



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

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The Infrastructure Bill: It's a Big Deal



The Biden Presidency is quietly accomplishing some of the biggest environmental policy victories in history, with more likely on the way. The [House passed the Build Back Better bill](#), a potentially epoch-making mega-bill with hundreds of billions for renewable energy development, and it's on its way to be haggled over interminably in the Senate. But the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, the bipartisan

infrastructure deal, has already passed both houses of Congress and been signed into law-and the news of its effects just keeps getting better!

We've already discussed climate-related policies in previous newsletter, but it turns out that the IIJA is also the [biggest investment in wildlife conservation in American history](#). (If it seems odd to you that there's new news about a bill that's already been signed into law, that's one of the artifacts of the American legislative process: thousands of pages of this bill have been negotiated on and passed in Congress relatively confidentially, and then it's all released to the public at once, so it takes a while to be analyzed in-depth beyond the highlights). The IIJA includes-this is all definitely happening!-the following wildlife-friendly policies:

- **\$350 million** to help animals not become roadkill, by constructing new overpasses, underpasses, and road fences.
- **\$130 million per year** for reforesting areas scorched by wildfires.
- **\$8 billion** for flood and wildlife prevention, resilience, and management.
- **\$800 million** for a program to replace old, poorly designed water-channeling culverts, which often serve as barriers to fish passage as well as being a danger to humans' infrastructure.
- **\$1.5 billion** to continue the EPA's freshwater conservation work in the Chesapeake Bay, Puget Sound, Great Lakes, and elsewhere.

For more, check out [Grist's excellent article on the bill's wildlife benefits](#), or [this article on the bill's history and other major aspects](#).

The potential far-reaching effects of this investment in America's wild future were summed up by Texas A&M University ecology professor Rusty Feagin, an expert on coastal restoration and engineering, who was quoted by Grist on the bill's historic nature "When you really look at the impact of this, conceptually, over the next couple of decades, it'll be a turning point in the way we're driving our economy...I think it'll change it from an economy that's built to benefit human needs without regard for the natural world to one in which we're building a better world for humans while also trying to sustain the base on which it relies, which is nature." Great news!



Climate Impacts

Climate change continues to ravage Earth's atmosphere.

A massive "[atmospheric river](#)" storm around **Vancouver, Canada** dumped the region's monthly rainfall average in just 24 hours, forcing a town of 7,000 to evacuate, killing at least one woman, and temporarily shutting down the two major highways to access the city. This region of British Columbia saw back-to-back climate disasters this year, having been slammed with a [heatwave](#) that killed over 500 people and burned down the town of Lytton in summer 2021. Scenes of the disaster included [cattle being rescued by jet ski and a mudslide shutting down a highway in Washington State to the south](#).



This disaster pales in comparison, however, to what the people of **South Sudan** have been experiencing. For the last three years in a row, the already impoverished and violence-torn young country has experienced extreme flooding, which has currently grown to affect or displace over [700,000 people](#). UN missions in Upper Nile State reported [a group of 1,000 men, women, and children](#) who

had walked for seven days to try to find a dry town where there might be some food, their homes and farms having been inundated. ([Pictured, from NPR](#): a family and their livestock seeking higher ground). These people did almost nothing to contribute to the climate crisis, but they have seen their livelihoods washed away by it. The world owes them better.



Wildlife Surprises

In 1957, Britain's **Thames River** was declared "biologically dead," polluted to the extent that it could sustain no wildlife. Now, after decades of London cleaning up its act, a new State of the Thames report has found that [the river is thriving](#), home to 115 species of fish, 92 bird species, almost 600



hectares of salt marsh habitat, seahorses, eels, [over 3,000 seals](#) (a few of which are [pictured](#)), and even three species of shark. This is a great example of the global trend towards urban wildlife renewal!

The tentacled butterfly ray (pictured) was last documented off the coast of Pakistan in 1986, and was



declared "possibly extinct", wiped out by overfishing, by the IUCN in 2017. Now, [Iranian marine biologist Mohsen Rezaie-Atagholipour](#) has found a last stronghold population off [southeast Iran in the Persian Gulf](#), having first discovered their presence by chance among the bycatch from boats trawling for shrimp. He is now working to protect them from being accidentally caught by the

shrimp trawlers, perhaps by adding selective excluder mesh to the nets. A second chance for the species!



Happy Thanksgiving!

The Weekly Anthropocene

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