Policy News & Monthly Review

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Agency Contingency Plans for the government shutdown

The majority of federal agencies have released contingency plans detailing how they will execute an orderly ceasing of programs.
The agencies’ plans are based on which programs and employees are considered essential (excepted) or non-essential (non-excepted) during the funding hiatus.

**Floodplain mapping should include climate variation, group says**
The Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) released a report on August 13 that criticizes the failure of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) to take account of climate change in risk assessment. The report is part of a larger effort by UCS to convince the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to account for climate impacts on flooding in its policies. The report comes before the planned initiation of increased premiums for risky buildings, which will be done by the NFIP on October 1.

**NAS report on Ocean Acidification Strategic Plan**
The National Academies of Sciences released a report on the “Review of the Federal Ocean Acidification Research and Monitoring Plan.” Developed as a guide for federal research, the strategic plan assesses the impacts of ocean acidification and help policymakers develop strategies for adaptation and mitigation. The report discusses the potential consequences of increasing ocean acidity, and reviews the Strategic Plan for Federal Research and Monitoring of Ocean Acidification prepared by the Interagency Working Group on Ocean Acidification, which was created as part of Fed

**Update: Senate CST Committee hearing on Pritzker for Secretary of Commerce**
Penny Pritzker, President Obama’s pick for Secretary of Commerce, was questioned by the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation committee on May 23, 2013. Though the hearing was relatively cordial, Pritzker, a businesswoman with close ties to the Hyatt Hotel chain, faced scrutiny regarding the tense management-labor relations allegedly reported at Hyatt Hotels. The Committee plans to hold a vote next month on Pritzker’s confirmation. A majority in the full Senate is required to confirm the nomination.

**Capitol Hill Oceans Week in review**
On June 4-6, 2013, marine professionals, government officials, and ocean enthusiasts from across the country converged on Washington, D.C., for a three-day conversation about ocean and coastal policy.

**DOI holds offshore wind lease sale**
On September 4, 2013, the Department of the Interior held its second competitive lease sale for renewable energy in federal waters. The sale consisted of 112,799 acres of Virginia’s Outer Continental Shelf, and brought in more than $1.6 billion in revenue. The first lease sale took place in July, and auctioned 164,750 acres of land off the coast of Rhode Island. That sale was won by Deepwater Wind New England, LLC, which had the high bid of $3.8 million.

**State, Federal partnership working to improve tsunami resilience**
Scientists with the U.S. Geological Survey, the California Geological Survey, the California Governor’s Office of Emergency Services, the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and other agencies, academic and other institutions are teaming up to improve tsunami resilience in California. Instead of attempting to predict when tsunami-producing earthquake will occur, these scientists are instead identifying the impacts of a tsunami on local infrastructure and the economy.

**Safe Building Code Incentive Act of 2013 introduced in the House and Senate**
Representative Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) introduced the Safe Building Code Incentive Act of 2013 (H.R. 1878) to the House on May 9, 2013. Senator Robert Menendez (D-NJ) introduced the Safe Building Code Incentive Act (S. 905, S. 924) to the Senate on May 8 and 9, 2013, respectively.

**New USGS report shows public supply well vulnerabilities**
The U.S. Geological Survey released the results of a study designed to identify factors that affect the vulnerability of public water
supply wells to contamination. More than one-third of the U.S. population gets its drinking water from these wells, and the study was done in response to evidence indicating low concentrations of contaminants in groundwater in many parts of the nation.

**C2ES report on "Leveraging Natural Gas to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions"**

The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions (C2ES) released a report titled “Leveraging Natural Gas to Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions”. This report examines the implications of expanded natural gas use in the economy, and recommends plans of action to maximize the climate benefits of natural gas.

**Senate Committee Holds Hearing on Proposed Helium Legislation**

On May 7, 2013, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a hearing to discuss the proposed Helium Stewardship Act of 2013 (S. 783) which was introduced on April 23, 2013 by Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) and Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK).

During the hearing, Wyden, Murkowski, and the witnesses emphasized the urgent need to address the impending early closure of the Federal Helium Reserve in October 2013, which would cut off 42 percent of the domestic and 35 percent of the global helium supply.

**New map of areas most vulnerable to climate change**

A study published in *Nature Climate Change* provides a map of areas most vulnerable to climate change. Authors say they hope to give governments and environmental groups a roadmap to help them identify the places where they should invest in protecting and restoring threatened ecosystems. The paper indicates the areas most impacted by climate change include southern Asia, western and central Europe, eastern South America, and southern Australia.

**Distant Quakes Trigger Tremors at U.S. Waste-Injection Sites**

A recent study done by Columbia University and the University of Oklahoma published in the 12 July 2013 issue of *Science* suggests that large (magnitude 7 or above) earthquakes from all over the globe can trigger smaller quakes at waste fluid injection sites where pressure from the fluids has pushed faults close to failure. At some injection locations, a swarm of remotely triggered earthquakes appears to act as a warning sign that large earthquakes related to human activities may be imminent. Several areas in Oklahoma, Colorado, and Texas showed this correlation.

**Permitting for federal lands in the Dakotas may be expedited**

On June 19, the Senate passed S. 244, a bill designed to amend the Energy Policy Act of 2005 to streamline permitting for oil and gas projects on federal lands in North and South Dakota. Introduced by John Hoeven (R-ND) and Heidi Heitkamp (D-ND), the bill extends a Bureau of Land Management federal permit streamlining program to include federal lands in the Dakotas. A related bill, H.R. 767, passed the House on May 15, 2013.

** Appropriations update for May 2013**

The Senate Committee on Appropriations held subcommittee hearings on the President’s fiscal year (FY) 2014 budget requests for the Department of the Interior (DOI) and the Department of Energy (DOE).

**Bipartisan Bill to Create Science Laureate Position Introduced by Smith and Lofgren**

On May 8, 2013, Representative Lamar Smith (R-TX) and Representative Zoe Lofgren (D-CA) introduced the Science Laureates of the United States Act of 2013 (H.R. 1891). This bill would authorize the President to appoint up to three Science Laureates of the United States who would serve 1- or 2-year terms. The Science Laureate would honor scientists who have excelled in their research careers and in enhancing public interest in science.

**EIA report on US crude oil production**
In the U.S. Energy Information Agency’s (EIA) Annual Energy Outlook 2013 (AEO2013), which presents yearly projections and analysis of energy topics based on current conditions, projected domestic crude oil production ranges from 6-8 million barrels per day for the next 30 years. However, using greater supply assumptions, domestic crude oil production could be sustained at approximately 10 million barrels per day between 2020 and 2040.

House committee considers stepping stones to Mars
The House Subcommittee on Space held a hearing on May 21, 2013 on next steps in human space exploration. The primary goal of the hearing was to evaluate whether a human mission to the moon or to a near-earth asteroid would better prepare NASA to send humans to Mars and beyond.

House Natural Resources Committee examines U.S. helium production
On July 11, 2013, the House Committee on Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources held an oversight hearing to discuss the future of helium production in the U.S. The subcommittee heard testimony regarding the current and future U.S. demand for helium, the Federal Helium Reserve, and permitting for helium production.

Senators call for increased U.S. oil production
Senator James Inhofe (R-OK) introduced legislation this May proposing increased U.S. oil production in order to enact full sanctions on Iranian oil imports. Proponents of the bill hope to attenuate Iran’s economy, which collects approximately 70 percent of its revenue through oil exports, and to cripple its controversial nuclear program. Inhofe’s bill, the Iran Sanctions Implementation Act of 2013, calls for the U.S. to produce 1.25 million more barrels of oil per day to displace oil imports from Iran and ease potential disruptions in global markets.

Hultgren introduces draft legislation on next generation "exascale" computers
Representative Randy Hultgren (R-IL) unveiled a discussion draft of the American High-End Computing Leadership Act that would modify the DOE High-End Computing Revitalization Act of 2004 to increase funding for the Department of Energy (DOE) Office of Science. If enacted, this bill would provide $110 million each year for FY 2014 and 2015 to develop two or more exascale computing systems in national laboratories for use by industry, academia, and other labs.

National Scenic Trails included on U.S. Topo Maps
The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) reported that National Scenic Trails will be added to U.S. Topography Maps. The United States has 11 National Scenic Trails and the first to be featured on USGS maps is the Ice Age National Scenic Trail in Wisconsin. The revised maps will be added to the USGS Historical Topographic Map Collection and are also available for download.

House advances Keystone XL bill
On May 22, 2013 the House voted 241-175 to approve H.R. 3: The Northern Route Approval Act, which seeks to approve the construction, operation, and maintenance of the Keystone XL Pipeline. If enacted, the bill would allow for the construction of the pipeline without a presidential permit, and would greatly streamline other permitting processes normally required by the Secretary of Interior and the Army. The bill still needs to be approved by the full Senate and the President before it can be enacted into law.

National Academies
The Mathematical Sciences in 2025 – The mathematical sciences are becoming increasingly important in all parts of society, including the geosciences. The National Science Foundation (NSF) requested that the National Research Council (NRC) examine how the mathematical sciences can improve their capabilities to properly maximize their contributions to the nation by 2025.

Government Accountability Office (GAO)
Hazardous Waste Cleanup: Observations on States’ Role, Liabilities at DOD and Hardrock Mining Sites, and Litigation Issues –
The Government Accountability Office (GAO) summarizes its most recent findings on the role and responsibilities of states and federal agencies in cleaning up hazardous waste sites.

DOE releases 2013 Annual Plan for Ultra-Deepwater and Unconventional Natural Gas and Other Petroleum Resources Research and Development
The DOE Office of Fossil Energy has released the Ultra-Deepwater and Unconventional Natural Gas and Other Petroleum Resources Research and Development Program 2013 Annual Plan. The goal of the Program is, broadly, to maximize the value of domestic resources of natural gas and other petroleum resources.

House committee holds markup of the NASA Authorization Act of 2013
On July 18, 2013, the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee held a markup of the NASA Authorization Act of 2013 (H.R. 2687). The bill, which reauthorizes programs at NASA for two years with a top line budget of $16.9 billion, was approved by a vote of 22 to 17 along party lines. The bill authorizes a total of $4.6 billion for science, including $1.5 billion for planetary science and $1.2 billion for earth science. This represents a reduction of the earth science budget by about one-third, to 2008 levels.

Senators investigate private funding solutions for struggling national parks
On June 6, 2013, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a full committee hearing to review programs and activities of the Department of the Interior (DOI).

Federal Register - May 2013
EPA – The Environmental Protection Agency issued a final rule revising the deadline for submitting requests for use of best available monitoring methods. The rule applies to petroleum and natural gas facilities under the Greenhouse Gas Reporting Rule. [Wednesday, May 1, 2013 (Volume 78, Number 84)]

Budget Update for September
For most of September, Congress was focused on considering a budget for 2014 before the 2013 fiscal year ended on September 30th. Congress, however, has failed to pass a budget or a Continuing Resolution (CR) and so all non-essential government services are shutting down, and thousands of non-essential government employees, including those at the National Science Foundation, the Department of the Interior, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and NASA, are being furloughed.

USGS develops improved technique for coral reef monitoring
Coral reefs are being degraded on a global scale, and a better understanding of the factors that affect coral growth could tell us why. To this end, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) has pioneered a new weight-based method that allows for more accurate and precise measurements of coral growth.

Update: Senate CST Committee approves Foxx nomination
On May 22, 2013, the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee held a hearing to confirm Anthony R. Foxx as the new Secretary of Transportation. Foxx, the current mayor of Charlotte, N.C., has been criticized by some Republicans for his lack of direct experience working in the transportation sector. Despite these reservations, Foxx faced few objections during the hearing and is expected to be confirmed without difficulty. A simple majority vote in the Senate is required to confirm his nomination - at the time of publication no vote had been scheduled.
House Committee holds hearing on windstorms
On June 5, 2013 the House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittees on Research and Technology held a hearing to review the National Windstorm Impact Reduction Act Reauthorization of 2013 (H.R. 1786). The act, introduced by Randy Neugebauer (R-TX), would reauthorize the multi-agency National Windstorm Impact Reduction Program (NWIRP).

CRS Report on Laws & Regulations on Exporting Fossil Fuels
The Congressional Research Service (CRS) published a report that examines federal laws and regulations pertaining to the export of natural gas, crude oil, and coal. This report provides an overview of federal laws and regulations and agency roles in authorizing and regulating the export of these fossil fuels. Any party wishing to export fossil fuels must comply, as appropriate, with the Natural Gas Act, a general ban on crude oil exports, and other various laws and regulations applicable to the construction and operation of exporting fossil fuels.

National flood insurance rates on the rise
National flood insurance rates are set to rise at the end of the month. Beginning October 1, 2013, owners of repetitively flooded homes and the most subsidized policyholders of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) will begin paying 25 percent more each year for flood insurance until their rates accurately reflect the level of risk associated with their properties. The increases are targeted at 1.1 million policyholders that own homes along hazardous shorelines that are worth less than the claims paid out by the federal government.

Restoring US leadership in weather forecasting
On May 23, 2013 the Subcommittee on Energy of the House Science, Space and Technology Committee held a hearing on Restoring U.S. Leadership in Weather Forecasting. With witness testimony from Mr. Barry Myers, Chief Executive Officer of AccuWeather, a private weather forecasting company, and Mr. Jon Kirchner, President of GeoOptics, a private environmental data company, the hearing focused on how to improve budgeting and cooperation between federal weather organizations and the private weather industry.

House and Senate committees release FY 2014 discretionary spending requests
The House and Senate Appropriations committees released their non-emergency discretionary spending allocations for fiscal year (FY) 2014 this June. The Senate Appropriations Committee requested $1.058 trillion in non-emergency discretionary funds, while the House Appropriations Committee requested $967 billion. These bills authorize funding levels for all of the subcommittees, including the subcommittees on Commerce, Justice, Science; Energy and Water Development; and Interior and the Environment.

Role of climate change in 2012 weather events
The Bulletin of the American Meteorological Society released a report entitled Explaining Extreme Events of 2012 from a Climate Perspective. The report was compiled by more than 70 scientists on 18 research teams from around the world, and examined the causes of 12 extreme weather events that occurred on five continents and in the Arctic in 2012.

DOE report on U.S. Energy Sector Vulnerabilities to Climate Change and Extreme Weather
The Department of Energy updated a report as part of the Administration’s efforts to support national climate change adaptation planning and to promote energy security. The report examines the impacts of climate change and extreme weather on the U.S. energy sector and identifies activities underway to address these challenges as well as potential opportunities to enhance energy technologies.

BOEM and NMFS hold Gulf of Mexico public scoping meetings
The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) held a series of public scoping meetings across the U.S. regarding the Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to analyze the impacts of geological and geophysical activity in the Gulf of Mexico.

Open for public comment: Draft legislation on hydraulic fracturing
The Department of the Interior’s Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released an updated draft proposal for rules regarding hydraulic fracturing on federal and Indian lands. The updated proposal reflects public feedback on the initial proposal published in
2012. This most recent draft includes new regulations on trade secret disclosure, and establishes new baselines for environmental safeguards and water quality monitoring mechanisms.

**Kathryn Sullivan nominated as NOAA Administrator**
Former astronaut Dr. Kathryn D. Sullivan was nominated by President Obama on August 1 to serve as Administrator of the National Atmospheric and Oceanic Administration (NOAA) and Undersecretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere. She has been serving as NOAA’s acting administrator since Jane Lubchenco’s retirement in February.

**Draft Advanced Fossil Energy Solicitation**
The Department of Energy (DOE) released its Draft Advanced Fossil Energy Solicitation, outlining a proposed loan guarantee solicitation for innovative and advanced fossil energy technologies that avoid, reduce, or sequester air pollutants or anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. The program would provide up to $8 billion in loan guarantees. This program is part of President Obama’s Climate Action Plan, which includes actions designed to reduce domestic greenhouse gas emissions.

**Moniz outlines DOE science and technology priorities**
On June 18, 2013 the Science, Space, and Technology Committee held a hearing to discuss the Department of Energy’s (DOE) science and technology priorities. Testimony was heard from the newly appointed Secretary of Energy, Ernest Moniz.

**USGS, NASA call for ideas to preserve earth observation data**
The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) is seeking information on system concepts and innovative approaches for its Sustainable Land Imaging Architecture study which is examining how best to extend the Landsat data record. The Landsat program is the longest running continuous space-based record of earth observations, which is jointly managed by NASA and USGS. On September 18, NASA and the U.S.

**Update: Senate EPW Committee approves McCarthy nomination**
Gina McCarthy has been approved by the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee to succeed Lisa Jackson as the next head of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The vote came a week late after Republicans on the committee boycotted the hearing over concerns regarding transparency issues. McCarthy’s confirmation will now proceed to a full Senate vote.

**Ninth Circuit upholds California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard**
The Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals voted to uphold California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) and ruled against a lower court ruling that the LCFS violates the Constitution’s Commerce Clause. The LCFS requires the oil industry to reduce the carbon intensity of transportation fuels by at least 10% by 2020. Using a life cycle analysis, the LCFS caps the average carbon intensity of transportation fuels in California’s market.

**USGS releases assessment of US geologic CO2 storage potential**
The USGS released the first-ever assessment of the geologic carbon sequestration storage capacity of the United States. The new estimate, 3000 metric gigatons of storage, is based on USGS assessments of the nation’s technically accessible storage resources, and is based on peer-reviewed methodology.

**NRC report studies land change models**
At the request of the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, the National Research Council (NRC) produced a report synthesizing the most advanced models for assessing land change. The report focuses on how each model can best be used to help agriculture, regional planning, and disaster relief.

**USGS trains volcano scientists from around the world**
Scientists and technicians from volcano observatories in nine countries traveled to the United States this month to participate in the International Training Program in Volcano Hazards Monitoring. The goal of the program is to help participating nations become self-sufficient in volcano monitoring, in order to decrease the negative impacts of a volcanic eruption.