

## Policy News & Monthly Review

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### 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.

#### **House approves National Defense Authorization Act**

On June 14, 2013, the full House passed H.R. 1960, the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2014 in a 315-108 vote. The bill authorizes appropriations totaling \$632 billion for the Department of Defense and certain Department of Energy activities. Although the initial Armed Services Committee Chairman's mark of the bill included language pertaining to the procurement of rare earth elements, the final approved language contains no mention of the critical minerals.

#### **House approves bill to streamline mining on US land**

The House of Representatives passed the National Strategic and Critical Mineral Production Act, in a 246-178 vote. If enacted, the bill will expedite government review of gold, silver, copper, and uranium mining on federal land. Supporters of the bill suggest the bill will help create jobs by reducing waiting periods for new mining projects, which can linger up to 10 years; opponents suggest that it would weaken environmental protections.

#### **BLM reopens comment period for proposed commercial oil shale regulations**

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced that the comment period for the proposed rule to amend the BLM's commercial oil shale regulations has been reopened for 30 days. This rule would amend certain environmental protection requirements and issues about the royalty system for shale oil resources.

#### **New Rule Proposed by the Forest Service Regarding Paleontological Resources**

On May 23, 2013 the United States Forest Service (USFS) proposed a rule under the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-011) that would clarify regulations for the management and protection of paleontological resources on Forest Service lands.

#### **Climate change legislation in the 113th Congress**

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) issued a report that describes and compares 52 bills introduced in the 113th Congress that directly address climate change. The CRS also issued a report on federal climate change funding from fiscal year (FY) 2008 through the President's request for FY2014. More than 75% of the \$77 billion for climate change activities from FY 2008 to FY2013 was to fund technology development and deployment.

#### **EIA interactive map showing energy structure potentially impacted by storms**

The U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) has released several interactive maps that combine real-time data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Hurricane Center with maps showing the nation's energy infrastructure and resources. These maps, released as peak hurricane season approaches, serve to better illustrate the potential impact of a storm for industry, government decisions makers, and the general public. The new maps are available at any time on the EIA's Energy Disruptions webpage.

#### **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**

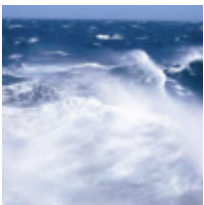
On June 6, 2013, the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources held a full committee hearing to review programs and activities of the Department of the Interior (DOI).

## **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.

### **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.

### **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.

### **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.



### **France Córdova nominated as NSF Director**

President Barack Obama announced on July 31 his intent to nominate astrophysicist France Córdova as the next Director of the National Science Foundation (NSF). Dr. France Anne Córdova served as President of Purdue University from 2007 to 2012 and is currently President Emerita. Prior to Purdue, she served as Chancellor of the University of California at Riverside, where she was also a Distinguished Professor of Physics and Astronomy. The first female chief scientist ever hired by NASA, Dr.

### **Pritzker and Foxx confirmations clear Senate**

Following unanimous approval by the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation to advance the nominations of Penny Pritzker for Secretary of Commerce and Anthony Foxx for Secretary of Transportation, the full Senate followed suit and smoothly confirmed both candidates this June. Pritzker, a prominent businesswoman and Hyatt Hotel heiress, succeeds John Bryson as the 38th Secretary of Commerce. Charlotte, North Carolina, Mayor Anthony Foxx succeeds Ray LaHood as the 17th Secretary of Transportation.

