

# **Environmental Report**

## **June 2017 / July 2017**

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This is a recap / collection of events, policies, and commentaries that have taken place over the months of June and July 2017 in regards to the environment and environmental policy.

## **United States Plans to Withdraw from Paris Climate Accord:**

The Paris Climate Accord is a landmark agreement put together within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change that focused on the world wide reduction of harmful emissions, and the financing of said reduction, starting in 2020. Though there is no mechanism to force a country's hand to follow the accord most countries have been increasingly transparent about their progressive environmental goals. 195 UNFCCC members have signed the agreement, 153 of which have ratified it. The Trump administration has been vocal about its intent to review the Paris Climate Accord since before coming into office, and after months of infighting within the Trump administration over what to do with the accord, the Trump administration announced in early June 2017 that the United States would be withdrawing from the Paris Climate Accord.

## **White House Defends U.S. Withdrawal From Paris Climate Agreement**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/02/531269011/white-house-defends-u-s-withdrawal-from-paris-climate-agreement>

“KELLY MCEVERS, HOST:

The Trump administration spent today defending the president's decision to withdraw from the international climate deal known as the Paris accord. Environmentalists and foreign leaders are criticizing the move, but for many Trump supporters, that criticism reinforces their belief that the president made the right call. NPR's Scott Horsley reports.

SCOTT HORSLEY, BYLINE: EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, the administration's point person on dismantling climate regulations, calls it a courageous decision by President Trump to pull out of the Paris Agreement. Pruitt insists the U.S. has nothing to apologize for, having already reduced its own carbon emissions to 1990's levels. And he says the president's announcement yesterday doesn't have to be the last word.

SCOTT PRUITT: Exiting Paris does not mean disengagement. Paris represents a bad deal for this country. It doesn't mean that we're not going to continue the discussion. To export our innovation, to export our technology to the rest of the world, to demonstrate how we do it better here is I think a very important message to send.

HORSLEY: Trump even says he'd be willing to rejoin the Paris Agreement if the U.S. could negotiate more favorable terms, but that offer was immediately rebuffed by European leaders. The new French president, Emmanuel Macron, says the rest of the world will press ahead without the United States.

## **Week In Politics: Trump Withdraws U.S. From Paris**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/02/531269018/week-in-politics-trump-withdraws-u-s-from-paris-climate-accord>

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: The rest of the world applauded when we signed the Paris Agreement. They went wild. They were so happy for the simple reason that it put our country, the United States of America, which we all love, at a very, very big economic disadvantage.

DIONNE: Well, I think it was astonishing. It was kind of the paranoid style of the American president that he is treating all of our leaders and, by the way, all these CEOs - General Electric, Facebook, Apple, Microsoft on and on - as stupid and easily duped - as not the shapers of our own fate, as the victims of invidious foreign leaders. It was a profound insult not only to Barack Obama, which he obviously intended, but to the whole country that somehow we can be taken advantage of like this.

And it was very bad for us in the world. Trump himself had to concede that this is a nonbinding agreement. And doing something like this can only weaken our standing in the world, which he already did a pretty good job of at the NATO summit.

## **What Leaving The Paris Climate Accord Means For Corporations**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/02/531269074/what-leaving-the-paris-climate-accord-means-for-corporations>

FLAVELLE: You know, there isn't a good reason for them to celebrate. And the reason is that Paris by itself doesn't do anything. There's no enforcement mechanism. There's no rule that says the U.S. can do something different today than it could do yesterday. All the policies that matter are policies that the president could already affect - regulations. He can sign legislation. And he's made those changes.

So to the extent that the president can protect coal or bring back coal, he's done that. And it's important to know that even then, it's not clear what benefit the coal industry might have. A lot of the problems they face are due to technology, automation causing coal miners to lose their jobs and cheap natural gas.

FLAVELLE: Environmentalists told me this week they're concerned this could dissuade foreign investors who might otherwise have put money into U.S. solar or U.S. wind. From doing that, they could say this is a signal of a tough environment; put your money somewhere else.

## **Will China Take A Bigger Role As The U.S. Leaves The Climate Pact?**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/03/531347257/will-china-take-a-bigger-role-as-the-u-s-leaves-the-climate-pact>

LIN: Well, you know, of course, they'd been following this very closely. So I think they've been kind of prepared for it. And, you know, Friday, for example, the EU and China, they just concluded a bilateral, the leaders of their countries, in Brussels. And upon hearing the announcement from Mr. Trump, they actually came out and announced that they would be strengthening their commitment to fighting climate change together. So I don't think this changes the Chinese position at all. And in fact, I think, you know, they're just going to go and do what they were going to do in terms of transitioning to a clean energy future.

## CEO Of Electric Power Giant Criticizes Trump Decision To Withdraw From Paris Climate Agreement

<http://www.npr.org/2017/06/04/531444376/ceo-of-electric-power-giant-criticizes-trump-decision-to-withdraw-from-paris-climate-agreement>

AKINS: Yeah. I think there's a couple of reasons. One is our investors certainly expect us to really focus on sustainability and de-risk our business. So we continue to focus on that. Secondly, from a customer standpoint, there's an expectation that we move to that cleaner energy economy.

And I also should add that the economics themselves have changed dramatically in that if you think about new coal generation or new investments in coal generation, you're measuring that against what's going on with shale gas, with the lowering cost of renewables, with other technical options that are available today that weren't available just a few years ago. So you're seeing a rebalancing of the portfolio as a result of these new technologies.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: What percentage of the power that you supply is based on clean energy?

AKINS: So we have certainly changed. We've reduced our carbon emissions by 44 percent since 2005. So if you look at our resource plan for the next few years, it certainly is driven by renewables, in particular related to solar, wind power and then backed up by natural gas-fired generation to the extent needed. And keep in mind, too, that we still believe that coal should remain a part of the portfolio but, certainly, a smaller part of the portfolio so that we can manage risk and have a multiple set of solutions available to us.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: You keep on using this word risk. Are carbon fuels risky?

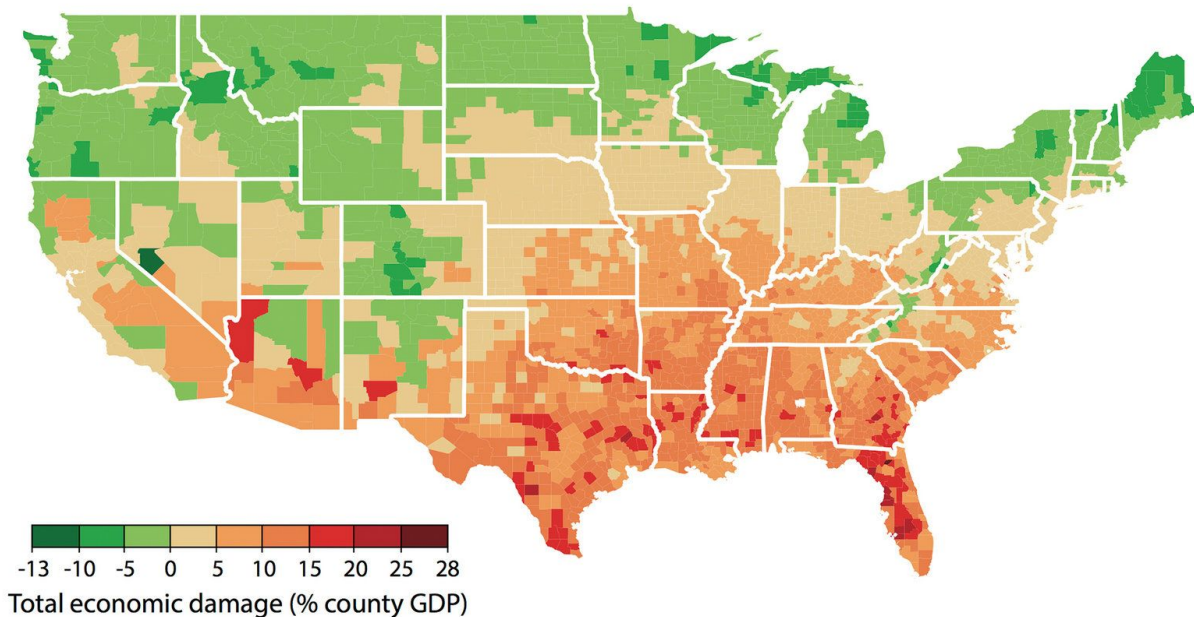
AKINS: Yeah. I think you have to look at it in terms of the risk profile of a coal-fired generation facility versus renewable and other forms of generation. Coal-fired facility is much more costly. And then, secondly, with natural gas prices coming down, renewable price is coming down on an energy standpoint. It's becoming competitive. So if you want to de-risk the company going forward, you'd focus on these other technologies. So that's really driving this to solutions that, really, are coming about in the future.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Why is coal expensive?

AKINS: Well, any large capital investment like that - a coal-fired station and, for that matter, a nuclear station is just a huge capital investment. So if you build a new coal unit in today's order, it would probably be in the four to \$5 billion range. That's a lot of capital because you're not only building the generation facility itself, but you're building all of the environmental equipment attached to it, which is substantial. It actually is a chemical factory that happens to produce electricity.

## Mapping The Potential Economic Effects Of Climate Change

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/06/29/534896130/mapping-the-potential-economic-effects-of-climate-change>



Colder places like New England might see an economic upturn — for example, from lower heating bills. But places that are already hot, like the South and Midwest, could see huge damage to their local economies, due to enormous electric bills, dying crops or mass migration away from the area.

Maybe that is not so surprising, but Hsiang takes it a step further: Climate change will redistribute wealth by driving workers, businesses and agriculture away from those hard-hit regions and move them mostly toward the north and west of the country. Again, Hsiang says exactly how much is hard to predict. But he says that is actually part of the new study's findings: "When you start changing the climate," he says, "it starts affecting all these aspects of the economy, and it makes the future world harder to predict."

The administration of Donald Trump says it's not interested in the social cost of carbon or moving away from carbon-based fuels, arguing that doing so would hurt the economy. Climate scientist Chris Field at Stanford University says yes, decarbonizing the economy would be expensive, but he compares it to the space program in the 1960s. "It cost a lot," he says, "but it also unleashed a huge amount of creativity and innovation and really launched the United States on a trajectory to being ready for the 21st century."

## **It's Not Easy, But Aspen Moves Toward 100 Percent Renewable Energy**

<http://www.npr.org/2017/07/05/535578438/aspen-moves-toward-its-goal-of-supporting-100-percent-renewable-energy>

As part of that proposal, it spent millions on things like a custom turbine and generator, a move that Aspen voters approved. But some residents and groups ultimately worried the plan would reduce stream flows, and that would harm the environment. In 2012, Aspen voters reversed course and rejected the plan. Instead, Aspen signed contracts to bring in hydropower, wind and biogas from other regions and states. In 2015, the city utility became the third in the nation to be powered completely by renewable energy, Skadron says. "It was really exciting," he says. "It was really hard."

## **Earth is becoming 'Planet Plastic'**

<http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-40654915>

- 8,300 million tonnes of virgin plastics have been produced
- Half of this material was made in just the past 13 years
- About 30% of the historic production remains in use today
- Of the discarded plastic, roughly 9% has been recycled
- Some 12% has been incinerated, but 79% has gone to landfill
- Shortest-use items are packaging, typically less than a year
- Longest-use products are found in construction and machinery
- Current trends point to 12 billion tonnes of waste by 2050
- Recycling rates in 2014: Europe (30%), China (25%), US (9%)

## **Diesel and petrol car ban: Clean air strategy 'not enough'**

<http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-40731164>

Moves including banning the sale of new diesel and petrol cars from 2040 and £255m for councils to tackle air pollution locally have been welcomed. Transport Secretary Chris Grayling said the government was determined to deliver a "green revolution". But environmental groups criticised the decision not to include a scrappage scheme or immediate clean air zones.

## **Allowable 'carbon budget' most likely overestimated**

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/07/170724114116.htm>

While most climate scientists, including the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, implicitly define 'pre-industrial' to be in the late 1800s, a true non-industrially influenced baseline is probably further in the past, according to an international team of researchers who are concerned because it affects the available carbon budget for meeting the 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit) warming limit agreed to in the Paris Conference of 2015.

## **Thawing permafrost releases old greenhouse gas**

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/07/170719084810.htm>

The thawing permafrost soils in the Arctic regions might contribute to the greenhouse effect in two respects: on the one hand rising temperatures lead to higher microbial methane production close to the surface. On the other hand thawing subsurface opens increasingly pathways for old, geologic methane.

## **Global hotspots for potential water conflict identified**

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2017/07/170717160048.htm>

More than 1,400 new dams or water diversion projects are planned or already under construction, fueling the potential for increased water conflict between some countries.

## **Shale gas development spurring spread of invasive plants in Pa. forests**

<http://www.enn.com/ecosystems/article/51913>

The spread of invasive non-native plants could have long-term negative consequences for the forest ecosystem in a region where the ubiquitous woods provide timbering revenue, wildlife habitat and ecotourism.

## **Thawing permafrost releases old greenhouse gas**

<http://www.enn.com/energy/article/51906>

The thawing permafrost soils in the Arctic regions might contribute to the greenhouse effect in two ways: On the one hand rising temperatures lead to higher microbial methane production close to the surface. On the other hand deeper thawing opens new pathways for old, geologic methane. This is shown in a study in the Mackenzie Delta (Canada), conducted by scientists from the German Research Centre for Geosciences GFZ, the Alfred Wegener

Institute, Helmholtz Centre for Polar and Marine Research (AWI) and partners in the US. The study is published in the journal *Nature Scientific Reports*.

## **New rules urgently needed to protect our oceans, Oxford scientists warn**

<http://www.enn.com/ecosystems/article/51870>

Marine scientists from Oxford's, Department of Zoology, have presented a United Nations (UN) panel with an overview of the risks facing our oceans. The UN members were meeting for the latest round of negotiations towards a possible high seas treaty.

## **Ozone Pollution Connected to Cardiovascular Health**

<http://www.enn.com/pollution/article/51864>

Exposure to ozone, long associated with impaired lung function, is also connected to health changes that can cause cardiovascular disease such as heart attack, high blood pressure and stroke, according to a new study of Chinese adults.



*-Christopher Aaron Coleman-*