

Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin

[February 1, 2021]



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

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

The Hill: [Biden makes shift from Trump on science](#)

President Biden is taking steps to restore scientific integrity to government actions after several controversies in which advocates say science was sidestepped or ignored by the Trump administration. Biden this week created a task force to review agency scientific integrity policies. He is also requiring that all federal research agencies have a chief science officer, and that all agencies have a scientific integrity official.

The Hill: [Court rules against fast-track of Trump EPA's "secret science" rule](#)

The Trump EPA had characterized the rule, which would restrict the use of studies that don't make their underlying data publicly available, as procedural, allowing it to go into effect immediately. Judge Brian Morris, an Obama appointee, disagreed, determining that the rule was substantive and ordering that it can't go into effect until Feb. 5, thus rendering it subject to a new White House memo that freezes pending regulations for 60 days.

Science: [Biden orders sweeping review of government science integrity policies](#)

Biden's new task force will spend 120 days reviewing scientific integrity policies. Part of their work includes documenting cases in which "improper political interference" affected research, including instances of potential suppression or distortion of scientific data. The Union of Concerned Scientists and other organizations that have advocated for federal scientific integrity policies were reported to be cautiously optimistic about the move.

Scientific American: [Biden elevates science in week one actions](#)

Since taking office on January 20, President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris have signaled a clear commitment to science and pledged sweeping initiatives to reestablish and elevate its role in the federal government. President Biden immediately nominated scientists to some key positions and began implementing an

ambitious agenda to revitalize the nation's climate-change-mitigation efforts and get the coronavirus pandemic under control.

Guardian: [Biden faces call to heal environmental and cultural scars of Trump border wall](#)

Hundreds of miles of the borderlands—including sacred Native American sites and protected public lands—have been bulldozed, blasted, and parched over the past four years, with little environmental assessment or oversight thanks to waivers suspending dozens of federal laws in order to expedite construction.

The Washington Post: [Millions earmarked for public health emergencies were used to pay for unrelated projects, inspector general of Department of Health and Human Services says](#)

Federal officials repeatedly raided a fund earmarked for biomedical research in the years leading up to the covid-19 pandemic, spending millions of dollars on unrelated salaries, administrative expenses and even the cost of removing office furniture, according to the findings of an investigation into a whistleblower complaint shared with The Washington Post.

New York Times: [Johnson & Johnson's vaccine offers strong protection but fuels concern about variants](#)

The Johnson & Johnson vaccine is the first to require only one dose and was found to be extremely effective at preventing severe cases of the virus. The vaccine had a 72% efficacy rate in the United States which, while not as high as the Moderna and Pfizer alternatives, is still considered to be a strong vaccine. However, this efficacy rate dropped to 57% when tested in South Africa, which is suffering from a highly contagious variant of the coronavirus, leading scientists to be concerned that other vaccines may also be less effective against new variants.

Nature: [Novavax offers first evidence that COVID vaccines protect people against variants](#)

The Novavax vaccine was found to be more than 85% effective against the coronavirus variant found in the UK, but less than 50% effective against the highly contagious variant found in South Africa. Early studies have shown this variant to be partially resistant to anti-bodies developed after recovery from the disease or from vaccinations. However, even 50% efficacy provides some combative pressure against the vaccine and quick distribution can still dramatically limit its spread.

Smithsonian: [Earth loses 1.2 trillion tons of ice per year, a nearly 60% increase from 1994](#)

A new report found that earth lost 28 trillion tons of ice from 1994 to 2007, and since 2010 the average amount lost annually has reached 1.2 trillion tons, compared to 760 billion tons lost per year in the 90s. Levels of loss are expected to continually increase. This is expected to have a substantial impact on global sea levels, which have risen 1.3 inches since 1994 and are projected to rise as much as 16 inches by 2100.

New York Times: ["Energy" is its name. But what can the D.O.E. actually do on climate?](#)

Though the Department of Energy oversees a wide array of tasks, five things they could do to improve climate policy include: funding the development of clean technologies; backstopping low interest loans to support clean-energy and carbon removal projects; tightening energy efficiency standards; building high-voltage transmission lines to carry power from remote solar and wind farms; and lobbying Congress for funding as well as clean energy policy and technology issues.

New York Times: [Electric cars are coming, and fast. Is the nation's grid up to it?](#)

GM recently announced plans to stop selling new gas-powered vehicles by 2035, several other car companies such as Ford, Volkswagen, and Tesla intend to increase their number of electric models, and California's governor plans to phase out combustion engines within the next 15 years. However, currently less than 1% of cars in the US are electric. Increases in public charging stations, upgrades to electrical grid and transmission systems, altering charging times, and getting more electrical energy from renewable sources are all infrastructural goals that should take place for electrical vehicles to be successfully implemented nationwide.

ABCnews.com: [Paul Crutzen, who shared Nobel for ozone work, has died](#)

Paul J. Crutzen, a Dutch scientist who won the Nobel Prize for chemistry for his work understanding the ozone hole and is credited with coining the term Anthropocene to describe the geological era shaped by mankind, has died at the age of 87.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [More than 75 bills are related to the environment this session. Here are ones we're following.](#)

Some of the bills could mean big steps forward for reducing Indiana's carbon emissions footprint, boosting "green" industries in the state and cleaning up Indiana's water and air. On the other end of the spectrum, other bills could repeal entire laws protecting the state's natural wetlands or potentially limit Hoosiers' ability to protect themselves from factory farm pollution.

Nwitimes.com: [Senators agree to eliminate all state regulations on Indiana wetlands](#)

The Indiana Senate voted 29-19 Monday to allow property owners to fill or drain any state-regulated wetlands on their property — putting up to 80% of the remaining wetlands in the state at risk of permanent elimination. Senate Bill 389, which now goes to the House, repeals all state regulations on wetlands and terminates all pending administrative and legal actions against individuals who violated the regulations while they were in effect.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

Wired: [Is it time for an emergency rollout of carbon-eating machines?](#)

The UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change notes that if we want to meet the Paris climate agreement's most optimistic goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, we have to deploy some sort of negative emissions technologies. In a recent paper in the journal Nature Communications, a team of researchers propose a wartime-style crash deployment of a global network of machines that sequester carbon.

Michigan Live: [Pentagon needs "culture change" on pollution, say PFAS caucus members](#)

The U.S. Department of Defense must adopt a more constructive attitude toward cleaning up toxic "forever chemical" pollution, say members of a bipartisan caucus in Congress that's pushing the new administration to move swiftly on regulations that would curb exposure to PFAS chemicals in the environment.

*Purdue Newsroom: [Turn off that camera during virtual meetings, environmental study says](#)
A new study says that despite a record drop in global carbon emissions in 2020, a pandemic-driven shift to remote work and more at-home entertainment still present significant environmental impact. just one hour of videoconferencing or streaming emits 150-1,000 grams of carbon dioxide (a gallon of gasoline burned from a car emits about 8,887 grams), requires 2-12 liters of water, and demands a land area adding up to about the size of an iPad Mini.*

TAKE ACTION AND RESOURCES FOR ACTIVISTS

NRDC.org: [Urge your senators to confirm President Biden's pro-environment nominees right away!](#)

President Biden has nominated highly qualified climate, clean energy, and environmental leaders to the top environmental positions in his cabinet in what would be the most diverse environmental team in White House history. Urge your senators to confirm Biden's climate nominees immediately, so they can get to work tackling our most urgent environmental challenges.

The CSIU Weekly News Bulletin is now available on the web. To view this page online go to <https://csiub.org/weekly-news-bulletins>. To view archives of past bulletins, see <https://csiub.org/bulletin-archives>.

Our CSIU news bulletin is intended to provide a brief update on recent news, editorials, as well as action items related to science integrity and science policy. Note that editorial pieces and action items are assembled from a variety of sources and organizations; they do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policy priorities of Concerned Scientists @ IU. This week's news bulletin was compiled by ASIU and IU biology major Emma Hand and CSIU member Christoph Irmscher of IU's Department of English. We're looking for volunteers! If you'd like to volunteer—or if you have additional links you'd like to share for future bulletins, send them to Christoph at cirmsche@indiana.edu.

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