



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

July 14 2021

Maine

Continuing a multi-year run of climate and environmental action, the Maine legislative session has ended with some amazing new accomplishments. In addition to the historic [fossil fuel divestment bill](#) from a few weeks ago, the entirely Democratic-controlled [130th Maine Legislature](#) has passed a budget which [gives \\$40 million](#) to the [Land for Maine's Future](#) program, a highly successful land conservation funding initiative. The new money will lead to the preservation of more of Maine's natural beauty! Furthermore, the budget [provides \\$20 million](#) for agencies to respond to per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) pollution (a growing problem in Maine) joining an array of other newly passed PFAS-related bills, including a mandate for public institutions to test their water for PFAS contamination. Beyond environmental issues, the Maine Democrats passed a suite of bills [expanding Mainer's voter rights](#) and making it easier to vote. The budget also [makes school meals free](#) for all students and [distributes "hazard pay" money](#) to the thousands of Mainers who worked through the pandemic, among many other positive steps.

Furthermore, Governor Janet Mills (pictured) also recently signed into law a bill that on its surface might seem concerning: LD 1619 prohibits offshore wind development in state waters. If you just read the headline, that sounds like a horrifying anti-renewables reversal from the governor who has [long pushed for offshore wind in Maine](#). However, [it's actually no problem at all](#). "State waters"



doesn't mean all the vast expanses of ocean off Maine's coast, but is a very specific legal term. In Maine, [state waters](#) extend from the coast to 3 nautical miles out, and from 3 to 200 nautical miles out is federal waters. However, about 75% of lobster harvesting happens in that little 3-mile strip, and all planned offshore wind development in Maine is in federal waters anyway, meaning that [no current or proposed wind power projects will be affected by this bill in the least](#). So why pass it? This is a smart and well-calculated maneuver designed to appease the politically powerful lobstermen and make it harder for political opponents to baselessly accuse Governor Mills' offshore wind leadership of somehow imperiling Maine's harbors or fishers, while not actually harming or setting back offshore wind power development in any way.

And it is critical for renewable energy's progress in Maine (and really, all aspects of progress in the state) for Governor Mills to make the political tradeoffs she needs to bolster support. [Paul LePage is running for governor again in 2022](#), and if he unseats Mills, it would be an absolute disaster for the state.

Republican Paul LePage was elected as Governor of Maine in 2010, and immediately [shut down Maine's involvement in offshore wind](#). In fact, he then tried and failed to push offshore oil drilling, which nobody wanted but him. This led to the [Hywind](#) offshore floating wind farm project, originally slated for Maine, [moving to Scotland](#), where it has been [a great success](#)-a huge missed opportunity for the state. There was no economic rationale for this whatsoever. LePage simply personally disliked renewable energy and relished "owning the libs." He was very much a "mini-Trump before Trump."

The eight years of the LePage administration brought economic stagnation, cuts to welfare benefits, a cruel and senseless refusal to accept government money for healthcare for poor Mainers, [racist rhetoric and threats of violence against state legislators who opposed him](#), and a complete lack of renewable energy development in any field. There were even Maine laws forcing people with home solar panels, under certain conditions, to pay the grid for the electricity they had generated themselves-[a monumentally unjust practice known as "gross metering."](#) Finally, Democratic Governor Janet Mills was elected in 2018, alongside a new Democratic majority in the Maine legislature.

In her first year in office, 2019, she accepted the federal healthcare money, passed some LGBT protections, and became an extraordinary leader on renewable energy issues, [shepherding through a wide swath of bills](#) including repealing the onerous solar rules, tax incentives for solar and wind development on land, a commitment for Maine to achieve 100% renewable energy by 2050, establishing the Maine Climate Council, speaking before the UN in favor of climate action, and a bill specifically devoted to reauthorizing a state-supported floating wind turbine project. In the last few weeks alone, Governor Mills is [working on finding a good site for a new 12-turbine offshore wind array](#) and developing a "master plan" offshore wind roadmap.

If this sounds like a blatant appeal for all readers living in Maine to support Janet Mills for re-election in 2022, that's because it absolutely is. (Note: this was written based on personal convictions and an assessment of what would be best for Maine,

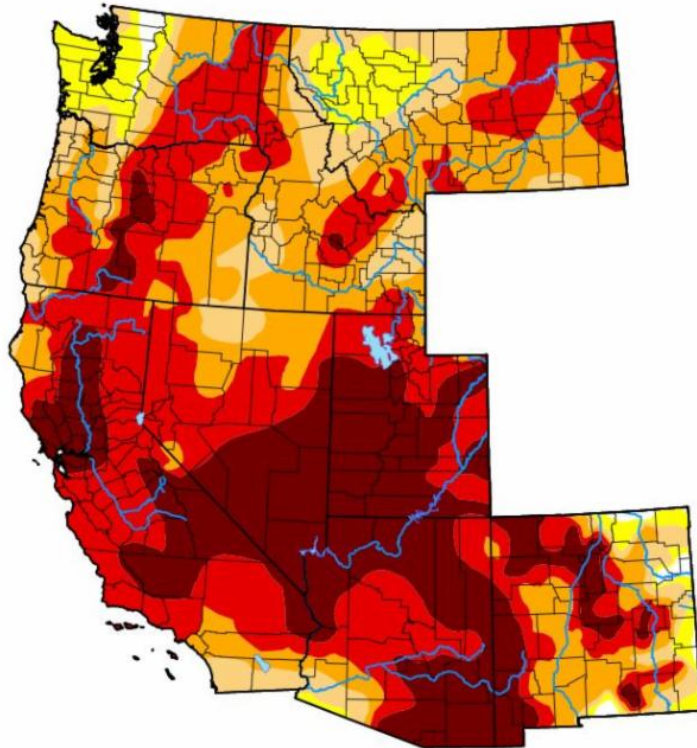
without the knowledge or support of Governor Mills or anyone else). This writer has gotten used to having a governor who cares about making the state a better place and works to address real-world issues from COVID to the climate crisis. Let's not take that for granted!



Climate Impacts

West

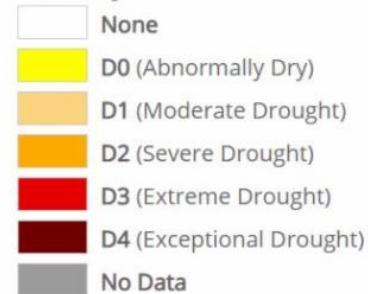
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Map released: Thurs. July 8, 2021

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Intensity



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The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. See accompanying text

The American West is experiencing an immense drought, one of such duration and magnitude that it underscores the last few decades' trend towards a [climate change induced "megadrought"](#). According to the [US Drought Monitor](#), in an area of "the West" defined as Arizona, California, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, New Mexico, and Utah, [93% of the land is in drought conditions and 59% is experiencing "extreme" or "exceptional" drought](#), the two highest possible drought conditions. (Pictured, above). As a result, we will likely be seeing [even crazier wildfires](#) later this year.

The small town of [Teviston, California](#), saw its last well fail in June and is being sustained by bottled water deliveries.

[Lake Mead](#), America's largest reservoir, was formed by the Hoover Dam and provides water to 25 million people. It's currently at only 36% of its full capacity, the lowest in its 85-year history, and [reductions in water flow](#) are planned for 2022. The House of Representatives [is considering a bill](#) to fund water recycling infrastructure across the West-it is sorely needed.

The consequences of the recent heatwave in the Pacific Northwest are still being evaluated. A marine biologist at the University of British Columbia calculated that over [one billion sea creatures](#), mostly shellfish, were likely killed, with [entire mussel beds found to be cooked and rotting](#) due to the unprecedentedly warm waters.

However, one scary-looking news story turned out to be overhyped. The viral "ocean on fire" photo from the Gulf of Mexico [actually wasn't a big deal](#), being the result of a [small gas leak from a Mexican state-owned oil company facility](#) that took only five hours to put out.



Albino Redwoods

In the woods of northern California, [citizen scientists and foresters have discovered](#) over 500 strange botanical anomalies-albino redwood trees (pictured), born when a [sucker](#) from a parent redwood tree develops a mutation that leads to them growing without any chlorophyll, the molecule that gives leaves and conifer needles their green color. There are also at least 116 wild "chimera" redwoods with some colorless and some albino needles.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of plant biology can see that this is really weird. The albino redwoods can't perform photosynthesis without chlorophyll, and seem to survive only by being passed nutrients underground by their parent trees, resulting in a big resource drain.



So why hasn't this mutation been weeded out by natural selection? The researchers figured the albino redwoods [must be providing some unseen benefit to the parent](#)

[trees](#), and noticed that the albino redwoods seem to be more common around pollution sources like power plants and sewage treatment stations. Sure enough, tissue samples revealed that "the albinos were sucking up more than twice the volume of heavy metals, such as cadmium, copper, and nickel, compared with green redwoods in the same area."

Although this research is at an early stage, and [there's a lot more work to be done to account for potential confounding variables](#) (for example, the albino redwoods are less efficient at controlling water loss-maybe that causes their accumulation of heavy metals?) this is a very interesting possibility. Redwoods may have developed biological hazardous waste disposal units to counter pollution-an extraordinary example of evolution in the Anthropocene if true. More research on this will likely produce fascinating new information!

The Weekly Anthropocene

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