



the weekly anthropocene

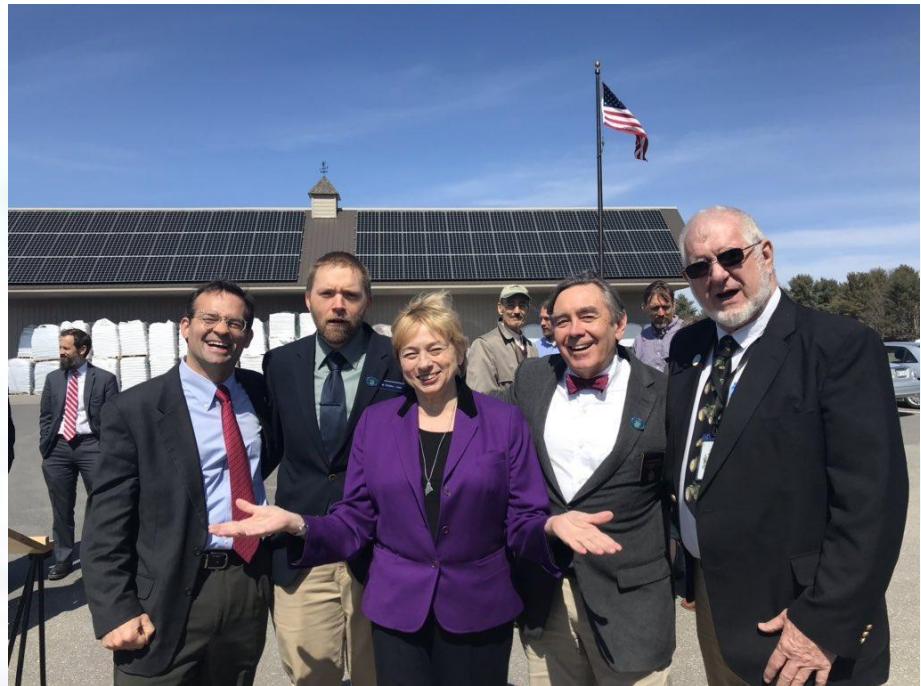
dispatches from the wild, weird world of humanity and its biosphere



By Sam Matey, June 5 2019

The Maine Issue II: A Great Leap

Forward. A few weeks ago, the Weekly Anthropocene reported on the wave of environmental action sweeping the Maine state government under the forward-thinking administration of Governor Janet Mills (pictured, right, center). Now, as the 2019 legislative session draws to a close (ending on June 19th) we are pleased to share the multifarious fruits of Mills' and Maine legislators' environmental leadership. In



this issue, we discuss the array of emissions reducing, renewables-boosting, and pollution-busting bills enacted (or soon to be enacted) this session. For a comprehensive directory of environment-related bills in the Legislature and their current status, see <https://www.nrcm.org/projects/state-house/legislative-bill-tracking/>

The Maine Issue II: Reducing Greenhouse Gas Emissions. Under Janet Mills, Maine has comprehensively rejected the slavishly fossil fuel-promoting regression of the LePage administration and begun to truly follow through on the state motto of “Dirigo” (I Lead). On June 13, Governor Mills signed into law **LD 955**, banning all offshore oil and natural gas drilling in the state of Maine. This is an excellent defensive move to ensure that Maine’s coasts will never be imperiled by risky and emissions-heavy offshore drilling. Two more ambitious bills to reduce the Pine Tree State’s greenhouse gas emissions are currently moving through the Legislature and are highly likely to be enacted in the next few days. **LD 1494** would update Maine’s Renewable Portfolio Standard to require that 80% of retail electricity sold in Maine come from renewable sources by 2030, and 100% from renewable sources by 2050. As of June 18, LD 1494 had passed the Maine Senate 34-0 and the Maine House 93-48! Still moving through the Legislature is **LD 1679**, the flagship “Governor’s Climate Bill” of the Mills Administration. This bill would establish the 39-member Maine Climate Council, a brainchild of Governor Mills. The Maine Climate Council will be tasked with updating the state Climate Action plan every four years, starting in 2020, and recommending new legislation and strategies to respond to climate change, including both emissions reduction plans and methods of adapting to new environmental conditions. In addition to



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creating the Council, the bill also mandates that Maine's greenhouse gas emissions be reduced to 45% below 1990 levels by 2030 and 80% below 1990 levels by 2050. As of June 18, LD 1679 had passed the Maine House 107-29 and was under consideration by the Senate!

Both LDs 1494 and 1679 are highly likely to become law, given Democratic control of the Senate and the high priority placed on climate change action by Governor Mills. Taken together, these bills indicate that Maine has truly become a world leader on building a sustainable society for the Anthropocene. Every jurisdiction should have a Climate Council and a Renewable Portfolio Standard like Maine's!

The Maine Issue II: Boosting Renewable Energy.

In addition to reducing Maine's contribution to climate change, the Mills Administration and the Legislature are considering (and have passed) several other bills that place Maine at the forefront of the renewable energy revolution. **LD 994** would give the go-ahead to the long-gestating (and held up by LePage) Maine AquaVentus project, a collaboration between the University of Maine and several corporations that would build two experimental floating offshore wind turbines several miles



off Monhegan Island. (Pictured above: the existing 1/8th scale prototype). This project has the potential to make Maine a leader in a revolutionary new form of wind turbine technology and could substantially boost the state's economy, as the American Jobs Project has predicted that Maine could see up to 2,100 jobs in offshore wind created by 2030. LD 994 has passed both houses of the Legislature, and awaits only the governor's signature. For more, [see maineaquaventus.com](http://maineaquaventus.com).

In an action designed to empower Mainers to take part in new renewable energy projects on their own, Governor Mills signed **LD 1282** into law on June 17th. Sponsored by rising young climate activist and State Representative for Nobleboro Chloe Maxmin, the bill is known as the "Green New Deal for Maine." It makes it easier for schools to build their own solar projects and mandates apprenticeship programs for new electricity generating projects in order to inculcate knowledge of clean energy technologies in Maine's workforce. Great news!



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Finally, **LD 1711**, one of the few fully bipartisan renewables bills anywhere in the nation, has sailed through the Legislature. It passed the Maine Senate 32-2 and the Maine House 93-52 on June 17th, and is certain to be signed by the Governor. This bill removes regulatory barriers to establishing new community solar farms, and mandates that Maine utilities purchase 250 megawatts of solar power from such solar facilities by 2024. (Pictured: an existing community solar farm in Damariscotta, Maine). This is spectacular news that will turbocharge Maine's solar industry and create hundreds of new jobs! For more on this phenomenal photovoltaic proposition, see <https://tinyurl.com/y6f3ykvt>.



The Maine Issue II: Fighting

Plastic and Phthalates

Pollution. Single-use plastic bags are unrecyclable, made from fossil fuels, and a major component of oceanic plastic pollution. New studies keep exposing new ways they cause harm to the marine ecosystem: whales swallow dozens of them and choke, sea turtles eat them thinking they're jellyfish and clog up their digestive systems, and coral diseases hitch a ride from reef to reef on drifting plastics, essentially making them the oceanic equivalent of plague rats. In short, they're exactly the kind of product that humanity does not need to





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be using in the Anthropocene. Now, Maine has done its part to eliminate this scourge. On June 17, Governor Mills signed **LD 1532**, which bans the distribution of single-use plastic bags in the state of Maine, as well as enacting a five-cent fee for the use of paper bags in order to incentivize use of reusable shopping bags. (Pictured: Mills signing the bill!). The bill will take effect on April 22, 2020-Earth Day. Maine is now the 4th state, after California, New York, and Hawaii, to ban plastic bags. In a sign of hope for the future, Maine just narrowly avoided becoming the 5th state-Vermont's governor signed the Green Mountain State's own plastic bag ban into law later on the same day! Spectacular news!

Earlier, on June 13th, Governor Mills signed into law **LD 1433**, banning the use of PFAS and phthalates (two notably toxic classes of chemicals) in food packaging. Maine is the first state in the nation to take this action. Another great step forward! For more on PFAS and phthalates, and why they *really* should not be near food, see tinyurl.com/y5sxw3lg.



The Maine Issue II: Ensuring Clean Waterbodies. On June 17th, Governor Mills signed **LD 1743**, "An Act to Reclassify Certain Waters of the State," into law. This is the bill upgrading water quality protections for over 400 miles of Maine rivers and streams that was reported on in-depth by this writer (see tinyurl.com/y6msesy6). This is excellent news, and will help ensure that Maine's aquatic environments continue to grow cleaner and safer for all Mainers to enjoy! In a further step to ensure pollutant-free Maine waters, the Maine Legislature has passed **LD 1775**, a bill establishing sustenance fishing as a "designated use" for an array of waterbodies commonly used as fishing grounds by Native American peoples, such as parts of the Penobscot, St. John, and St. Croix watersheds. (Pictured above: a panorama of the Penobscot River). It also requires the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to set new water quality protections stringent enough to ensure that it will be safe to eat the fish in these waterbodies. In addition to ensuring that it will be safe for tribes to exert historic fishing rights, this will have knock-on benefits to the entire ecosystem by ensuring lower levels of toxins such as mercury. As the bill was proposed by Governor Mills, it will surely be signed into law soon. Great news!