biodiversity: The silence and the promise](#)

Subhankar Banerjee on Biden's disheartening silence on the biodiversity crisis, which is just as significant, just as expansive, just as severe, and just as consequential as the climate crisis. According to the United Nations, 1 million animal and plant species face extinction due to human activity. The causes of the no-end-in-sight coronavirus pandemic are firmly situated in the human-caused biodiversity crisis.

Politico: ["A big promise": Biden's climate spending pledge faces early test](#)

What Biden's Jan. 27 executive order lacks in specifics, it makes up for in ambition. Among promises to protect large swaths of land, create a new civilian conservation corps and deliver help to suffering coal-producing regions, its call for 40 percent of spending to go to disadvantaged communities. But there's little clarity on how to identify which communities would qualify for those benefits.

API: [Science policy under Trump: A look back](#)

Science policy was subject to a variety of pressures during the Trump administration, not least during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many science programs have thrived nonetheless, owing principally to bipartisan support in Congress.

Roll Call: [A new dawn for US science policy and America's scientific integrity](#)

Rep. Paul Tonko (D-NY) on his excitement about the beginning of a new science policy that he thinks will deliver the lasting structural reforms we need to ensure our federal science can always be trusted and free from meddling by political operatives or special interests.

State of the Planet: [Climate and COVID as crises of environmental sustainability](#)

COVID-19 has spread around the world because humans encroached unknowingly on natural environments and creatures that allowed us to be exposed to a virus that we were not immune to. Not only that, but the technology of global travel enabled this virus to spread throughout the world in record time. What ecologists call “invasive species” are clearly as great a threat to humans as climate change.

The Hill: [Reclaiming American leadership in AI and data science](#)

Vilas Dhar, president of the Patrick J. McGovern Foundation, on how AI and data science have shown enormous potential in addressing the world’s most intractable problems — from climate to healthcare to inequality — and the complications stemming from the fact that the requisite tools currently rest overwhelmingly in the hands of technologists. The new administration has the opportunity to develop a new infrastructure to collectively shape these tools in ways that bring together research halls, boardrooms, and communities activated around finding solutions.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

Change.org: [Save Indiana’s wetlands](#)

Wetlands are highly productive and biologically diverse systems that enhance water quality, control erosion, maintain stream flows, sequester carbon, and provide a home to at least one third of all threatened and endangered species. Anti-Wetlands Bill 2021 SB 389 would eliminate protection of state wetlands in Indiana, and most of our wetlands are state wetlands.

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