

Policy News & Monthly Review

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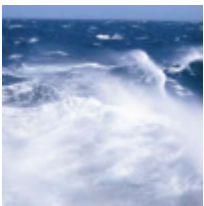
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Bernhardt confirmed as Secretary of the Interior

Date: Thursday, April 11, 2019

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee approved acting Interior Department Secretary David Bernhardt's nomination for the permanent secretary position by a 14-6 vote on April 4. Despite receiving strong bipartisan support from the committee, Bernhardt's confirmation remains encircled in a series of ethics allegations regarding his involvement with lobbying for Westland Water District after filing a legal notice that stated he was no longer a lobbyist. Bernhardt was confirmed as interior secretary by the full Senate on April 11 by a vote of 56-41.



House subcommittee meets to discuss ocean acidification bills

Date: Tuesday, April 9, 2019

The Subcommittee on Environment of the House Science Committee met on April 9 to discuss four bills to address ocean acidification: The National Estuaries and Acidification Research (NEAR) Act of 2019 (H.R.988), COAST Research Act of 2019 (H.R.1237), Coastal Communities Ocean Acidification Act of 2019 (H.R.1716), and Ocean Acidification Innovation Act (H.R.1921). Committee members have two days to submit additional comments on the bills before they move on to the full committee for a vote.



House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee passes a series of disaster aid bills

Date: Tuesday, April 2, 2019

Several disaster aid bills, including the Post-Disaster Assistance Online Accountability Act (H.R. 1307), Disclosing Aid Spent to Ensure Relief (DISASTER) Act (H.R. 1984), Federal Disaster Assistance Coordination Act (H.R. 1306), and H.R. 1311, were introduced in the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee beginning on February 15. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has also approved the National Public Infrastructure Pre-Disaster Hazard Mitigation fund, which will provide between \$400 million and \$600 million per year in grants for infrastructure investments in states that are most threatened by hurricanes, flooding, and other natural disasters.



Federal Register Summary: March 2019

Date: Sunday, March 31, 2019

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration,

National Science Foundation, and more.



House Appropriations Committee holds budget hearings for FY 2020

Date: Tuesday, March 26, 2019

Beginning on March 26, subcommittees of the House Appropriations Committee held a series of fiscal year (FY) 2020 budget hearings for agencies including the National Science Foundation (NSF), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Department of Energy (DOE), and National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). Administrators from each agency gave justifications for their budgets, which are derived from the White House's FY 2020 budget plan, and laid out their agency's priorities to be addressed in FY 2020.



Natural Resources Committee investigates rollback of national monument protections

Date: Wednesday, March 13, 2019

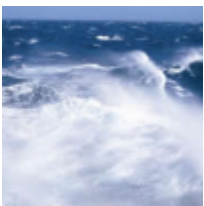
The House Natural Resources Committee held a hearing on rollbacks of the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments on March 13. The December 2017 proclamations authorizing the downscaling of the monuments followed a comprehensive review of 27 national monuments for potential reduction or elimination, as required by an executive order issued by President Trump in April 2017.



House committee holds hearing on reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program

Date: Wednesday, March 13, 2019

On March 13, the House Financial Services Committee held a hearing on the reauthorization of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). NFIP was last reauthorized by Congress on December 21, 2018, authorizing the program through May 31, 2019. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), NFIP reauthorization gives Congress the chance to simplify this program and strengthen it financially so that it can effectively help individuals and communities to secure flood insurance.



House subcommittee holds hearing on the energy-water nexus

Date: Thursday, March 7, 2019

On March 7, the House Science, Space and Technology Committee met to discuss the complex web of connections between the energy and water sectors, as well as the implications of this nexus for society and the economy. The committee heard from experts in academia, industry, and the non-profit sector.



House holds hearing on maintaining U.S. leadership in science and technology

Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2019

On March 6, the House Science, Space and Technology Committee held a hearing on maintaining U.S. leadership in science and technology (S&T). The hearing focused on science policy and heard from Dr. Marcia McNutt, president of the National Academy of Sciences, Dr. Patrick Gallagher, chancellor of the University of Pittsburgh, and Dr. Mehmood Khan, vice chairman and chief scientific officer at PepsiCo.



House subcommittee holds hearing on offshore energy policies at BOEM and BSEE

Date: Wednesday, March 6, 2019

On March 6, the House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing to discuss the policies and priorities of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM), the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE), and the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). Both BSEE and BOEM have been prioritizing the advancement of offshore energy to satisfy Executive Order (E.O.) 13795, "Implementing an America-First Offshore Energy Strategy," which aims to reduce restrictions on the offshore drilling industry.



House passes bipartisan bill to support energy efficiency in schools

Date: Tuesday, March 5, 2019

On March 5, the House passed the Streamlining Energy Efficiency for Schools Act of 2019 (H.R. 762), a bill that directs the Department of Energy (DOE)'s Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy to provide a clearinghouse of information on programs and funding geared towards making schools more energy efficient. The bipartisan bill, introduced by Representatives Matt Cartwright (D-PA-8) and Peter Welch (D-VT-AL) on January 1, would also include resources to help conceptualize and fund energy efficiency and retrofitting projects.



Senate introduces bipartisan bill to designate PFAS as hazardous substances

Date: Friday, March 1, 2019

On March 1, the Environment and Public Works Committee introduced the PFAS Action Act of 2019, a bipartisan bill that would require the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to classify per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) as hazardous substances within a year after the bill is passed. This declaration would expedite contaminated superfund remediation efforts by providing funds for cleanup efforts and charging polluters for remediation.



Federal Register Summary: February 2019

Date: Thursday, February 28, 2019

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



Public lands package passes the House

Date: Tuesday, February 26, 2019

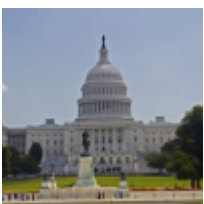
Congress overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan package of more than one hundred public lands, natural resources, and water bills in February. The package, originally titled the Natural Resources Management Act (S. 47), includes measures to improve the nation's volcano monitoring network, reauthorize the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program, and permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund.



House holds a series of climate hearings

Date: Monday, February 25, 2019

House Democrats held a series of hearings throughout February to highlight the evidence and impacts of climate change. Beginning on February 6, two simultaneous hearings were held on the societal impacts of climate change and the potential adaptation and mitigation strategies. The following week, two more hearings were held about preparing for the energy transition and the state of climate science. The House continued to showcase its focus on climate change with six additional climate-related hearings during the last week of February.



Negotiators pass bipartisan spending package

Date: Friday, February 15, 2019

On February 14, Congress passed legislation containing the final FY 2019 spending agreements for certain agencies that had recently been caught up in the 35-day partial government shutdown. NSF and NASA each received a 4 percent increase to their total budgets in FY 2019, compared to last year's enacted budget levels, while USGS received a 1 percent increase. NOAA received an 8 percent decrease in its FY 2019 budget.



Lawmakers reintroduce bill to protect communities from landslides

Date: Thursday, February 14, 2019

Lawmakers in both the House and Senate reintroduced legislation to improve research and coordination needed to help communities prepare for and respond to landslides. The bill, called the National Landslide Preparedness Act (S. 529/H.R. 1261), would create a unified national program run by USGS to better understand the risks and reduce losses from landslide hazards. It would also officially establish the 3D Elevation Program, managed by USGS in coordination with other federal agencies and nonfederal entities.



Legislation could block relocation of USDA offices

Date: Thursday, February 14, 2019

On February 14, Representative Chellie Pingree (D-ME-1) introduced H.R. 1221, the Agriculture Research Integrity Act of 2019, to block the relocation of two U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) offices out of the National Capital Region. Secretary Sonny Perdue announced his intent to move the offices in August 2018, in order to place USDA resources closer to many stakeholders who live outside of the region and attract staff with training and interests in agriculture who may otherwise be discouraged by Washington D.C.'s high cost of living. However, the relocation would affect approximately 700 employees currently at the USDA offices, some of whom may choose to find new jobs rather than move to a different city.



Lawmakers introduce bipartisan carbon capture bills

Date: Wednesday, February 13, 2019

Two bipartisan carbon capture bills were introduced in the Senate on February 7. First, the Carbon Capture Modernization Act (S. 407) was introduced by Senator John Hoeven (R-ND) to modify the existing tax credit for investment in clean coal facilities so that it would more effectively encourage the use of carbon capture and sequestration technologies. Second, the Utilizing Significant Emissions with Innovative Technologies (USE IT) Act (S. 383) was introduced by Senator John Barrasso (R-WY) to support carbon utilization and direct air capture research.



Green New Deal resolution emerges in the House and Senate

Date: Friday, February 8, 2019

On February 8, Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14) and Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) introduced a resolution proposing an economic stimulus program known as the Green New Deal. The resolution (H.Res. 109/S.Res. 59) calls for a complete overhaul of U.S. energy production infrastructure and sets a goal for meeting the nation's energy demand with 100 percent renewable sources by 2030.

House chamber

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House subcommittee holds hearing on spending restrictions during shutdown

Date: Wednesday, February 6, 2019

On February 6, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior, Environment and Related Agencies held its first hearing of the 116th Congress to review how the recent government shutdown affected agency spending. Subcommittee Chair Betty McCollum (D-MN) began the hearing by emphasizing the importance of Congress protecting federal agencies, and reviewing the legal framework surrounding the executive branch's decision to continue operating certain agencies, like the National Park Service (NPS), in the absence of appropriations during a shutdown.



Federal Register Summary: January 2019

Date: Thursday, January 31, 2019

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



Senators Murkowski and Cantwell reintroduce lands bill package

Date: Thursday, January 31, 2019

Senators Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) reintroduced a bipartisan package of more than one hundred public lands, natural resources, and water bills, which they negotiated last year with their counterparts on the House Natural Resources Committee. The lands package—S. 47, the Natural Resources Management Act—was placed directly on the Senate calendar for expedited consideration. It contains measures to permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund, reauthorize the National Cooperative Geologic Mapping Program, and improve the U.S. volcano monitoring network.



House lawmakers introduce natural resource sustainability bills

Date: Monday, January 28, 2019

Throughout January, several bills were introduced in the House relating to natural resource sustainability. Representatives Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX-30) and Frank Lucas (R-OK-3) cosponsored the Energy and Water Research Integration Act of 2019 (H.R. 34), which directs the Department of Energy to consider the critical link between energy and water use in its programs. Representative Scott Tipton (R-CO-3) later introduced two energy-related bills, the Planning for American Energy Act (H.R. 785) and the Education and Energy Act (H.R. 786), to support responsible energy development and additional funding for education.



35-day government shutdown ends with temporary funding through mid-February

Date: Friday, January 25, 2019

The longest federal government shutdown in U.S. history ended on January 25, when President Trump signed a short-term spending deal that temporarily reopens affected agencies—including the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Science Foundation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and the Department of the Interior—which had been shut down since the end of last year. The legislation provides continued funding at last year's levels for certain agencies through February 15, pushing back the deadline for Congress and the administration to agree upon the final 2019 appropriations bills for those agencies or enter into another partial government shutdown.



Senate holds confirmation hearing to consider Andrew Wheeler for administrator of EPA

Date: Friday, January 18, 2019

On January 18—day twenty-six of the government shutdown—the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a confirmation hearing on the nomination of Andrew Wheeler for administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Wheeler has served as the acting administrator since July 2018, following the resignation of former administrator Scott Pruitt in light of a series of ethics scandals. (UPDATE: On February 5, the committee voted 11-10 to advance Wheeler's nomination, sending it to the full Senate for consideration.)



House advances disaster aid funding bill

Date: Wednesday, January 16, 2019

On January 16, the House passed the Supplemental Appropriations Act (H.R. 268) to provide over \$12 billion in emergency

funding for communities affected by earthquakes, wildfires, and other natural disasters in 2018. Republicans repeatedly stressed the futility of moving forward any appropriations bill that does not include funding for the president's border wall. Ultimately, this bill did not make it to a vote in the Senate as a short-term spending bill was agreed upon to re-open the government on January 25.



President Trump approves National Integrated Drought Information System Reauthorization Act

Date: Monday, January 7, 2019

On January 7, President Trump signed a bill (S. 2200) into law that reauthorizes the National Integrated Drought Information System (NIDIS) through fiscal year 2023. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's NIDIS program provides drought information to farmers, ranchers, and other industries affected by extreme weather.



Senate confirms nominations for energy and environment agency positions

Date: Wednesday, January 2, 2019

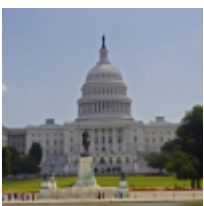
On January 2, the Senate confirmed a lengthy list of President Trump's nominations by voice vote. Some of the confirmed geoscience-related agency nominees include Kelvin Droegemeier as director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, Daniel Simmons as assistant secretary for energy efficiency and renewable energy at the Department of Energy, and Teri Donaldson for inspector general at the Department of Energy. Mary Neumayr was also approved to head the Council on Environmental Quality and Alexandra Dunn to lead the Environmental Protection Agency's chemicals office.



Federal Register Summary: December 2018

Date: Monday, December 31, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



US federal government goes into partial shutdown as Congress struggles to agree on 2019 budget

Date: Saturday, December 22, 2018

For the third time in 2018, the federal government went into a partial shutdown on December 22, with Congress and the president still at an impasse over border security funding. The year ended with several unfinished spending bills, leaving agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Interior (DOI) with a funding lapse until another short-

term resolution or permanent funding deal is enacted for fiscal year (FY) 2019.



President signs farm bill into law, setting national agriculture policy for next five years

Date: Thursday, December 20, 2018

President Donald Trump signed the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (H.R. 2) into law on December 20, following months of drawn-out negotiations in the House and Senate. The legislation, commonly referred to as the “farm bill,” modifies and extends some of the major programs for land conservation, food and nutrition assistance, trade promotion, rural development, research, forestry, horticulture, and other programs within the Department of Agriculture (USDA) through fiscal year 2023.



Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke resigns

Date: Saturday, December 15, 2018

On December 15, 2018, President Donald Trump announced that Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke would be stepping down at the end of the year. During his time as secretary, Zinke faced a string of investigations over allegations that he violated ethics rules, while the Department of the Interior has been under scrutiny over concerns about scientific integrity. Deputy Secretary David Bernhardt will be taking charge as acting secretary amid a partial government shutdown.



EPA and Department of the Army announce intent to redefine WOTUS rule

Date: Tuesday, December 11, 2018

On December 11, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of the Army proposed a revised definition of the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) rule to clarify the scope of waters federally regulated under the Clean Water Act. The proposed revision would limit where federal regulations apply, clearly outlining what would be considered “waters of the United States” in addition to specific exclusions from the definition.



President Trump approves earthquake hazards bill

Date: Tuesday, December 11, 2018

On December 11, President Donald Trump signed a bill to reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) through fiscal year 2023. The bill provides the first reauthorization of NEHRP since 2004, while clarifying the responsibilities of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the National Science Foundation (NSF), and the United States Geological Survey (USGS) in carrying out the program. It

also calls for a comprehensive assessment of the nation's earthquake risk reduction strategy.



Nominations for energy and environmental agency positions move forward in lame duck

Date: Thursday, December 6, 2018

A series of nomination processes moved forward in December as Congress wrapped up their lame duck session following the November 6 midterm elections. On December 6, the Senate confirmed Bernard McNamee to be a member of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The nominations of Rita Baranwal to be assistant secretary for nuclear energy at the Department of Energy (DOE) and Raymond Vela to be director of the National Park Service (NPS) were still awaiting a final confirmation vote by the Senate at the end of December 2018.



White House releases 2018-2023 STEM education plan

Date: Tuesday, December 4, 2018

The White House unveiled its five-year strategic plan for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) education on December 4. The report, entitled "Chartering a Course for Success: America's Strategy for STEM Education," outlines the administration's goals and approaches for advancing STEM education and workforce, highlighting the federal government's role in promoting STEM education by working with private partnerships and removing barriers to participation in STEM careers.



Senate lawmakers consider series of energy bills

Date: Friday, November 30, 2018

The Senate Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy met on November 29 to consider a series of energy-themed bills as Congress begins look toward the next session. The hearing considered fourteen pieces of legislation, including bills to provide for the full operations of a fast neutron nuclear reactor by 2025 and to change access to the Strategic Petroleum Reserve.



Mid-term elections bring new members of Congress and shifts in leadership

Date: Friday, November 30, 2018

The results of the November 6, 2018, mid-term elections will shape geoscience-related legislative priorities for the next two years and beyond. The Democratic Party won control of the U.S. House of Representatives, while the Republican Party retained control of the U.S. Senate.



Administration releases second decadal report on ocean science and technology

Date: Friday, November 30, 2018

The National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) released a report this month entitled, “Science and Technology For America’s Oceans: A Decadal Vision.” The report outlines the Trump administration’s goals to advance U.S. ocean science and technology in the coming decade.



Federal Register Summary: November 2018

Date: Friday, November 30, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



Congress reauthorizes national earthquake hazards program

Date: Tuesday, November 27, 2018

A bill to reauthorize the National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program (NEHRP) through fiscal year 2023 passed the House on November 27 and now awaits final approval by the President. The National Earthquake Hazards Reduction Program Reauthorization Act of 2018 (S. 1768) serves as a follow-up to the Earthquake Hazards Reduction Act of 1977, which established NEHRP as the nation’s interagency platform for seismic hazards.



National Climate Assessment warns of environmental impacts and societal and economic damages

Date: Thursday, November 22, 2018

The White House released the second volume of the U.S. Global Change Research Program’s (USGCRP) Fourth National Climate Assessment (NCA4) on November 22, warning of potential damage to the U.S. economy, environment, and human health in the coming decades as a result of climate change.



House approves reauthorization of National Geologic Mapping Act

Date: Tuesday, November 13, 2018

The House of Representatives passed the National Geologic Mapping Act Reauthorization Act (H.R. 4033) on November 13, sending the bill to the Senate where it currently awaits further action. The act, introduced by Representative Doug Lamborn (R-CO-5), reauthorizes the National Geologic Mapping Program (NCGMP) through fiscal year 2023 and provides for the Associate Director for Core Science Systems to replace the Associate Director for Geology as the chairperson of the geologic mapping advisory committee.



Senate subcommittee field hearing addresses effects of PFAS chemicals in Michigan

Date: Tuesday, November 13, 2018

Senator Gary Peters (D-MI), ranking member of the Federal Spending Oversight and Emergency Management Subcommittee, convened a field hearing titled “Local, State and Federal Response to PFAS Contamination in Michigan” in his home state on November 13. The hearing focused on the emerging health and environmental impacts of per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).



Federal Register Summary: October 2018

Date: Wednesday, October 31, 2018

A summary of notices posted to the Federal Register by geoscience-related federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Energy, Department of the Interior, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, National Science Foundation, and more.



President Trump signs America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 into law

Date: Tuesday, October 23, 2018

President Trump signed America’s Water Infrastructure Act of 2018 (S. 3021), which includes the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) of 2018, into law on October 23. The biannual WRDA legislation contained in S. 3021 authorizes investments in water infrastructure, including reauthorization of the Levee Safety Initiative and the National Dam Safety Program through 2023.



Senate hearing addresses the EPA proposed transparency rule

Date: Tuesday, October 16, 2018

A subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing on October 3 to gauge expert opinion on the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) "Strengthening Transparency in Regulatory Science" proposed rule. The proposed rule directs the EPA to use "peer-reviewed information, standardized test methods, consistent data evaluation procedures, and good laboratory practices to ensure transparent, understandable, and reproducible scientific assessments." Two witnesses testified in favor of the rule, asserting it would ensure timely scientific and administrative accountability, while a third witness expressed concern that the rule is focused on reducing regulations, not promoting transparent or sound science.



Senate committee approves Land and Water Conservation Fund reauthorization

Date: Friday, October 12, 2018

On October 2, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing on legislation that would permanently reauthorize the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). Although Congress was unable to pass a reauthorization bill for the LCWF before its funding expired on September 30, the authority to carry out the program does not expire. The proposed legislation, called the Land and Water Conservation Authorization and Funding Act (S. 569), seeks to provide consistent and reliable authority for and funding of the LCWF.



OPM announces direct-hire for federal government STEM positions

Date: Thursday, October 11, 2018

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) announced a new direct hiring authority in various science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) positions in a memorandum issued by acting director Margaret Weichert to all federal agency heads on October 11. Federal agencies can use a direct-hire authority, which expedites the hiring process, to fill vacancies when a critical hiring need or severe shortage of candidates exists.