



Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [July 20, 2020]

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

The New York Times: [Trump weakens major conservation law to speed construction permits](#)

The Trump Administration announced changes to the National Environmental Policy Act, which required federal agencies to analyze and make public any environmental impacts infrastructure projects could have. The change severely weakens NEPA by setting deadlines for the completion of environmental studies, allowing certain activities to not require environmental assessments, and not requiring the analysis of cumulative environmental effects that the projects may cause.

The Guardian: [“Carbon savings” from Covid-19 lockdown halve within weeks](#)

The UK's carbon emissions have begun to rebound following the easing of Covid-19 lockdown measures, causing the “carbon savings” triggered by the coronavirus to halve within weeks.

The New York Times: [As Trump ignores virus crisis, Republicans start to break ranks](#)

Many Republican state governors and party leaders, including Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, are encouraging mask-wearing, business restrictions, and the following of CDC guidelines that Trump has continuously criticized and ignored. This comes as many states across the US face rapidly increasing numbers of cases.

The Guardian: [Joe Biden unveils aggressive \\$2tn climate and jobs plan](#)

Biden's new proposal focuses on creating jobs through clean energy infrastructure and plans to spend \$2 trillion over the next four years. The plan includes upgrading buildings to make them more sustainable, focusing on electric vehicle manufacturing and public rail systems, as well as cleaning up after extractive industries. It aims to have an electricity system based solely on renewables and nuclear power by 2035 and plans to combat environmental injustice.

NPR: [Congressional Democrats demand White House restore COVID-19 data collection to CDC](#)

The Trump administration told hospitals to stop reporting their coronavirus data directly to the CDC, and instead use their state health departments or a new portal set up by a private contractor to report their data directly to the Department of Health and Human Services, which oversees the CDC. Public health experts worry this will hurt the CDC's ability to respond to the changing pandemic and provide up-to-date information to the public.

Science: [Data secrecy is crippling attempts to slow COVID-19's spread in U.S., epidemiologists warn](#)

Epidemiologists from Stanford and several University of California campuses have been denied requests placed from April through June for more detailed coronavirus and contact-tracing data by county and state health agencies. The agencies cite privacy concerns and workload constraints in making their decision, despite the same data from several states being given to a federal contractor analyzing the data for the Department of Health and Human Services.

Euronews: [Crab blood used to make COVID-19 vaccine outrages animal rights activists](#)

Horseshoe crabs have existed on earth for over 450 million years, predating dinosaurs and flowering plants - as well as surviving five mass extinctions. But since the species' medical potential was discovered and made the industry standard for detecting bacterial contaminants in the 1970s, around 500,000 crabs are harvested annually for this use.

AIP FYI: [Panchanathan takes up baton as NSF director](#)

An interview with Sethuraman Panchanathan about his vision for NSF, why he first came to the U.S., and his views on expanding the agency's footprint beyond fundamental research.

New York Times: [The Link between Parkinson's Disease and toxic chemicals](#)

Trichloroethylene, or TCE, linked to Parkinson's, is so widespread in the American environment that nearly everyone has been exposed to it. Yet a proposed ban on the use of TCE was postponed indefinitely in 2017 by the Environmental Protection Agency, as has a ban on the nerve toxin chlorpyrifos, an insecticide linked to Parkinson's that is widely used on crops and golf courses.

Science: [United States drops visa restriction on foreign students attending remote classes](#)

After backlash from University officials across the country, the Trump Administration dropped its proposal requiring international students to leave the US if all of their courses were online. Instead, the policy from the start of the pandemic stating that international students may maintain their visas if their courses are online remains intact.

REGIONAL NEWS

IndyStar: [While Indiana coal and gas firms received millions in loans, clean energy was left behind](#)

Environmental advocates worry that the old-guard Indiana coal, gas, and oil companies may have gobbled up more than their share of the government loans meant to help companies deal with the pandemic. An IndyStar analysis showed that several large coal and gas companies received large loans — of more than \$2 million each — in the state. Meanwhile, the largest loan a clean energy company received was for a maximum of \$1 million.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

InsideClimate News: [As the culture wars flare amid the pandemic, a call to speak "science to power"](#)

A growing number of National Academy of Science members sign a statement decrying the Trump administration's "denigration of scientific expertise."

Grist.org: [To fight climate change, Democrats want to close the "digital divide"](#)

If the pandemic has laid bare America's so-called "digital divide," climate change will only worsen the inequality that stems from it. As the weather grows more extreme and unpredictable, wealthy urban communities with faster, more reliable internet access will have an easier time responding to and recovering from disasters, while rural and low-income Americans—already especially vulnerable to the impacts of a warming climate—could be left in the dark.

National Geographic: [The pandemic could actually strengthen the U.S. food system](#)

Reports from farmers, CSA alliances, regional food researchers, and wholesalers across the country suggest a boom is under way for direct-to-consumer operations, as long as they're close enough to cities to take advantage of dense urban markets.

Washington Post: [Joe Biden just released a pretty good climate plan. The president is still a denier](#)

Mr. Biden's proposal is serious but imperfect, the sort of plan that might in a normal election year spark a debate on cost, efficiency and the role of the private economy in decarbonizing the

nation. But even if it's less good than it could have been, it's miles ahead of where the nation is now.

The Intercept: [Half of Oklahoma is "Indian Country." What if all Native treaties were upheld?](#)

Going back to the original treaty texts would make broad swaths of the nation Native territory. That means Indigenous people would have a stronger voice on environmental enforcement, more of a say on fossil fuel infrastructure construction, be able to better control the fate of Native children removed from their parents' home, and less likely to be tried in local courts.

Grist.org: [This makeup ingredient could destroy 99% of "forever chemicals"](#)

Since the 1940s, per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances—more commonly known as PFAS—have been leaching into the soil, the groundwater, and our bodies. Michael Wong of Rice University and his team have found that boron nitride — also known as BN and commonly used in cosmetics and electronics — could destroy up to 99 percent of a type of PFAS called PFOA in about four hours. Between 2013 and 2015, as many as 6 million Americans were routinely exposed to PFAS levels exceeding the EPA's safety guidelines.

Swissinfo.ch: [Reviewing the legacy of racist scientists](#)

Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler coined several now-common psychological terms such as schizophrenia, autism, and ambivalence. He also believed "mental and physical cripples" should be sterilized in order to preserve racial purity. At a time when controversial historical figures are increasingly under the microscope, how should we judge scientists like Bleuler?

TAKE ACTION

UCS: [COVID-19 disinformation: How to spot it—and stop it](#)

Disinformation is more likely to take root and proliferate if people lack reliable access to accurate, up-to-date information. In the past, scientific experts have played a key role in providing such information to the public. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, federal scientists, especially CDC scientists, have been silenced in a way that would have been unthinkable during previous epidemics.

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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