



Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

April 7, 2021

## Maine



Governor Janet Mills of Maine (pictured) has long been an environmental champion, shepherding [a batch of pro-renewable energy and land conservation bills](#) into law in her first year in office in 2019, creating and leading the [Maine Climate Council](#), [urging climate action at the UN](#), and setting a commitment for Maine to be carbon neutral by 2045. Now, even while in the midst of spearheading a [highly successful](#) vaccination rollout,

Governor Mills is taking new steps forward on environmental issues.

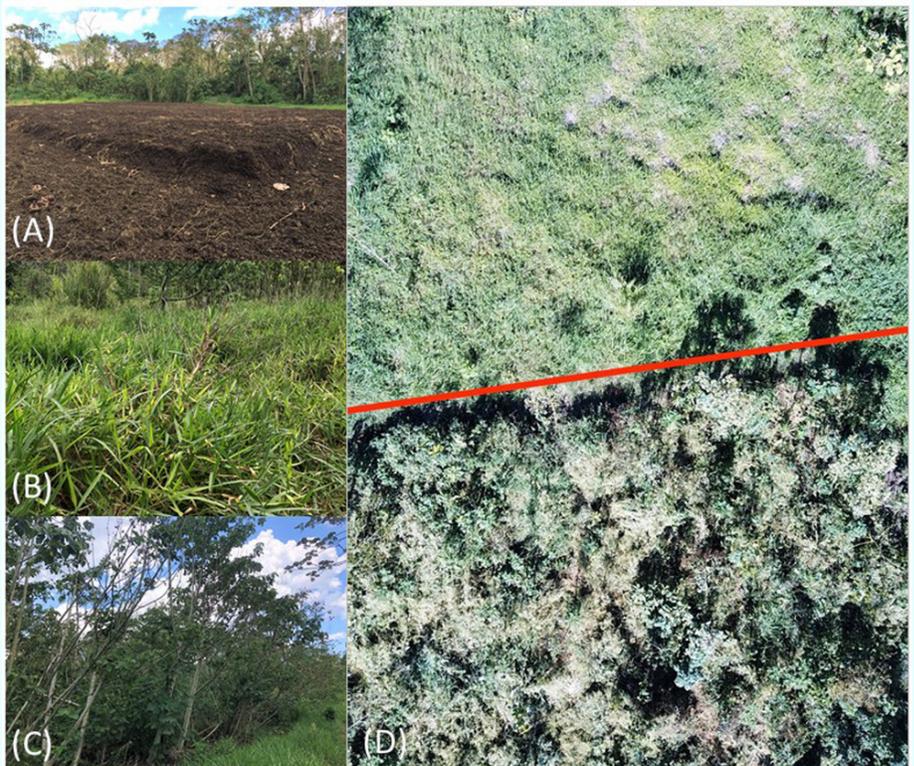
First and foremost, on March 30th, Governor Mills released a new "[Lead by Example](#)" report, outlining an array of actions the Maine state government will take to help lead the transition to renewable energy and broader economy-wide decarbonization. Maine is now committed to powering all state government operations with clean energy by 2024, generating clean energy on state lands and buildings where practical (this will mean a lot of new solar panels on public buildings!), prioritizing low-emissions building products like cross-laminated timber in new state construction, purchasing only zero-emission vehicles for the state fleet by 2030, supporting teleworking and ride-sharing for state employees, and more. These are the kind of sensible steps forward that all governments should be taking.

Governor Mills also issued a [new executive order](#) on March 30th to create a [roadmap for Maine to lead in the transition to electric vehicles](#), including a Governor's Clean Vehicle Recognition Program to promote public and private sector EV leaders. She's pushing the federal government for [more funding and action](#) to address pollution from PFAS, aka "forever chemicals." And one of her early supported projects, the in-development [floating wind farm](#) off Monhegan Island, is moving forward with [surveying in progress](#) for the power cable that will connect it to Maine's grid (despite a few [highly misguided protests](#) from local lobstermen, who are unlikely to be negatively affected and who appear to discount the [substantial economic benefits](#) the project will provide to the local community). Governor Mills is up for reelection next year, and it looks like her opponent may be her [loathsome, disgustingly racist, and politically destructive predecessor](#), Paul LePage. This newsletter urges all Maine voters to remember Governor Mills' leadership on the most important issues of the era, and when the time comes, to support her at the ballot box!



## Costa Rica

A fascinating new experiment conducted by researchers from ETH-Zurich and the University of Hawaii has revealed that [coffee production by-products are excellent at regenerating forest ecosystems](#). In 2018, the researchers dumped 30 dump truck loads of [coffee pulp](#) (from the fruit of the coffee plant that encloses the seeds, aka beans, used to make coffee) onto a 35 by 40 meter patch of degraded land in Costa Rica, marking out a similar



sized untreated area as a control. "The results were dramatic" said [the study's](#) lead author Dr. Rebecca Cole. "The area treated with a thick layer of coffee pulp turned into a small forest in only two years while the control plot remained dominated by non-native pasture grasses." This is worth repeating: just two years after dumping a waste product onto wasteland and leaving it alone resulted in a young forest. The [extraordinary ecological effect](#) was produced because the coffee pulp

smothered the invasive pasture grasses that had previously occupying the land, while decomposing into ultra-fertile compost that provided an ideal growth medium for native tree seeds that arrived via the wind and bird droppings. Spectacular news-and a great new win-win tactic for habitat regeneration!

(Pictured, [Figure 1 from the study](#): (A) Freshly added layer of coffee pulp on post-agricultural land. (B) Control treatment 2 years after initiating study. (C) Woody vegetation growing on coffee pulp treatment 2 years after initiating the study, photo credits R. Cole. (D) Aerial view of the coffee pulp treatment (bottom) and the adjacent control treatment (top) one year after initiating the study, photo credit R. Zahawi).



## California

In a fascinating example of the complexities and contradictions of wildlife management in the Anthropocene, the California department of fish and wildlife is [working to relocate cougars](#) (pumas, mountain lions, catamounts: the American felid of many names) away from Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep herds. The Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, [Ovis canadensis sierrae](#) (pictured) is an



endangered and genetically distinct subspecies that has been ravaged by hunting and outbreaks of pneumonia caught from domestic sheep. After reaching a low of around 100 individuals in the 1990s, the subspecies is now up to 600 sheep, spread across 14 small herds. A single cougar, particularly one that has learned how to become an effective bighorn sheep hunter, can wipe out an entire heard. So, the state has begun relocating mountain lions that start to feed on the herds. The results so far have been mixed: one young female cougar was relocated 100 miles away and has since settled down, but a male that has eaten at least nine individual sheep was moved 100 miles away and walked right back to his old hunting grounds. In an implausible-seeming but true sequel, he has since been relocated 200 miles away in the opposite direction and begun walking back again. This small but significant montane drama underscores the strangeness of the world we live in today. Nothing could be more archetypally wild or natural that a cougar hunting and eating a bighorn sheep; it is not their fault that the population has declined. And yet it would seem absolutely unconscionable to let bighorn sheep to disappear from the Sierra Nevada, after thousands of years, just as their

population is starting to rebound. The future of the ecosystem is once more determined by humanity.



## New Hampshire

New Hampshire's Great Bay, a biodiverse tidal estuary near the city of Portsmouth, received a new water quality permit from the EPA last year regulating nitrogen runoff from the 12 surrounding communities. (Nitrogen pollution, often from fertilizers and animal manure, can cause rapid algal blooms and consequent oxygen depletion and ecosystem collapse in a waterbody, a [little-known but common problem](#) known as eutrophication). The Conservation Law Foundation felt the permit wasn't strict enough to protect the bay, and was moving to appeal-but the EPA warned that might start years of legal wrangling, resulting in no new protective regulations at all. Now, [the CLF has reached a new agreement](#) with the towns of Dover, Rochester, and Portsmouth, in which the towns commit to drainage improvements, new catch basis, fertilizer use changes, and oyster bed restoration in exchange for the CLF dropping the appeal. This is the kind of environmental progress being made day by day all around the US and the world-not earth-shaking, not globally significant, but the start of new collaboration between communities and civil society to work towards a healthier ecosystem. Great news!



**The Weekly Anthropocene**

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