

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

[March 15, 2021]



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

Contributions welcome.

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NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

New York Times: [Deb Haaland becomes first Native American cabinet secretary](#)

Ms. Haaland in 2018 became one of the first two Native American women elected to the House. But her new position as Secretary of the Interior is particularly redolent of history because the department she now leads has spent much of its history abusing or neglecting America's Indigenous people.

The Hill: [CDC review finds Trump-era guidance was not based on science](#)

Federal health officials have identified and removed guidance documents released during the Trump administration that were not grounded in science and not "primarily authored" by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) staff, according to an agency internal review.

Politico: [Senate confirms Michael Regan to lead EPA](#)

Regan was the secretary of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality for four years and put emphasis on fixing environmental problems faced by low-income areas and communities of color. He was praised by environmentalists for blocking the extension of the Mountain Valley natural gas pipeline, getting Duke Energy clean up coal ash collecting in waste ponds, and reaching a settlement with chemical manufacturer Chemours pertaining to toxic PFAS chemicals. He was confirmed 66-34, with 16 Republicans joining the democrats in approving his appointment.

Science: [What's in the huge pandemic relief bill for science?](#)

Though primarily designed to address economic damage caused by the virus, the pandemic relief bill contains \$60 billion for vaccine development and distribution, and testing and contact tracing. The bill allocates \$1.75 billion to sequence and track

variants of the virus, as well as \$600 million to the National Science Foundation, \$150 million to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, \$100 million to the Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences, \$95 million to the US Fish and Wildlife Service, and \$11 billion to international groups and foreign governments fighting the pandemic and other public health threats.

*New York Times: [Countries tried to curb trade in plastic waste. The U.S. is shipping more](#)
Plastic waste that American citizens collect for recycling mostly ends up in landfills or bodies of water overseas. Last year, over 180 nations agreed to rules restricting the export of plastic waste from richer countries to poorer countries, but data from the first few months since these rules have taken effect show virtually no change in American plastic exports, with scrap plastic exports actually increasing. The international law dictates that it is illegal for countries to accept anything but the purest forms of plastic scrap from the US, but the US is one of the few countries who did not ratify the ban, which is not currently being enforced by other countries.*

*NPR: [Biden moves to make it illegal \(again\) to accidentally kill migratory birds](#)
The Biden Administration is working to restore protections listed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that were loosened by the Trump Administration. The Act is one of the oldest environmental laws in the US and was changed under the Trump Administration to end penalties for the accidental killing of migratory birds--thus limiting the scope of a law that was instrumental in fining BP \$100 million for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of migratory birds following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010.*

*Smithsonian: [Partially protected marine areas have little benefit, scientists say](#)
Over two-thirds of the world's marine protected areas still allow some fishing, with many allowing industrial-scale fishing and oil and gas exploration as well. A new study claims this partial protection is ineffective at preserving the biodiversity of the areas as well as recreational enjoyment of these spaces. In contrast, fully protected areas had significantly higher biodiversity levels.*

*New York Times: [Dropping mask mandates, even as vaccinations speed up, is "risky business," Dr. Fauci warns](#)
Many states are dropping mask mandates and dining restrictions as coronavirus cases have decreased over the past few weeks, plateauing at around 60,000 new cases each day. Dr. Fauci points to Italy and other European countries who are reinstating lockdowns and restrictions after they had a decrease in cases, loosened restrictions, and had a subsequent surge. A year into the pandemic, Dr. Fauci says the best actions to take are to vaccinate people as quickly as possible and maintain current public health measures and restrictions.*

*Nature: [COVID antibody treatments show promise for preventing severe disease](#)
Results from two clinical trials show COVID antibody treatments to be successful means of preventing hospitalizations and deaths among individuals with mild or moderate forms of the disease. It is especially effective for those at risk of developing severe forms of the disease. The use of antibody treatments has been authorized in the US, but lack of published data, expensive and complex treatment procedures, and mixed messaging about their effectiveness early in the pandemic have slowed their use by US physicians.*

Science: [Countries now scrambling for COVID-19 vaccines may soon have surpluses to donate](#)
The US, along with three dozen other countries, originally established contracts with multiple vaccine companies when it was still unknown which would prove safe and effective vaccines. As most of the vaccine candidates met these requirements, many wealthy countries ended up with amounts of doses several times that of their populations. Discussions about donating surplus vaccines to poorer countries stopped in December 2020 as cases surged and variants increased. China and India have donated over 12 million vaccines in what some call “vaccine diplomacy.” France and Norway have also pledged to donate some of their vaccine supply.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [34 Indiana counties restrict wind, solar projects. Lawmakers are pushing a bill to override them](#)

State lawmakers are pushing for a bill that would create consistent statewide standards for how close wind and solar projects can be located to other properties. This would overrule the county ordinances that have tried to stop them, including Hamilton and Hendricks counties, which have restrictive ordinances. The state is missing out on millions of dollars in potential income, according to bill proponents, because piecemeal standards are stopping renewable companies from investing in Indiana.

The Center Square: [Indiana, 17 other states file brief to keep California cities from setting climate policy](#)

Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita wants to stop what he thinks is California’s attempt to establish a nationwide climate change policy, and he hopes the U.S. Supreme Court will help. Rokita, along with 17 other states, filed a brief with the Supreme Court on Thursday, asking the court to overrule an appeals court decision that allows a lawsuit filed by San Francisco and Oakland to remain in state court. Both cities sued to hold several major fossil fuel companies liable for the costs of global climate change.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

New York Times: [Biden vowed to make climate “essential” to foreign policy. The reality is harder.](#)

Single issue advocacy policies like the promotion of democracy, human rights or climate change almost always collide with traditional priorities like war and peace, energy security and alliances. Yet the Biden administration will have an easier time weaving its climate goals into its diplomatic agenda once the United States takes concrete steps to lower its own emissions.

UCS: [Why scientists shouldn’t heed calls to “stay in our lane”](#)

On the importance of speaking science to power, particularly on issues that are of critical importance to the health of our society and our planet. There is little point in being a scientist if you are unwilling to defend hard-won scientific understanding.

Forbes: [Politics, not science, may be behind suspensions of AstraZeneca’s Covid vaccine](#)

Multiple experts say that the vaccine is safe and that suspensions hinder efforts to roll out vaccines worldwide. Others worry the vaccine is being put on hold for political, rather than scientific, reasons. This is especially a concern given that demand for vaccines currently outstrips supply as Covid-19 cases continue to spike across Europe.

Scientific American: [How to be an effective science communicator](#)

Anyone can be an effective science communicator and support a culture that endorses science by using Kathleen Hall Jamieson's tips to help friends reject myths about the coronavirus, vaccines, masks, or (is this really the year 2021?) whether Earth is round or flat.

Scientific American: [Science needs to face up to its racist history](#)

In the hands of government and research, science has been a tool that in infamous nonconsensual cases, such as the Tuskegee study and the mistreatment of Henrietta Lacks, caused victims to suffer while the field of medicine benefited. To build trust in science, the administration will be required to look deeply into the fractures between the American public and science that have been orchestrated over the last four years, but stem well into the trenches of the racially unjust history of this country.

Anthropocene: [The global pollination "trade" reveals how crucial biodiversity is to food security](#)

Half the world's traded crops are dependent on pollinators. What's more, this trade is split starkly along geographic lines, with wealthy nations hugely dependent on insect-fueled crop production in tropical, developing countries. Worryingly, these regional cornucopias of pollinator-fueled food are also where pollinator habitat is currently in decline—something that requires urgent action and attention if our food systems are to continue into the future.

Washington Post: [Wisconsin's brutal wolf hunt shows hunters have too much sway over conservation policy](#)

This unprecedented hunt took place during the breeding season, killing pregnant females and disrupting family packs at a time critical to pup survival. A full accounting of the hunt's biological toll is impossible, as the state declined to inspect carcasses.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

UCS: [Tell the CDC: Complete data are critical for vaccine equity](#)

Ensuring equity in vaccine distribution is critical to addressing COVID-19 racial disparities. With giant gaps in demographic data, data-driven policy to increase equity in vaccine distribution becomes nearly impossible. Write today and urge the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to prioritize equity in the vaccine rollout and require data on race and ethnicity so vaccine disparities can be identified, prioritized, and addressed.

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