



# the weekly anthropocene



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

By Sam Matey, August 5, 2020

**Great American Outdoors Act.** After passing the House and Senate with bipartisan majorities, the Great American Outdoors Act was signed into law on August 4, 2020.

This is a big deal, and a big win. It has two main parts: first, the establishment of a National Park and Public Lands Legacy Restoration Fund set to spend up to \$9 billion over the next five years on



federal public lands maintenance and upkeep, with about \$6.5 billion earmarked specifically for national parks.

(Pictured: Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park in Colorado). This is woefully needed, as the national parks' budget has remained flat for decades, leading to an immense backlog of work to be done on basic infrastructure. While this won't erase the entire backlog, it's an excellent start, and should provide thousands of people with employment while doing so. Second, the bill makes permanent the Land and Water Conservation Fund, with a guaranteed allotment of \$900 million per year in perpetuity. (The LWCF is funded by revenues from energy development on public lands, which will hopefully soon shifting from oil and gas to renewables!). The LWCF provides extra funding for everything from parks to community sports fields, and making it permanent has been a conservation goal for years. It's been used to purchase conservation land in the Yellowstone ecosystem and to expand Acadia National Park. It'll be amazing to see what parts of America's heritage it can afford to preserve now-and forever!

There is a certain surrealness to the fact that such a big conservation victory has come under a historically anti-conservation president. As Linda Bilmes, Daniel Patrick Moynihan Senior Lecturer in Public Policy at Harvard, put it: "It is ironic that President Donald Trump will get to have his signature on a historic milestone that has eluded conservationists for decades. The Trump administration has...slashed Bears Ears National Monument in Utah by 85 percent, reduced Grand Staircase Escalante by 50 percent, removed protection for millions of acres of sage-grouse habitat in Western states, opened the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and most of the U.S. coastline to oil and gas drilling, reduced protections for wetlands, and weakened the Endangered Species Act. Earlier this year, Trump proposed cutting discretionary spending on the Land and Water Conservation Fund by 97 percent...But 2020 is a crazy year." As scholar of human progress Steven Pinker put it when Tweeting about this Act: "Progress often runs like a subterranean stream beneath storms & wildfires of the day." In this crazy time, we need as many such steps forward as we can get. For more, check out [tinyurl.com/GreatAmericanOutdoorsActImpact](https://tinyurl.com/GreatAmericanOutdoorsActImpact) and [tinyurl.com/GreatAmericanOutdoorsActStory](https://tinyurl.com/GreatAmericanOutdoorsActStory).



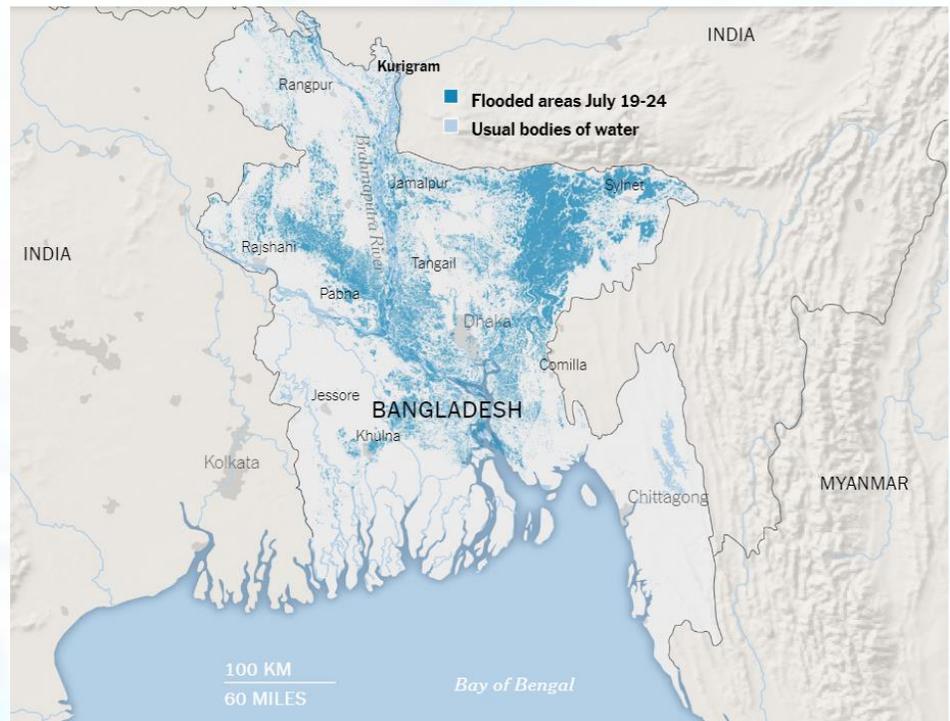
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**Bangladesh.** Intense rains have caused massive flooding on the Brahmaputra River that has left approximately a quarter of the entire nation of Bangladesh submerged. According to the United Nations service ReliefWeb, “As of 28 July, 4.7 million people are affected and 984,819 houses inundated. More than 150,000 [hectares] of paddy fields were damaged, along with thousands of latrines and tube wells...24% of the country is inundated, approximately 56,000 people have been displaced in 1,086 flood shelters. Several districts are isolated due to road communication damaged. Over 1,900 schools are damaged, leaving 807,467 children without access to education.” (Pictured: a scene in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, in late July 2020). Notably, this is just two months after the nation was struck by Cyclone Amphan, devastating the coastal Sundarbans area, and is concurrent with ongoing COVID-19 and rising sea level crises.



By Blacki Migliozzi • Source: Institute of Water and Flood Management, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology



Under any remotely plausible climate change scenario, even relatively hopeful pathways in which we transition to renewables quickly, Brahmaputra river flooding and similar disasters worldwide will grow more and more common and impactful. In a soul-aching injustice, the poorest people of the world, striving to rise up from poverty, are being and will continue to be slammed down over and over again by the wrath of an atmosphere destabilized by rich nations’ profligate burning of fossil fuels. The climate crisis is here and now.

For more on this story, check out [nytimes.com/2020/07/30/climate/bangladesh-floods.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/30/climate/bangladesh-floods.html), and [reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2020-000161-bgd](https://reliefweb.int/disaster/fl-2020-000161-bgd).