

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [December 6, 2020]



NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

Grist: [“The planet is broken,” UN chief says](#)

The U.N. and the World Meteorological organization released a report on the “state of the climate” and – surprise, surprise – it looks bleak. The year from hell is on course to be the third warmest on record, viruses are jumping out of nature to attack us, and the world has already warmed 1.2 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

Science: [“Wonderful news to wake up to”: U.K. greenlights Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine](#)

The vaccine developed by Pfizer and BioNTech was granted emergency authorization by the UK’s Medicines and Healthcare Products Regulatory Agency, making it the first vaccine approved for use outside of China and Russia. The FDA has a meeting on December 10th to discuss the Pfizer vaccine, which was found to have a 95% efficacy rate in a phase three trial of 43,000 people.

New York Times: [As virus spreads, C.D.C. draws up an urgent battle plan](#)

In response to a dramatic increase in infections, the CDC is urging local governments to follow 10 public health measures designed to contain the pandemic. The goal of the singular, consistent plan is to unify the country in its response and end the patchwork of different regulations and messaging in different parts of the country. Some measures include requiring face masks on public transit, avoiding eating at indoor restaurants, and keeping schools open as much as possible.

New York Times: [Anti-vaccine doctor has been invited to testify before Senate Committee](#)

The lead witness at an upcoming Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing will be Dr. Jane M. Orient, the executive director of the Association of American Physicians and Surgeons. The association opposes governmental involvement in medicine, with Dr. Orient calling mandated vaccines “a serious intrusion into individual liberty, autonomy and parental decisions.” She intends to instead convince the committee to encourage the use of hydroxychloroquine as a potential treatment, despite FDA’s rejection of its emergency use.

New York Times: [Doctors are skeptical of pricey drug given emergency approval for COVID-19](#)

The FDA recently gave emergency authorization to Eli Lilly’s arthritis drug baricitinib as a treatment for the coronavirus. However, a trial performed by the NIH showed the drug only

decreased patient recovery time by one day and had side effects that included blood clotting. Use of the drug costs \$1,500 per patient, and many doctors feel it may have overlapping roles with more widely available steroids being used to treat the virus.

Science: [First-of-its-kind African trial tests common drugs to prevent severe COVID-19](#)

The first major drug trial performed across the African continent, ANTICOV, will bring together researchers and participants from 13 different countries to test the effectiveness of several different inexpensive, widely available drugs at treating COVID-19. The main goal of the trial is to find a drug that reduces the likelihood of a mild illness developing into a severe case by 50%.

American Institute of Physics: [Trump fills out National Science Board with final picks](#)

Trump has filled the last two seats in the National Science Board following the expiration of 8 members' terms in May. The National Science Board is the governing board of the National Science Foundation and oversees NSF's budget submission, distribution of funding awards, and advising members of Congress and the executive administration on scientific matters. Astronomer Matthew Malkan and mechanical engineer Scott Stanley follow 16 other Trump appointments to the board, which has 24 members.

Science: [Must-pass U.S. defense bill would harmonize funding disclosures for all federal grant applicants](#)

The legislation will detail how a researcher applying for a federal grant must disclose other sources of funding in response to counter attempts by China to "obtain cutting-edge technologies by tapping into work funded by the U.S. government." The legislation is a part of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act and will apply to all federal agencies.

New York Times: [Hotter planet already poses fatal risks, health experts warn](#)

Public health experts published a report in The Lancet deeming climate change as an already present public health risk that is expected to increase in severity. The report finds a 50% increase in heat-related deaths in people over 65 in the last 20 years, as well as an increase in the size and number of days with wildfires, which contribute to air pollution. The report includes recommendations such as investing in public transit, ending subsidies for fossil fuels, and reducing the use of nitrogen fertilizers.

Scientific American/ E & E News: [Major companies call on Biden to act on climate change](#)

A big slice of corporate America signed onto a statement yesterday calling on President-elect Joe Biden to work with Congress on "ambitious, durable, bipartisan climate solutions." While the statement doesn't offer support for a specific policy, its signatories represent a cross section of the U.S. economy, including Amazon.com Inc., Bank of America Corp., BP PLC, Walmart Inc., DSM and Exelon Corp.

Guardian: [Climate crisis to triple flooding threat for low-income US homes by 2050](#)

Climate Central, a New-Jersey based science organization, released a report stating that affordable housing in coastal areas is at particular risk from increased flooding, worsening storms, and higher tides. Flooding is expected to increase from affecting 7,668 affordable housing units across the US annually to 24,519 units by 2050.

Smithsonian: [In a global first, lab-grown chicken nuggets will soon be on the menu in Singapore](#)

"Cultured chicken" is grown from chicken muscle cell samples that are fed plant-based nutrients and grown into tissue. It was approved by the Singapore Food Agency as an ingredient for chicken nuggets and is the first lab-grown meat to receive regulatory approval. The US-based company behind the "meat" is one of over two dozen companies currently working on growing chicken, fish, and beef in labs, which would substantially decrease environmental consequences associated with meat production.

REGIONAL NEWS

CBS Chicago: [Indiana COVID-19 outbreak now among worst in the United States](#)

The Hoosier state is second worst in terms of cases per 100,000 residents in the past seven days, trailing only Rhode Island, according to data compiled by the New York Times. In terms of overall numbers, not factoring for population, the 6,910 daily case average, places Indiana No. 9 in the United States. The state also ranks No. 8 in terms of daily average deaths from COVID-19.

Indiana Environmental Reporter: [A seat at the table](#)

The pandemic has highlighted the severity of the climate change crisis, said representatives from three climate activist organizations during the virtual America's Role in the World conference held by Indiana University's Hamilton Lugar School of Global and International Studies Dec. 1-2.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

New Yorker: [The climate debt the U.S. owes the world](#)

Bill McKibben on how the U.S. cannot meet its moral and practical burdens by simply reducing its own emissions, since it has already put so much carbon in the air.

Guardian: [Following the science: the writers who have made sense of Covid](#)

It has been an extraordinary year to be a science writer, watching the formerly niche subjects of epidemiology, virology and immunology take center stage. The scramble to get a grip on this invisible global killer was all-consuming, and writers rose to the challenge, producing reams of coverage: the disease was only officially named severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (Sars-CoV-2) on 11 February; by June, the first book on it had been published.

Mongabay: [To save life on Earth, consult this new map](#)

Reversing biodiversity loss, halting climate change and even preventing the emergence of new pandemics may seem like isolated objectives, but they are not. A group of scientists set out to create an interactive digital map to show which land areas are essential to meet these challenges and save life on Earth.

Grist: [How climate change could undo 50 years of public health gains](#)

A report in The Lancet contains "the most worrying outlook" they've ever published. It not only took a host of new climate-health risks into account but also found that "a concerning number of indicators are showing an early, but sustained, reversal of previously positive trends identified in past reports."

Yale 360: [How Biden can put the U.S. on a path to carbon-free electricity](#)

Even without strong action by Congress, President-elect Joe Biden will have a wide array of tools—from expanding renewables on federal lands to pushing the financial industry on climate change—that could put the U.S. on a trajectory to decarbonizing its electricity sector by 2035.

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR

NRDC: [Help save gray wolves before it is too late](#)

President Trump's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) just finalized its Rule to roll back vital Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for gray wolves in the lower-48 states. Their disastrous plan will reverse years of recovery for this iconic species. We are facing a biodiversity crisis of global proportions. The fate of humanity is intertwined with the fate of species and healthy ecosystems. Now is the time to restore species to the landscape — not dial back efforts for an iconic animal that was once nearly exterminated in the U.S.

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