



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

March 31, 2021

Biden Administration



Across all fields of environmental policy, the Biden Administration is striving to undo the vandalism of the previous administration and working towards a renewable-powered, land-conserving, pollution-free future.

Biden's EPA, under Administrator [Michael](#)

[Regan](#), has issued an [update to the Cross-State Air Pollution Rule](#) that will require coal plants in 12 states to reduce their nitrogen oxides (NOx) pollution—a major component of smog and contributor to asthma. The EPA estimates that this will reduce NOx emissions by 17,000 tons in 2021, and yield [public health and climate benefits](#) valued at \$2.8 billion each year from 2021 to 2040.

For decades, the people of the US Virgin Islands have suffered from flaring, spills, and air pollution from the Limetree oil refinery on St. Croix. The previous administration gave it a rushed "sweet deal" air pollution permit, overturning all EPA precedent, in December 2020. Now, Biden's EPA has announced it will [withdraw that permit](#), likely leading to stricter pollution controls soon!



Energy Secretary [Jennifer Granholm](#) (pictured) is overseeing the disbursement of [\\$128 million in solar power R&D](#), having set a new goal of reducing the cost of solar energy by 60% in the next ten years. Most of the money is going to exciting new frontiers in solar technology, like super-efficient perovskite-based solar cells and cadmium telluride thin film solar cells. Secretary Granholm said "In many parts of the country, solar is already cheaper than coal and other fossil fuels, and with more innovation we can cut the cost again by more than half within the decade. This first burst of funding will help us add even more affordable clean energy to the grid, jobs to communities

across the country, and will put us on the fast track toward President Biden's goal of 100% clean electricity by 2035." This is a relatively small amount of funding, but a step in the right direction.

And on March 29th, Secretary Granholm, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo [joined for an announcement of new offshore wind power](#) leasing, funding, and regulatory support, as well setting a national goal of deploying 30 gigawatts of offshore wind by 2030. If that goal is reached, American offshore wind would support 77,000 jobs, power over 10 million American homes, and cut 78 million metric tonnes of CO₂ emissions. To make that happen, the Interior Department has designated a new priority offshore wind area in the New York Bight and is fast-tracking offshore wind project leases, the Transportation Department is encouraging port authorities to apply for \$230 million in funding for upgrades to support the offshore wind industry, the Commerce Department's NOAA signed a data sharing agreement with wind developer Ørsted and is [studying offshore wind impacts](#), and the Energy Department is funding \$8 million worth of wind R&D and encouraging offshore wind companies to access a \$3 billion pool of energy loans.

This is all great-the kind of sensible cooperation to move the country forward that was completely absent from the previous administration. But the numbers are still small-we need billions upon billions of new federal investment in solar and wind, in addition to redistribution of existing agency funds. Fortunately, all of the positive actions discussed above are likely to pale in comparison to the massive climate and renewables funding set to be included in the [next big reconciliation stimulus bill](#), the Build Back Better Recovery Plan. Although details are not final (and this newsletter was written before Biden's initial public announcement on March 31st), it is likely to consist of about \$3 trillion in infrastructure funding, including electric vehicle, grid, and wind and solar projects, and is intended to be the major impetus behind Biden's pledge to reach net-zero electricity emissions in America by 2035. President Biden is also working to include [fixing methane leaks from oil wells](#) in that infrastructure package, a policy that will create jobs and shut down a source of highly dangerous greenhouse gases. In a [recent interview with Grist \(available on YouTube\)](#), National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy outlined the administration's view of climate as an all-encompassing issue impacting all domains of policy, from job creation to foreign affairs to social justice to agriculture. Some potentially extraordinary progress lies ahead!



Bald Eagles

Bald eagles (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), America's national bird, were once endangered, due to illegal hunting, pollution, and DDT weakening their eggshells. In 1963, there were only 417 nesting pairs left in the lower 48 states (plus some more in Canada and Alaska). Thanks to the banning of DDT in 1972 and the passage of the Endangered Species Act in 1973, their population rebounded greatly, reaching an estimated [16,048](#) nesting pairs in the lower 48 states in 2009.



[Now](#), a [new report](#) from the US Fish and Wildlife Service has found that the eagles are doing even better, with an [astounding](#) 71,400 nesting pairs and an estimated 316,700 individual bald eagles in the lower 48 states in the 2019 breeding season. "The strong return of this treasured bird reminds us of our nation's shared resilience and the importance of being responsible stewards of our lands and waters that bind us together," said Interior Secretary Deb Haaland. Spectacular news-and a great example of conservation working!



Uganda

French oil giant Total is trying to finalize investment to build the East African Crude Oil Pipeline, a proposed 896-mile (1,443 km) heated crude oil pipeline from the shore of Lake Albert in Uganda to the sea in Tanzania. [This is a terrible, terrible idea, for a wide range of reasons](#). First, of course, we shouldn't be building any new fossil fuel infrastructure-and the oil to be transported by this pipeline would likely emit 33 million tonnes of CO₂ per year. Beyond that, the project plans for ten oil wells in Uganda's Murchison Falls National Park, home to elephants, chimpanzees, and lions. The proposed pipeline route is dangerously close to Lake Victoria, where a spill could imperil the water and food source for 40 million people. And the project is supported by Uganda's authoritarian President Yoweri Museveni, but opposed by [the people](#) of the hundreds of villages it will run through-particularly the hundreds of households that will be forcibly displaced.

All in all, it's a dreadful project. But the good news is, it's far from certain that it will be funded. Several banks have already ruled out funding it, and South Africa's Standard Bank is still on the fence. The project requested funds from UK Export Finance, but [was shot down as part of Britain's policy to end overseas fossil fuel subsidies](#). Stay tuned-and [here's a petition you can sign](#) to some of the banks still considering it!



The Weekly Anthropocene

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