

Policy News & Monthly Review

AGI policy news briefs summarize geoscience policy activities and related events in Washington, D.C. as part of an effort to keep AGI member societies and other audiences informed about relevant federal policy and legislative updates.

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NASA tests Orion capsule for human space travel

Date: Friday, December 5, 2014

On December 5, NASA successfully tested its new Orion capsule, designed to carry humans to deep space destinations like Mars or an asteroid.



Senate committee holds hearing on bipartisan climate bill

Date: Tuesday, December 2, 2014

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee held a hearing on December 2 to assess a bipartisan climate bill that would lower emissions of short-lived climate pollutants.



House passes three bills concerning EPA science and regulations

Date: Thursday, November 20, 2014

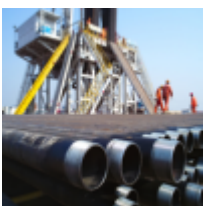
The House passed three bills the week of November 17 regarding the science that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) uses to issue environmental regulations. The bills attempt to change to how EPA reviews scientific data and how it issues permits.



House subcommittee holds oversight hearing on volcanic hazards

Date: Wednesday, November 19, 2014

On November 19, the House Natural Resources Committee Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee held an oversight hearing on U.S. preparedness for and response to volcanic hazards.



Keystone XL Pipeline bill falls one vote short of passage in Senate

Date: Tuesday, November 18, 2014

A bill to approve the TransCanada Keystone XL pipeline project failed to pass the U.S. Senate by a single vote on November 18.



Army Corps of Engineers considers shift toward watershed-based planning

Date: Friday, November 14, 2014

In a press conference held on November 14 to discuss their climate adaptation plan, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) discussed the possibility of an agency-wide shift toward holistic watershed management.



Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee holds markup on energy, parks, and lands bills

Date: Thursday, November 13, 2014

On November 13, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee held a markup of 16 bills pertaining to energy, parks, and public lands.



U.S. signs climate change agreement with China

Date: Wednesday, November 12, 2014

On November 12, President Obama and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a climate change agreement, pledging to cut greenhouse gas emissions and collaborate in an international effort to combat global temperature rise.



European Space Agency lands space probe on comet

Date: Wednesday, November 12, 2014

On November 12, the European Space Agency (ESA) Rosetta mission successfully landed a probe onto a comet for the first time in human history.



Midterm voters pass four, defeat four ballot measures to ban hydraulic fracturing

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2014

During midterm elections, ballots in several states included measures to ban hydraulic fracturing and other unconventional drilling

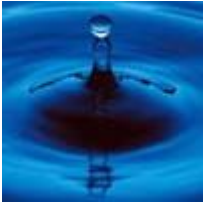
techniques.



Nature study recommends new approach to wildfire management

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2014

A new study in the journal *Nature* suggests that wildfires be treated like other natural disasters, such as earthquakes or floods, where officials focus on adaptation and loss mitigation as opposed to prevention and response.



U.S. water use at lowest levels since 1970

Date: Wednesday, November 5, 2014

According to a new U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) report, U.S. water usage has declined to its lowest level in the past 45 years.



Leadership changes in the 114th Congress

Date: Tuesday, November 4, 2014

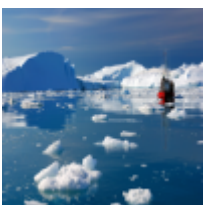
Midterm congressional elections took place on Tuesday, November 4, resulting in a number of committee leadership changes for both Democrats and Republicans.



IPCC releases report warning of consequences of climate change

Date: Monday, November 3, 2014

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released a report on November 3 that synthesizes its published findings on climate change over the last 13 months.



State Department announces priorities for Arctic Council chairmanship

Date: Thursday, October 23, 2014

On October 23, the U.S. State Department announced that climate change adaptation and mitigation will be top priorities when the

U.S. assumes the chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2015.



Scientists and policymakers continue efforts to study and prepare for earthquakes

Date: Friday, October 17, 2014

In the 25 years since the devastating Loma Prieta earthquake, scientists and policymakers have worked to better understand seismic hazards and implement strategies to reduce vulnerability.



U.S. Forest Service study will examine wildfire effects on watersheds

Date: Thursday, October 16, 2014

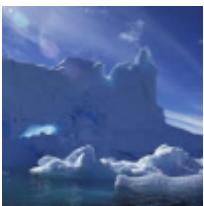
U.S. Forest Service (USFS) scientists are beginning a three-year study to examine how wildfires affect water supplies.



President Obama announces nominee for NASA Deputy Administrator

Date: Thursday, October 16, 2014

On October 16, President Obama nominated MIT professor Dava Newman as Deputy Administrator of NASA. Previous Deputy Administrator Lori Garver resigned in September 2013 to manage the Air Line Pilots Association.



NASA begins sixth year of flights studying polar ice changes

Date: Thursday, October 16, 2014

NASA's Operation IceBridge mission began its sixth season of polar research flights monitoring ice sheets, glaciers, and sea ice conditions.

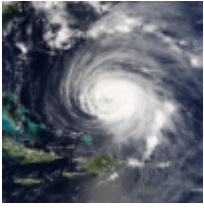


GAO critical of interagency response to ocean acidification

Date: Tuesday, October 14, 2014

In an October 14 report, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended the formation of an independent office to

streamline the federal response to ocean acidification.



Pentagon report warns of climate change threats to national security

Date: Monday, October 13, 2014

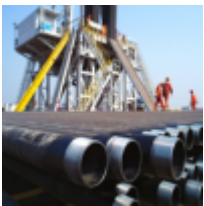
Climate change “poses immediate risks to U.S. national security,” according to a Pentagon report released on October 13.



UK opens space weather forecasting center

Date: Thursday, October 9, 2014

The United Kingdom (UK) opened its first space weather forecasting center, the Met Office Space Weather Operations Center, on October 9 in Exeter, England.



House Democrats urge BLM to take action on illegal drilling

Date: Thursday, October 9, 2014

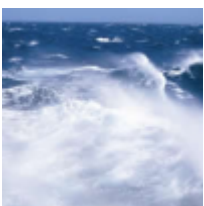
Following the recent release of a report by the Interior Office of Inspector General (OIG), four House Democrats sent a letter to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) encouraging it to strengthen its policies for preventing illegal drilling for federal mineral resources.



Alaska commission asks that resource development be priority for Arctic Council

Date: Thursday, October 9, 2014

The Alaska Arctic Policy Commission has asked the U.S. State Department to prioritize Arctic resource extraction during the 2 year U.S. chairmanship of the Arctic Council starting in 2015.



Weak El Nino conditions likely to develop for winter 2013-14

Date: Thursday, October 9, 2014

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Climate Prediction Center reports that weak El Niño conditions have a 60-65 percent chance of developing this fall and winter.



White House introduces new plan to protect federal lands from climate change

Date: Wednesday, October 8, 2014

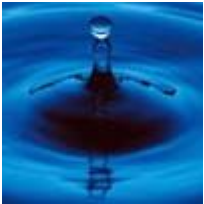
On October 8, the White House unveiled a new agenda to protect federal lands against the impacts of changing climate by conserving and restoring natural resources and carbon sinks.



NASA to test unmanned aerial systems for wildfire detection

Date: Tuesday, October 7, 2014

NASA's Langley Research Center and the Department of the Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) have entered into a one-year agreement to test small unmanned aerial systems (UAS) for detecting brush and forest fires in the Great Dismal Swamp National Wildlife Refuge in Suffolk, VA.



EPA extends comment period for proposed changes to Clean Water Act

Date: Monday, October 6, 2014

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have extended the comment period for a proposed rule to clarify "waters of the United States" as defined under the Clean Water Act.



Gimbel to lead Water and Science office

Date: Friday, October 3, 2014

On October 3, Department of the Interior (DOI) Secretary Sally Jewell named Jennifer Gimbel, who currently serves as Deputy Commissioner for External and Intergovernmental Affairs at the Bureau of Reclamation, to be Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science.



Report shows BLM policy is weak on illegal drilling of federal lands

Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2014

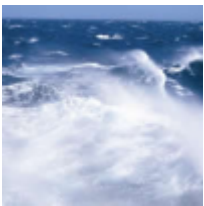
A report released on September 29 by the Interior Office of Inspector General (OIG) relates the shortcomings of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) policy to detect and deter illegal mineral or oil and gas drilling on federal lands.



NOAA launches new modeling tool to track severe weather

Date: Tuesday, September 30, 2014

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) launched a new modeling tool for meteorologists to study severe weather and track how it develops at the local level.



President Obama establishes world's largest marine reserve

Date: Thursday, September 25, 2014

On September 25, President Obama announced the addition of more than 490,000 square miles of federally protected waters around the Pacific Remote Islands Marine National Monument in the southern Pacific Ocean south and west of Hawaii, making it the largest marine reserve in the world.



NASA calls on citizen scientists to help with mission to Mars

Date: Wednesday, September 24, 2014

On September 20, NASA announced the Mars Balance Mass Challenge, a new contest seeking design ideas for spacecraft payloads entering the atmosphere on Mars.



USGS outlines resources for reporting on earthquakes

Date: Wednesday, September 24, 2014

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) held an educational seminar for members of the media on September 24 on how to accurately

report on earthquakes following an event.



NASA announces contracts to transport American astronauts to International Space Station

Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2014

On September 23, NASA announced that they have contracted two private companies, Boeing and SpaceX, to transport American astronauts to the International Space Station (ISS).



House passes bill blocking proposed changes to Clean Water Act

Date: Tuesday, September 23, 2014

On September 9, a majority of House Republicans united with 35 Democrats to successfully pass H.R. 5078, a bill blocking the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) proposed changes to the Clean Water Act (CWA).



Scientists brief Congress on science-based resilience following Hurricane Sandy

Date: Friday, September 19, 2014

Representatives from the USGS, the NPS, and the U.S. FWS presented a congressional briefing on the science behind efforts to help rebuild shorelines, ecosystems, and communities after Hurricane Sandy.



House Natural Resources Committee approves bills supporting surface water storage projects

Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014

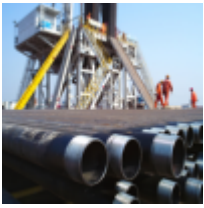
On September 18, Democrats and Republicans on the House Natural Resources Committee approved three bills that help to create and expand surface storage water projects.



Congress passes bill funding the federal government through December 11

Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014

This September, Congress passed a short-term Continuing Resolution (CR) funding the federal government through December 11, 2014.



House passes bills to approve KXL and increase domestic energy production

Date: Thursday, September 18, 2014

On September 18, the House passed two legislative packages that would approve the Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline and increase domestic energy production.



House holds contentious hearing on Clean Power Plan

Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2014

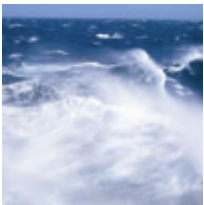
On September 17, the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology held another hearing to discuss the Obama Administration's Climate Action Plan.



House hearing examines benefits of data preservation

Date: Wednesday, September 17, 2014

The House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held a hearing on September 17 to discuss legislation to reauthorize the National Geological and Geophysical Data Preservation Program (NGGDPP).



House passes Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act

Date: Monday, September 8, 2014

On September 8, the House of Representatives passed the Tsunami Warning, Education, and Research Act (H.R. 5309) by voice vote.



Governor of Oklahoma appoints committee to study induced seismicity

Date: Thursday, September 4, 2014

Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin has formed a committee to study the recent uptick in earthquakes within her state that researchers have linked to oil and gas development.



EPA announces new acting officials while appointees await confirmation

Date: Thursday, August 7, 2014

On August 7, Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Gina McCarthy announced the names of several new acting officials to fill vacancies in the agency's administration. President Obama has nominated six officials, but the positions remain open while these individuals await hearings in the slow confirmation process.



House forms bipartisan caucus to bring attention to Arctic policy

Date: Tuesday, August 5, 2014

Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) and Rep. Don Young (R-AK) recently announced the formation of a new bipartisan caucus designed to bring more attention to Arctic issues in Congress.



Senate committee releases draft of Interior and Environment appropriations report

Date: Friday, August 1, 2014

The Senate Committee on Appropriations released a committee report to accompany their Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies appropriations bill on August 1. Committee reports allow legislators to make their views on funding levels public at a time when the Senate appropriations process has come to a halt, and it is unclear whether specific appropriations bills will be voted on in committee and on the Senate floor.



Montana senator introduces legislation to fund CCS projects

Date: Friday, August 1, 2014

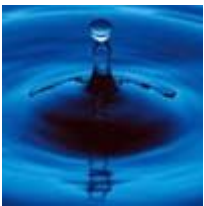
Senator John Walsh (D-MT) introduced legislation on August 1 that calls for funding of CCS units across the country and follows recent regulations issued by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that mandate a reduction in carbon emissions.



Senate Democrats introduce COMPETES reauthorization bill

Date: Thursday, July 31, 2014

Senate Democrats introduced a bill that would fund science research and education and reauthorize the 2010 Creating Opportunities to Meaningfully Promote Excellence in Technology, Education, and Science (COMPETES) Reauthorization Act on July 31.



Western Democrats introduce water bill to address drought crisis

Date: Thursday, July 31, 2014

On July 31, a group of Democrats from Western states introduced the Water in the 21st Century Act, which includes a number of programs intent on conserving and managing diminishing water supplies in drought-stricken states.