



Concerned Scientists' Weekly News Bulletin [September 14, 2020]

NEWS ITEMS AND ARTICLES

Washington Post: [Dense smoke smothers Pacific Northwest, shutting residents indoors and complicating fire response](#)

In many parts of Oregon, the air quality ranked among the worst in the world, as bad as Beijing's 2013 bout of pollution that was widely branded the "airpocalypse." The smoke made the air potentially life-threatening for people with respiratory problems to venture outside.

Circle of Blue: [Western wildfires damage, contaminate drinking water systems](#)

The destruction and contamination of drinking water systems is a new and unsettling chapter in the story of wildfires in the West. Past fires have burned watersheds, depositing into reservoirs debris and ash that interfere with the water-treatment process. Now, subdivisions are burning, putting the plumbing itself at risk.

The Guardian: [Humans exploiting and destroying nature on unprecedented scale: report](#)

The 2020 Living Planet Report released by WWF shows that vertebrate populations have decreased by over two-thirds since 1970, with Latin America and the Caribbean facing the largest decline at 94%. Humans have altered 75% of Earth's ice-free landscapes, and natural ecosystems across the globe are threatened by overexploitation, disease, and habitat fragmentation.

The Guardian: [Up to 48 species saved from extinction by conservation efforts, study finds](#)

21 to 32 bird species and 7 to 16 mammal species have been saved from extinction since 1993, when the UN Convention on Biological Diversity established legal conservation protections and reintroduction programs. It is estimated that without these protections in place, extinction rates would have been 3 to 4 times higher.

The New York Times: [Federal report warns of financial havoc from climate change](#)

A government report written by analysts from oil companies, agricultural giants, investment firms, and academics states that "A world wracked by frequent and devastating shocks from climate change cannot sustain the fundamental conditions supporting our financial system." It is the first government study to explore the financial impacts of the climate crisis.

Washington Post: [In rare bipartisan climate agreement, senators forge plan to slash use of potent greenhouse gas](#)

In a show of defiance of the Trump administration, key Senate Republicans joined Democrats on Thursday in agreeing to phase out chemicals widely used in air conditioners and refrigeration that are warming the planet. Despite the Trump administration's refusal to join a global agreement to reduce hydrofluorocarbons, which are among the world's most potent

drivers of climate change, a push by U.S. firms and environmentalists appears to have swayed lawmakers.

Science: [Climate change denialist given top role at major U.S. science agency](#)

David Legates, who rejects climate science, was hired by the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) as assistant secretary of Commerce for observation and prediction, in a move suggesting the Trump administration is asserting growing influence over the study of rising temperatures. A geography professor at the University of Delaware, Legates has suggested that an outcome of burning fossil fuels would be a more habitable planet for humans.

The Independent: [‘This may most shameful moment in history of US science policy’: Science journal editor launches attack on Trump over coronavirus](#)

As the number of infections in the US passed 6.5m and the number of fatalities approached 200,000, excerpts of a new book by Bob Woodward revealed the president privately was aware early on of the seriousness posed by the virus and the pandemic it had triggered. The editor in chief of Science magazine, Herbert Holden Thorp, rebuked the president for flat-out lying to the American people.

The New York Times: [Vaccine makers keep safety details quiet, alarming scientists](#)

Though it is normal for pharmaceutical companies to guard details regarding their clinical trials until after they are complete, many scientists and public health experts are calling for companies to release data, protocols, and analyses from their coronavirus vaccine trials and be more open with the public to gain their trust. Some argue the large amount of federal investment in the vaccines should require companies to be more transparent.

Politico: [Dem probe: Trump administration ignored NIH evidence on fetal tissue](#)

The Trump administration’s efforts to curtail the use of fetal tissue in federal research was driven by political considerations despite health officials’ promise to follow the science, according to new findings from a long-running investigation by senior Democratic lawmakers.

The New York Times: [Cancer projects to diversify genetic research receive new grants](#)

Decades of genetic studies and clinical trials primarily focused on white patients. The New York Genome Center has a program aimed to fix this disparity of information and recently gave six grants to researchers focused on the roles of race and ethnicity in different types of cancer.

The Guardian: [Nasa is looking for private companies to help mine the moon](#)

NASA hopes to buy moon rock and dust samples collected by private companies. The samples would range from 50-500 grams and be bought for \$15,000 - \$25,000. NASA administrator Jim Bridenstine wrote that “It’s time to establish the regulatory certainty to extract and trade space resources” and hopes the material collected can aid the agency in planning future missions.

REGIONAL NEWS

WishTV.com: [Purdue begins inaugural sciences pilot program cohort](#)

The first cohort of Purdue University’s Emerging Leaders Science Scholars pilot program has begun. John Gates, vice provost for diversity and inclusion at the university, says the program aims to grow access for underrepresented students in the science fields.

OPINION AND ANALYSIS

Undark.org: [After years of gains, black STEM representation is falling. Why?](#)

Culled from reports issued by the National Science Foundation (NSF), the analysis indicates that after decades of increases, the share of STEM-field bachelor's degrees awarded to Black students peaked in the early 2000s and has been falling ever since — despite increasing federal spending on STEM diversity initiatives.

Ensia: [We need massive societal change if we're going to survive and thrive on Earth](#)

Decades of research have been spent examining and understanding the complex, nonlinear connections between different parts of our planet and incorporating them into climate models. Yet we get away with ignoring much of this complexity in our day-to-day lives — the consequences being delayed or removed enough for us to blissfully not connect the dots. But when it comes to existential threats to humanity like climate change, we must take into account the messy way the world works.

The New York Times: [These changes are needed amid worsening wildfires, experts say](#)

As record-breaking wildfires spread throughout the West Coast, cities are discussing the implementation of increased regulation of housing development in fire-prone areas and increased use of controlled burns to lower the chances of future large fires. California already has fire-resistant construction standards and mandated access to water for firefighters, and other states are looking to adopt these practices.

Science: [COVID-19 worries douse plans for fire experiments](#)

Many states have severely reduced, or altogether eliminated, the number of prescribed burns in response to fears that dry conditions will make burns harder to control and their resulting air pollution could worsen coronavirus risk, especially among vulnerable populations. However, areas that do not undergo prescribed burns could pose larger wildfire risks in the future.

Smithsonian: [How redlining made city neighborhoods hotter](#)

A recent study found that redlined neighborhoods are, on average, 5th warmer in the summer than historically white neighborhoods in the same city. Some cities such as Washington DC and Portland experience 20-degree temperature differences. Lack of trees, large expanses of roads and sidewalks, and less central air-conditioning all contribute to this disparity. The US currently experiences heat-related deaths of up to 12,000 each year, with single degree temperature increases resulting in 2.5x more deaths.

InsideClimate News: [With tactics honed on climate change, Ken Cuccinelli attracts new controversy at homeland security](#)

When Cuccinelli was Virginia Attorney General a decade ago, he pursued an extraordinary legal campaign against one of the nation's top climate scientists, Michael Mann, in essence accusing him of fraud for his research tracking the rise in global temperatures.

AIP FYI: [DOE Science Director Chris Fall on the present and future of the national labs](#)

FYI spoke with Department of Energy Office of Science Director Chris Fall about a range of issues bearing on the national lab system, including a new "Labs of the Future" thought exercise, pandemic recovery, diversity initiatives, and research security.

TAKE ACTION

NRDC: [Save national forests from devastating oil and gas drilling](#)

A new rule announced by the Forest Service could make it much easier to privatize federally managed forests for corporate gain quickly and with very little public input. The Forest Service is accepting public input on this rule for just 60 days. Letters opposing the rule need to be sent by November 2.

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 Irmischer 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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