

# Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [January 18, 2020]



**Note: Welcome to another year of science policy news!  
Our weekly bulletin collects and digests news of the past week.  
Contributions welcome.**

## **NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES**

*Guardian:* [2020 was hottest year on record by narrow margin, NASA says](#)

*NASA determined that the average global land and ocean temperature of 2020 was hotter than previous record holder 2016 by less than one tenth of a degree. Due to different measurement methods, NOAA found 2020 slightly colder than 2016 and the EU climate observation program determined the two years had tied. Nevertheless, the 10 warmest years on record all occurred within the past 15 years, indicating a dramatic increase in global temperature that is expected to worsen over the coming years.*

*ABC.net.au:* [Climate change pushed ocean temperatures to record high in 2020, study finds](#)

*The world's oceans absorbed 20 sextillion joules of heat due to climate change in 2020 and warmed to record levels, a study has found. Report co-author Kevin Trenberth, from the US National Center for Atmospheric Research, said oceans absorbed more than 90 per cent of the solar energy trapped by greenhouse gases.*

*American Institute of Physics:* [Biden builds out administration-wide climate team](#)

*Former senator and secretary of state John Kerry will serve as an internationally focused climate envoy. Former EPA administrator and current president of the Natural Resources Defense Council Gina McCarthy will be Biden's national climate advisor and lead the new White House Office of Domestic Climate Policy. Biden continued to form his "climate team" with recent nominations for the heads of the Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, EPA, and the Council on Environmental Quality. He also nominated heads of the Commerce Department, the National Economic Council, and the labor secretary that have experience with and have expressed support for climate policy, stating that "If we are going to tackle the climate crisis, then solutions must be woven into every aspect of our economic policy."*

Science: [Biden proposes a science-led New Deal to end pandemic suffering](#)

*Biden's \$1.9 trillion "American Rescue Plan" will include direct assistance to citizens financially struggling because of the pandemic in the form of \$1400 stimulus checks, increased health care and unemployment benefits, as well as rent and food assistance. \$400 billion of the total is intended to aid in a pandemic response that includes a national vaccination program, tripling the amount of community health workers, and expanding COVID-19 testing.*

Science: [Biden appoints geneticist Eric Lander as science adviser](#)

*Lander will act as the head of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy and science adviser to president-elect Biden. He was co-chair of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology under the Obama administration and is the founding director of the Broad Institute, a biomedical and genomic research center run by Harvard and MIT. He previously co-led the Human Genome Project and will be the first biologist to hold a Cabinet-level position.*

Nature: [COVID curbed carbon emissions in 2020 — but not by much](#)

*Global carbon emissions fell by 6.4%, with US emissions decreasing by almost 13% because of declines in travel. However, this decline in emissions is less than what some experts anticipated, and fossil fuel emissions are expected to bounce back to normal, if not higher, levels in 2021. The UN Environment Program estimates a 7.6% drop in global emissions is needed each year to stay within the 1.5 degrees of warming goal set by the Paris Climate Agreement.*

Politico: [Biden to yank Keystone XL permit on first day of presidency](#)

*The move is billed as one of Biden's Day One climate change actions, according to a presentation circulating among Washington trade groups and lobbyists, a portion of which was seen by Politico.*

Washington Post: [In Trump's last days, a spree of environmental rollbacks](#)

*If federal judges or congressional members do not overturn recent Trump policies, the Biden administration will likely have their environmental agenda delayed as they will have to spend months reversing over two dozen environmental policies finalized since Trump's loss in November. The policies are aimed to help fossil fuel, mining, and logging industries by reducing protected habitats, opening conservation lands for development, and requiring the Interior department to use language that undermines climate science, with policies aimed at everything from in-home heaters to northern spotted owls.*

New York Times: [Two members of W.H.O. team on trail of virus are denied entry to China](#)

*13 members of a team of 15 WHO employees and scientists were recently admitted to China after months of delays, to conduct an independent investigation tracing the origins and spread of the coronavirus. Two team members tested positive for COVID-19 antibodies and were not admitted with the rest of the group. The remaining members will be required to quarantine for 14 days in Wuhan before they begin their investigation. Critics of the Chinese government worry there will be attempts to politicize the investigation.*

Washington Post: [United Airlines aims to suck carbon dioxide from the friendly skies](#)

*United Airlines is the first major U.S. air carrier to take a step toward trying to remove some of the greenhouse gases spewed by it and every other airline, pollution that is driving up global temperatures.*

*New York Times: [Toyota to Pay a Record Fine for a Decade of Clean Air Act Violations](#)*

*Toyota will pay a \$180 million fine for failing to report defects in models made from 2005-2015 that affected the control of tailpipe emissions. It is the largest penalty for breaking federal emission-reporting requirements to date. The United States has recently seen fuel efficiency decrease and pollution increase in cars and trucks for the first time in 5 years, with Toyota vehicles having some of the worst fuel efficiency according to an EPA report. The company also supported Trump's 2019 rollback of tailpipe emission standards.*

## **REGIONAL NEWS**

*IndyStar: [Biden picks Hoosier Janet McCabe to be No. 2 at the Environmental Protection Agency](#)*

*McCabe, the Director of Indiana University's Environmental Resilience Institute, previously worked at the EPA under former President Barack Obama. In McCabe, the incoming Biden administration has tapped someone who brings experience working in a red state and with industry to move the needle on environmental issues.*

*IndyStar: ["The biggest obstacle is change": How farmers are being convinced to update their methods](#)*

*Regenerative farming, which includes not tilling the soil, growing cover crops during the off season and rotational grazing, helps reduce erosion and sequesters greenhouse gases, is a potential tool in the fight against climate change. It also requires Hoosier farmers overcome a mental block to changing the way they, their fathers, and grandfathers worked the land for decades.*

## **OPINION AND ANALYSIS**

*Scientific American: [The four most pressing science priorities for the next president](#)*

*A plague is raging. The planet is warming. Social trust is abysmal; a substantial fraction of Americans have bought into the lie that Biden's decisive win in the 2020 election was somehow fraudulent. But there is much the new administration can do immediately, starting with the steps laid out in the pages that follow.*

*Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists: [Biden is off to a great start. But there's a lot of work to be done on climate](#)*

*The new president and his team must hit the ground running, reengage the global community, and immediately seek to set and adhere to new and binding emissions targets that will keep global warming from becoming much worse.*

*The Intercept: [Oil industry reconsiders donations to election deniers—but has its own big lie](#)*

*The fossil fuel industry pioneered massive political disinformation with climate denial. It also fed the "Stop the Steal" movement.*

*New York Times: [Inside the C.I.A., she became a spy for planet Earth](#)*

*Linda Zall is disclosing how she toiled anonymously within the intelligence agency to help scientists intensify their studies of a changing planet.*

## **TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS**

*Hoosier Environmental Council: [HB 1191 bars local governments from prohibiting unhealthy energy resources](#)*

*Local governments have, for decades, been at the forefront of protecting our public health, including addressing issues with leaking septic tanks, mold, mosquitoes, second-hand smoke, and much more. With HB 1191, major special interests want to strip away the right of local governments to prohibit energy resources and infrastructure (tied to a local electric or gas utility) that a local government might view as harmful to the public health. Take action against HB 1191.*

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