

OurBlueOrb.Org Monthly Environmental News Briefing September 2026

All THE Breaking Environmental News That Matters

SR+ An IngeniousVortex

Creative thinking, memory lane and finding ways for each to impact those loved, our lives and environment.



Introduction

There is no shortage of environmental news. There is a shortage of people paying attention to it.

This month's briefing arrives amid unprecedented rollbacks of environmental protections and mounting corporate negligence. And yet — the science of solutions is advancing, forests are recovering wherever political will exists, and young people are stepping forward.

NOTE ON ARTICLE SOURCES: Some of the reporting cited are national and regional newspapers. Many sit behind paywalls. Where possible we've linked to non-paywalled coverage of the same story. Where we haven't, two tricks often work: open the article in Reader Mode (tap the "Aa" icon in mobile Safari, or the book icon in other browsers) right as the page loads, before the paywall script fully kicks in; or, if you do hit a paywall, clear your browser's history and reopen the link — many sites only enforce the paywall after a repeat visit.

The Renaissance of Environmental Momentum has only just begun. Not yet an avalanche. Not a single dramatic moment. The revival is the accumulation of actions, decisions, and demands of people who remain focused and refuse to look away.

The environmental movement of the 1970s produced real, documented results: the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Act, the

EPA, the banning of DDT, the recovery of the bald eagle. These were not accidents. They were the product of sustained public pressure, bipartisan political will, and citizens who refused to look away.

That momentum has been lost. Regulations built over decades are being systematically weakened. The EPA's authority is under direct legal attack — from the private sector and from our own government. Corporate interests have gained unprecedented influence over environmental policy.

The Renaissance of the Environmental Movement is a clarion call to rebuild that momentum — not as nostalgia, but as necessity. It is a grassroots effort to reconnect citizens with the environmental stakes of this moment, to support the organizations doing real work, and to demand accountability from elected officials at every level.

Senator Nelson was right. This is exactly why Earth Day was born. Now is the time to work together so its promise is fulfilled — together we shall cause a rebirth of nationwide commitment and citizen concern for the environment so large that it will again shake the political establishment out of its environmental lethargy and force this issue permanently into the political arena.

Every month, scientists publish research that should stop us cold. Journalists document decisions being made in our name that will affect every living thing on this planet. Most of this never reaches the people who need to hear it most. Decisions are being made right now that will determine what kind of world is left for those not yet born.

The OurBlueOrb.org Monthly Briefing exists to close that gap.

What follows is the environmental news worth your attention this month — the research, the setbacks, the breakthroughs, and the stories that demand to be heard. Read one. Read all of them. Share what moves you with everyone in your world.

ENCOURAGING DEVELOPMENTS

Proof That Positive Action Works

1. Do This to Fix the Planet, Say Scientists: Academics have identified 51 ready-to-deploy environmental solutions that, with proper support, could trigger an "unstoppable" cascade of positive change capable of rapidly repairing the planet, applying "positive tipping point" science across nature, air, oceans, waste, and climate. Led by Professor Tim Lenton at the University of Exeter with the Earthshot Prize. Source report — Positive Tipping Points: Accelerating System Change to Repair Our Planet, The Earthshot Prize, Sept 9, 2026: <https://earthshotprize.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Applying-a-Tipping-Points-Lens-to-The-Earthshot-Prize-External-09-09-26.pdf> Coverage — Positive News, Sept 11, 2026: <https://www.positive.news/society/good-news-stories-from-week-37-of-2026/>

2. Bipartisan Flood Resilience Bill Introduced: Reps. Beyer (D-VA) and Valadao (R-CA) introduced the National Flood Impact Reduction and Resilience Act, modeled on the National Earthquake Hazard Reduction Program, to coordinate federal flood-risk research and mitigation.
<https://beyer.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=9200>

3. Brazil's Atlantic Forest Hits Record-Low Deforestation: Deforestation fell to 8,658 hectares in 2025, the first time under 10,000 since 1985 records began. Older item (June 2026); a new state law removing federal approval requirements could threaten future gains. <https://www.naturalworldfund.org.uk/brazils-atlantic-forest-records-lowest-deforestation-level-in-40-years/>

4. East Antarctica Gains Record Ice, Temporarily: Between 2021-2023 East Antarctica gained about 695 billion tons of ice, the largest gain recorded by GRACE satellites, traced to tropical ocean warming that funneled extra snowfall to the continent. Does not reverse Antarctica's long-term average loss of ~140.5 billion tons/year.
<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260906170128.htm>

5. Saving Old Trees Might Save Lives: New study finds preserving mature tree canopy correlates more strongly with better community health outcomes than simply adding new trees,

tracking canopy change against neighborhood mortality rates. NYT, via theOrcasonian, Aug 20, 2026:

<https://theorcasonian.com/news-brief-saving-old-trees-might-save-lives/>

6. Cleaner Air, Smarter Toddlers: Columbia study followed 1,000+ NYC children 1998-2020; as city clean-air policies cut local PM2.5 by ~32%, mothers who breathed cleaner air during pregnancy had toddlers whose cognitive test scores trended upward. NYT, via 10bmnews, Sept 3, 2026:

<https://10bmnews.com/cleaner-air-smarter-toddlers/>

7. Our Power, Our Planet: Are We Doing Enough?: Steven Philbrick, who marched on the first Earth Day in 1970, argues that EARTHDAY.ORG's "Our Power, Our Planet" theme, carried over unchanged from 2025 into 2026, offers toolkits without follow-through. Tracing a line from the EarthRise photograph and Senator Gaylord Nelson's original mandate to today's PFAS rollbacks and Tallahassee's Lake Munson contamination, he calls for a year-round, moderated public forum to keep Earth Day's momentum alive between Aprils. SR+ IngeniousVortex, Sept 17, 2026: <https://srplus.wordpress.com/2026/09/17/our-power-our-planet-are-we-doing-enough/>

8. Grassroots Backlash Stalls AI Data Center Boom: ~75% of Americans now oppose local data center development; 530+ counties/municipalities have restricted or banned construction; \$130B+ in projects blocked or delayed in Q1 2026 alone. NY and TX governors both acted to pause projects. NPR, Sept 21, 2026:

<https://www.npr.org/2026/09/21/nx-s1-5927288/data-center-election-voters-ai>

9. Tribes Return to Co-Manage California's Biggest Lake: Seven tribes signed a historic agreement with state/local government on Sept 11 to co-manage Clear Lake's watershed, protecting the culturally sacred Clear Lake hitch fish from mercury contamination, algal blooms, and invasive species. LA Times, via Anchorage Daily News, Sept 11, 2026:

<https://www.adn.com/nation-world/2026/09/11/californias-biggest-lake-is-in-crisis-now-tribes-are-coming-back-to-save-its-sacred-fish/>

10. Earth Day Plus 56: A first-person account of the first Earth Day and the crises that sparked it, from the Santa Barbara oil spill and the Cuyahoga River fire to the 1970-71 collapse of the Everglades, which Philbrick witnessed firsthand. He argues the 1970 movement succeeded because its organizers stayed connected year over year, and calls on EARTHDAY.ORG and other groups to build a permanent public forum that rejoins the movement's scattered pieces before it is too late: Unite or Die. SR+ IngeniousVortex, Sept 11, 2026:

<https://srplus.wordpress.com/2026/09/11/earth-day-plus-56/>

11. Court Upholds Hazardous Designation for Two Forever Chemicals: The D.C. Circuit Court of Appeals unanimously upheld the EPA's 2024 decision designating PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances under the federal Superfund law (CERCLA), rejecting industry challenges. The designation gives EPA authority to compel cleanup of contaminated sites and recover costs from responsible parties. Earthjustice:

<https://earthjustice.org/press/2026/court-upholds-rule-designating-two-forever-chemicals-as-hazardous-substances>

12. Two Roads, One Solution: Why the Environmental Movement Needs a Public Forum: Philbrick ties his two preceding pieces together. Twenty million Americans turned out in 1970, while EARTHDAY.ORG reports 150,000 partners today, a retention problem rather than a reach problem. He argues environmental organizations compete for the same donors instead of sharing common goals, and proposes a moderated, year-round public forum, led by EARTHDAY.ORG and joined by other groups, to turn each April's energy into sustained political pressure. SR+ IngeniousVortex, Sept 19, 2026:

<https://srplus.wordpress.com/2026/09/19/two-roads-one-solution/>;
<https://srplusenvironmentaladvocacy.substack.com/p/two-roads-one-solution>

13. Clean Air Zone Linked to Healthier Lung Growth in London Children: Five-year study of 3,400+ children found London's Ultra Low Emission Zone associated with accelerated lung growth; the share of children with impaired lung function fell from 14% to 9% as NO2 exposure dropped 41% since 2019. Queen Mary

University of London, Sept 2026.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1l1r1zne1ro>

14. Court Rules Utility's Gas Plant Decision Broke the Law: A federal court ruled the Tennessee Valley Authority's decision to build its Kingston Gas Plant had "fundamental" errors violating federal law, vacating the utility's environmental review. The \$2.5 billion plant would have burned methane from a new 122-mile pipeline; the utility had committed billions in ratepayer funds before formally evaluating cleaner alternatives. Center for Biological Diversity, Sept 8, 2026:

<https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/court-rules-tvas-decision-to-build-kingston-gas-plant-broke-law-2026-09-08/>

15. Congolese NGO Makes History Co-Managing National Reserve: Strong Roots became the first Congolese NGO to co-manage a protected area in DRC history, entrusted with the Itombwe Nature Reserve for the next 10 years under a public-private partnership, recognized for centering local communities in its conservation work. Mongabay, Sept 2026: <https://news.mongabay.com/short-article/2026/09/for-the-first-time-congolese-ngo-to-manage-a-drc-protected-area/>

16. California Establishes Sea Otter Conservation Fund: Gov. Newsom signed SB 575, the California Sea Otter Voluntary Tax Contribution Fund, sponsored by Defenders of Wildlife, giving taxpayers a direct way to fund sea otter conservation. Office of the Governor of California, Aug 27, 2026:

<https://www.gov.ca.gov/2026/08/27/governor-newsom-signs-legislation-8-27-2026/>

17. AI-Assisted Beach and Island Restoration Takes Root in the Maldives: MIT's Self-Assembly Lab and Maldivian firm Invena are using data-driven, current-harnessing underwater structures ("Growing Islands"/"Ramp Ring") to rebuild eroding beaches and predict erosion patterns, offering a nature-based alternative to dredging for a nation where 80% of land sits under one meter above sea level. New York Times, via The Star, Sept 17, 2026: <https://www.thestar.com.my/tech/tech-news/2026/09/17/in-the-maldives-ai-is-helping-to-rebuild-beaches-lost-to-rising-seas>

18. Argentine Neighborhood Saves Its Own Contaminated River: Residents of a neighborhood along a polluted Argentine river organized a grassroots cleanup and restoration effort, turning a contaminated waterway into a community source of pride. The Guardian, Sept 17, 2026:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/sep/17/its-beautiful-when-its-clean-the-argentine-neighbourhood-saving-a-contaminated-river>

19. Ethiopia Recruits Citizens to Plant 50 Billion Trees by 2030: A nationwide reforestation campaign is mobilizing ordinary Ethiopians to plant, tend, and protect trees as part of a government-backed push toward 50 billion trees planted by 2030. The Guardian, Sept 17, 2026:

<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2026/sep/17/i-see-them-like-my-own-children-reforesting-ethiopia-with-50bn-trees-one-step-at-a-time>

20. Rare Bird Discovery Sparked a Conservation Movement in Ecuador: A chance discovery of the rare Jocotoco Antpitta led to the founding of the Jocotoco Foundation, which has since protected habitat for dozens of additional threatened species across Ecuador. The Guardian, Sept 13, 2026:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/ng-interactive/2026/sep/13/bird-ecuador-rare-species-jocotoco-antpitta-foundation-conservation-biodiversity-aoe>

21. Scientists Test "Assisted Migration" to Regrow Burned Forests for a Warmer Climate: In Colorado's Rocky Mountains, forest ecologists are experimenting with planting seedlings sourced from populations already adapted to warmer conditions in areas burned by wildfire, aiming to help forests keep pace with climate change faster than natural migration allows. Science/AAAS (Katie Langin), Sept 17, 2026:

<https://www.science.org/content/article/forests-burn-can-we-replant-trees-ready-warmer-world>

22. Remembering the Author of Pennsylvania's Environmental Rights Amendment: Franklin Kury, who died Aug 16 at 89, authored Article 1, Section 27 of the Pennsylvania Constitution — introduced on Earth Day, April 22, 1970 — making Pennsylvania

one of the first governments in the world to guarantee a healthy environment as a basic right. Five more states (Montana, Hawaii, Illinois, Massachusetts, New York) have since followed his lead.

Inside Climate News:

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/24082026/remembering-franklin-kury-pennsylvania-environmental-rights-amendment-visionary/>

23. Court Forces EPA to Restore Solar Grant Program: A federal district court ruled Sept 18 that the Trump administration must reinstate the \$7 billion Solar for All program, which funds rooftop solar installation for low- and moderate-income families, after the administration had moved to cancel it. Washington Post, Sept 18, 2026:

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2026/09/18/trumps-epa-must-reinstate-7-billion-grant-program-solar-panels-judge-rules/>

24. Colorado Becomes First State to Fully Adopt 2024 EPA Methane Standards: Announcement positions Colorado ahead of other states on methane regulation even as federal rollbacks accelerate elsewhere. Environmental Defense Fund, Sept 18, 2026: <https://www.edf.org/media/colorado-becomes-first-state-fully-adopt-2024-epa-methane-standards>

25. Virginia Governor Signs Data Center Accountability Framework: Gov. Spanberger signed Executive Order 22, establishing new oversight rules addressing data centers' energy efficiency, water use, and noise, and banning non-disclosure agreements between state agencies and data center developers — adding a state-level counterweight to the unchecked data-center boom covered elsewhere in this briefing. Office of the Governor of Virginia, Sept 18, 2026:

<https://www.governor.virginia.gov/newsroom/news-releases/2026/september-releases/name-1123696-en.html>

ScienceDaily, Sept 18, 2026:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260918024759.htm>

27. Satellite Reveals a World of "Weird Rivers" Shaped by Humans: New satellite analysis maps how dams, irrigation, and urbanization have measurably reshaped river systems worldwide. Science/AAAS (Paul Voosen), Sept 18, 2026:

<https://www.science.org/content/article/satellite-reveals-world-weird-rivers-shaped-humans>

28. Both Democrats and Republicans Increasingly Worried About AI's Environmental Impact: New AP-NORC/University of Chicago poll finds 53% of Americans are "extremely" or "very" concerned about AI's environmental impact, up from 41% a year ago — including about two-thirds of Democrats and roughly 4 in 10 Republicans, a notable jump on the right. About 6 in 10 Americans, across party lines, support limiting new data center construction, a rare bipartisan convergence worth tracking alongside the grassroots backlash in item 8 above. Time, Sept 16, 2026: <https://time.com/article/2026/09/16/majority-americans-worried-ai-environment-impact/>

29. Bloomberg Philanthropies: Taking Action to Protect the Planet: Bloomberg Philanthropies' Environment program funds work across five fronts — clean energy, air quality, ocean protection, sustainable cities, and sustainable finance — including the Beyond Carbon campaign and the Bloomberg Ocean Initiative, which has partnered with coastal communities, governments, and research institutions since 2014 to protect marine ecosystems and strengthen ocean governance. Bloomberg Philanthropies: <https://www.bloomberg.org/environment/>

30. This Farm Raised Thousands of Pigs for Slaughter. Now It's Growing Mushrooms Instead: An Iowa family that once raised up to 8,000 hogs a year — producing roughly a million gallons of liquid manure annually, a major source of methane — has converted its hog barns to grow specialty mushrooms with support from The Transformation Project (an initiative of Mercy for Animals). Their old open-air manure pit is now a freshwater pond; the family has added native grasses and an orchard, and the farm now serves as a demonstration hub to show other CAFO operators a viable, more sustainable alternative. NPR / Iowa Public Radio (Rachel Cramer), Sept 21, 2026:

<https://www.npr.org/2026/09/21/nx-s1-5944503/iowa-hog-farm-growing-specialty-mushrooms>

31. Iceland Moves Toward Ending Commercial Whaling: Iceland's government announced a review of the country's whaling legislation, to take place next February, that could result in a permanent ban. Iceland is one of only four jurisdictions worldwide — alongside Japan, Norway, and the Faroe Islands — still permitting commercial whaling despite the 1986 global moratorium. Roughly 80 fin whales have already been killed this season in Icelandic waters. The Guardian, Sept 11, 2026:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2026/sep/11/iceland-bill-commercial-whaling-ban-mounting-pressure>

32. UK Beach Plastic-Bag Litter Falls 80% Since Bag Charges Introduced: The Marine Conservation Society's annual beach clean data shows plastic carrier bags found on UK beaches have fallen 80% since single-use bag charges took effect, even as the overall share of plastic litter on beaches has risen since 1995. The group says the finding proves "simple policies can make a big difference," and is pressing for a deposit return scheme on drink containers set to launch in October 2027. The Guardian, Sept 18, 2026:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/article/2024/jul/29/number-of-plastic-bags-found-on-uk-beaches-down-80-since-charge-introduced>

33. \$2.1 Million Awarded for Next-Generation Coral Reef Restoration: The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation announced \$2.1 million in grants, leveraging \$1.2 million in matching funds, to test heat-resilient coral propagation and reduce sediment pollution across reefs in Florida, Hawai'i, American Samoa, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. The funding arrives as NOAA forecasts a greater than 90% chance of a severe El Niño-driven bleaching event through fall and winter 2026-27. National Fish and Wildlife Foundation / GlobeNewswire, Sept 21, 2026:

<https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2026/09/21/3365606/0/en/nfwf-awards-2-1-million-to-advance-next-generation-of-coral-reef-restoration.html>

THE URGENT PRESSING ISSUES

What Demands Immediate Attention

1. EPA Moves to Limit State Power Over Pipelines: New rules would limit state/tribal authority over waterways under the Clean Water Act, especially regarding pipeline, export terminal, and hydropower dam approvals.

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/03092026/epa-clean-water-act-provision-would-limit-state-power/>

2. Endangered Species Act Habitat Protections Narrowed: Federal rule change removing habitat destruction from ESA protections took effect Sept 14; 21 state attorneys general filed suit Sept 9. Santa Barbara Independent, Sept 12, 2026:

<https://www.independent.com/2026/09/12/california-sues-over-trump-administrations-attempt-to-weaken-endangered-species-act/>

3. PFAS and Microplastics Show Combined Toxicity: Study exposing five human cell lines to PFAS-microplastic mixtures found synergistic toxicity exceeding either pollutant alone, with increased oxidative stress and DNA damage in kidney/liver cells. Older study (Oct 2025), not yet widely covered.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0269749125016306>

4. UNESCO Warns of Near-Certain Mediterranean Tsunami: Close to 100% chance of a tsunami exceeding 1 meter within 30 years; French Riviera could see waves arrive in under 10 minutes, faster than alert systems.

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260910022149.htm>

5. EPA to Eliminate Power Plant Greenhouse Gas Limits: EPA moving to repeal the federal rule limiting emissions from coal/gas power plants entirely. Power plants are ~25% of US climate pollution; prior AP analysis found the rules could prevent 30,000 deaths and save \$275B annually. NBC News, Sept 14, 2026:

<https://www.nbcnews.com/science/climate-change/epa-repeals-limits-emissions-power-plants-rcna597741>

6. UN Confirms World Will Breach 1.5°C Warming Limit: First UN acknowledgment this threshold cannot be avoided; most optimistic scenario now peaks at 1.8°C. Report calls for large-scale carbon removal alongside emissions cuts. Scientific American, Sept 2026:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/un-admits-exceeding-paris-agreements-1-5-degrees-c-warming-target-is-unavoidable/>

7. Former EPA Officials Warn of AI Data Center Health Toll: 800+ former EPA employees warn data center power demand could cause ~600,000 asthma cases, 1,300 premature deaths, \$20B+ in annual health costs by 2028, worsened by rollbacks of pollution safeguards. Inside Climate News, Sept 10, 2026:

<https://insideclimatenews.org/news/11092026/data-center-boom-fossil-fuel-expansion-health-hazards/>

8. Federal Government Targets California's Climate Authority: At least half a dozen federal agencies enlisted to block California's climate policies, including preempting its authority to set vehicle emissions standards. Overlaps thematically with items 1 and 5. New York Times, via GV Wire, Aug 20, 2026:

<https://gvwire.com/2026/08/20/how-trump-is-trying-to-crush-californias-environmental-policies/>

9. Record El Niño Threatens West Coast Flooding: A potentially record-strength El Niño is driving a Kelvin wave of warm water toward the US West Coast, expected to raise sea levels and drive significant atmospheric-river flood risk through winter 2026-27.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/weather/2026/09/10/this-el-nio-fueled-phenomenon-could-soon-bring-major-flood-risks-west/>

10. Could We Handle Climate's "Other Big One"? Feature examines whether society can prepare for a compound, extreme-of-extremes climate disaster (heat, grid failure, storms, floods converging), drawing on seismologist Lucy Jones and Kim Stanley Robinson's "Ministry for the Future."

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2026/08/24/climate-change-disaster-big-one-threat/1d324318-9fbd-11f1-8606-1d40ad00172e_story.html

11. Leaked Memo Shows US Blocking Global Plastic Limits: Diplomatic memo shows the US doubling down on opposing binding plastic production limits in treaty talks. Lifecycle modeling shows production cuts are the only intervention that meaningfully reduces plastic's \$1.5T annual health toll. Next talks: Bangkok, Sept 27-30. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2026/08/24/leaked-memo-shows-how-us-aims-weaken-global-limits-plastic-pollution/>

12. Coastal Erosion Threatens San Onofre Nuclear Waste Storage: 3.6 million pounds of spent nuclear fuel sit ~100 feet from the Pacific with no federal long-term repository; waste stays hazardous for "2000 generations." Coastal erosion, an offshore fault, and record El Niño sea-level rise raise flooding concerns. LA Times, via Jefferson City News-Tribune, Sept 12, 2026: <https://www.newstribune.com/news/2026/sep/16/as-coast-begins-to-crumble-clock-ticks-on-moving/>

13. Study Ties Fossil Fuel Giants to California Water Scarcity: First-of-its-kind study finds the world's 122 largest fossil fuel/cement producers responsible for nearly 50% of climate-driven water scarcity impacts in California since 1950. Union of Concerned Scientists, Aug 25, 2026: <https://www.ucs.org/about/news/new-study-major-climate-polluters-worsening-water-scarcity-california>

14. Colorado Ranchers Back Climate Lawsuit at Supreme Court: Seven ranchers, hit hard by drought, filed an amicus brief supporting Boulder's climate liability suit against Suncor and ExxonMobil ahead of Supreme Court arguments Oct 5. LA Times, via Bytes Europe, Sept 5, 2026: <https://www.byteseu.com/2338582/>

15. Federal Proposal Would Undercut Climate Assessment: Proposal would amend the 5th National Climate Assessment to label its worst-case warming scenarios "implausible" and bar agencies from treating them as policy-relevant, following the dismissal of all ~400 authors of the 6th assessment. Environmental Data & Governance Initiative, Aug 25, 2026: <https://enviroadatagov.org/trump-administration-moves-to-amend-national-climate-study/>

16. Fix Our Forests Act Splits Environmental Movement: Bipartisan wildfire bill close to passing Congress; some conservation groups back it, while Sierra Club calls it "Fix Our Forests in Name Only," warning it expedites/exempts logging from NEPA review and limits ESA consultation and litigation. Sierra Club: <https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/fix-our-forests-name-only>

17. Federal Government Challenges California's Bay-Delta Plan: Bureau of Reclamation and Westlands Water District call the state's new Bay-Delta flow requirements "unworkable," threatening to withhold habitat-restoration funding. Delta supplies ~30M residents and 4M acres of farmland. LA Times, via Water Education Foundation, Sept 9, 2026: <https://www.watereducation.org/aquaforia-news/bureau-reclamation-raises-issues-over-bay-delta-plan>

18. "Climate Hushing" Spreads Through Democratic Campaigns: Researchers coin the term for a sharp shift away from climate messaging in 2026 campaigns vs. 2020; a Democratic think tank urged the party to stop mentioning climate change entirely. Associated Press, via PBS NewsHour, Aug 31, 2026: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/the-earth-is-sizzling-but-climate-isnt-a-hot-topic-for-democrats-in-this-years-campaigns>

19. EPA Seeks Comment on Narrowing Wetlands Protections: EPA working to redefine "waters of the United States" to significantly narrow Clean Water Act wetlands coverage, building on the 2023 Sackett v. EPA ruling; critics say it would "virtually eliminate protection for freshwater wetlands." Related to item 1. Associated Press, via Press Democrat, Sept 4, 2026: <https://www.pressdemocrat.com/2026/09/04/epa-public-comments-wetlands-water-rule/>

20. California Eases Farmland-to-Solar Conversion: AB 1156 eliminates steep exit fees for water-strapped farmland owners converting to solar, driven by tightening groundwater pumping limits; up to 900,000 acres may need to leave production. Farm Bureau opposes; awaits Newsom's signature. LA Times, via GV Wire, Sept 2, 2026: <https://gvwire.com/2026/09/02/ca-lawmakers-approve-farmland-to-solar-conversion-bill/>

21. Industry Campaign Targets California's Plastics Law: LA Times investigation traces a multimillion-dollar lobbying campaign to dismantle SB 54, involving a former CalRecycle director who helped write the law and later lobbied against it for the plastics industry. LA Times, via NewsBreak, Sept 10, 2026:

<https://www.newsbreak.com/news/4891271110826-leaked-emails-reveal-industry-plan-to-kill-california-s-plastic-and-recycling-laws>

22. House Votes to Delay Right Whale Protections: The House passed H.R. 9436, delaying conservation protections for critically endangered North Atlantic right whales. NRDC, Sept 1, 2026:

<https://www.nrdc.org/press-releases/house-passes-bill-pushing-north-atlantic-right-whale-toward-extinction>

23. Documents Show EPA Let Pesticide Maker Help Write Its Own Rules: Internal documents reveal EPA encouraged Bayer, maker of the controversial drift-prone pesticide dicamba, to recommend how its own product should be regulated. Center for Biological Diversity, Sept 10, 2026:

<https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/documents-trump-epa-encouraged-dicamba-maker-bayer-to-recommend-how-its-controversial-drift-prone-pesticide-should-be-regulated-2026-09-10/>

24. House Votes to Overturn California's Ship Shore-Power Rule: The House voted 216-211 to overturn the federal EPA waiver behind California's At-Berth regulation, which requires ocean-going vessels to plug into shore power or capture exhaust while docked. California ports have invested \$550M+ in shore power infrastructure; repeal backers say the rule effectively lets California regulate national shipping. A companion Senate measure awaits action. Ship & Bunker, Sept 15-16, 2026:

<https://shipandbunker.com/news/am/476227-us-house-votes-216-211-to-overturn-californias-shore-power-rule-for-ships-at-berth>

25. UK Parliament Launches Inquiry Into Data Centres' Climate Impact: UK Energy Secretary Ed Miliband told MPs the climate impact of the country's data center boom is "inherently uncertain" and not clearly accounted for in net-zero modeling, prompting a new parliamentary inquiry. Dozens of new US-funded data centers

are planned nationwide; activists organized a "March Against The Machines" protest outside OpenAI's UK offices. Adds an international dimension to the US data-center items (Encouraging #8, Pressing #7, Setbacks #9). Freedom News, Sept 9, 2026: <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2026/09/09/climate-activists-confront-data-centres/>

26. NPS Proposes Land Swap Allowing Mansions on Cumberland Island: The National Park Service proposed two land exchanges on Cumberland Island National Seashore, Georgia's largest barrier island — 30-day public comment period opened Sept 16. NPS frames it as voluntary, trading private parcels in ecologically sensitive areas for federal land protected by permanent conservation easements. Conservation groups call it a violation of the island's 1972 congressional mandate to remain "preserved in its primitive state," warning it would allow up to eight new 15,000-square-foot, three-story homes. Sierra Club: <https://www.sierraclub.org/press-releases/2026/09/mansions-proposal-threatens-national-park-georgia>

27. Cumberland Island National Seashore Invites Public Input on Proposed Voluntary Land Exchange Environmental Assessment: NPS's own announcement of a 30-day public comment period on two proposed land exchanges, beginning Sept. 9 — the agency's side of the story alongside item 26. National Park Service, Sept 9, 2026: <https://www.nps.gov/cuis/learn/news/cumberland-island-national-seashore-invites-public-input-on-proposed-voluntary-land-exchange-environmental-assessment.htm>

28. Sustainable Development Goals Live or Die in Our Cities: Opinion piece by Marco Zupi, Scientific Coordinator of the UN Local2030 Coalition, argues that with the 2030 SDG deadline approaching, the missing ingredient isn't ambition but delivery — cities have plans but lack funding organized around shared outcomes rather than fragmented departmental budgets. Cites examples from Freetown (tree-growers paid for survival, not planting), Jakarta (sinking as groundwater is drawn faster than it can replenish), and rural Chile. Earth.org, Sept 14, 2026: <https://earth.org/sustainable-development-goals-live-or-die-in-our-cities/>

29. World's Rivers Had Driest Year in 35 Years, WMO Reports: The WMO's State of Global Water Resources 2025 report found below-normal flows in over a third of the world's river basins — the fewest rivers with "normal" flow since 1991. Global terrestrial water storage has declined steadily since 2014-2016. Glaciers lost 1,400 gigatonnes of water 2023-2025 — roughly a third of the world's annual freshwater withdrawals. Asia and Africa accounted for over 80% of water-related deaths in the past five years. Reuters, Sept 17, 2026: <https://whbl.com/2026/09/16/river-flows-were-among-driest-in-decades-in-2025-world-meteorological-organization-says/>

30. Earth's Atmosphere Hits Record Water Vapor Levels: The planet's atmosphere has broken records for water vapor content, increasing the risk of extreme heat and rainfall events. The Guardian, Sept 17, 2026: <https://www.aol.co.uk/articles/planet-atmosphere-breaks-record-water-150051000.html>

31. Second Endangered Species Act Rollback Would Require Proof of Intent: A new internal memo would redefine "harm" under the ESA so that only intentional killing of an endangered animal is illegal — accidental or incidental deaths in the course of economic activity would no longer be covered. Distinct from item 2 (habitat destruction). Drawing bipartisan Congressional pushback: a House bill from Rep. Fitzpatrick (R) and Rep. Quigley (D), and a Senate resolution from Sens. Schiff and Whitehouse, both aim to block the change. New York Times, via The Hill, Sept 16, 2026: <https://thehill.com/policy/energy-environment/6096057-trump-endangered-species-esa/>

32. Two Wood County Residents Sue Chemours Over PFAS Landfill Contamination: Jason Goff and Aimee Cross filed a federal class-action suit Sept 4 against Chemours over PFAS/PFOA leaching from a landfill at the company's Washington Works plant near Parkersburg, WV — the same facility behind "Dark Waters." The suit alleges a 2024 treatment-system failure and a 2025 storm event both released contaminated leachate, and that Chemours publicly called portions of the landfill a "nature preserve," concealing the extent of waste disposal. WTAP:

<https://www.wtap.com/2026/09/17/two-wood-county-residents-sue-chemours-over-pfas-contamination-near-landfill/>

33. "Just a Spoonful of Plastic": Interview with author Beth Gardiner on her book "Plastic Inc.," tracing how plastic production expanded alongside the natural gas fracking boom. Cites a 2024 Nature Medicine study finding human brain tissue contains microplastics/nanoplastics roughly equal in mass to a standard plastic spoon, and argues regulatory oversight hasn't kept pace with rising neurocognitive conditions and early-onset cancers. Marshwood Vale Magazine, Aug 2026:

<https://www.marshwoodvale.com/features/2026/08/just-a-spoonful-of-plastic/>

34. Experts Warn Narrower Endangered Species Act Will Likely Drive Right Whales Extinct: With right whale protections delayed (item 22) and the ESA's "harm" standard narrowed to require intent (item 31), conservation experts say the combined effect removes key legal tools protecting a species down to roughly 370 individuals, most threatened by ship strikes and fishing-gear entanglement — both typically "unintentional" under the new standard. WBUR, Sept 17, 2026:

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2026/09/17/narrowing-endangered-species-act-will-likely-drive-right-whales-to-extinction-experts-warn>

35. EDF Analysis: Power Plant Rollback Could Cause 84,000 Early Deaths: New EDF modeling of the EPA's power-plant greenhouse gas rule repeal (item 5) puts the toll at up to 84,000 early deaths and \$3 trillion in damages. Environmental Defense Fund, Sept 18, 2026: <https://www.edf.org/media/edf-analysis-repeal-power-plant-pollution-standards-will-cause-84000-early-deaths-3-trillion>

36. SpaceX Louisiana Launch Site Draws Environmental Concern: Residents near SpaceX's planned Louisiana launch site say they were kept in the dark about the project's environmental impact. Audio and transcript available. NPR, Sept 15, 2026: <https://www.npr.org/2026/09/15/nx-s1-5947179/new-spacex-site-in-louisiana-concerns-some-residents>

37. No One Is Consistently Tracking Heat Deaths — One Medical Examiner's Fix: With no national protocol for counting climate-linked heat deaths, an Arizona medical examiner has developed a new method to catalog them, a step toward understanding the true scale of heat mortality. NPR, Sept 16, 2026:

<https://www.npr.org/2026/09/02/nx-s1-5887544/heat-deaths-undercount>

38. PFAS Awareness Week, Sept 21-25: Michigan Gov. Whitmer proclaimed the week PFAS Awareness Week, timing that lands inside this briefing's publication window. Michigan.gov proclamation, dated May 21, 2026, for the Sept 21-25 week.

39. How Data Centers May Use Forever Chemicals: A new ChemSec report finds major PFAS producers — including Daikin, Arkema, and Chemours — are expanding capacity largely to supply data-center cooling, semiconductor manufacturing, and lithium-ion battery materials. Newer "two-phase immersion cooling" systems submerge servers directly in PFAS fluid instead of using water, and some of the PFAS gases used in cooling carry global warming potential thousands of times greater than CO₂. Ties directly into the data-center threads (Encouraging #8 and #28, Pressing #7, Setbacks #9). The Hill, Sept 2026:

<https://thehill.com/newsletters/energy-environment/6099147-how-data-centers-may-use-forever-chemicals/>

ENVIRONMENTAL SETBACKS AND DISASTERS

Beyond Urgent Issues

1. Hurricane Lowell Batters Hawaii, Third Storm in Three Weeks: Over \$400M in damage, potentially exceeding 1992's Hurricane Iniki as Hawaii's costliest storm on record, amid an El Niño-supercharged Pacific hurricane season.

<https://www.cnn.com/2026/09/04/weather/hurricane-lowell-hawaii-storm-path-climate>

2. Indonesia's Peat Fires Rival 2015's Historic Crisis: El Niño and severe drought fueling underground peat fires; 2026 emissions on pace to match this century's worst fire-emissions year. Carbon Brief, Sept 11, 2026: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/el-nino->

[indonesia-fire-emissions-in-2026-on-track-to-match-record-for-this-century](#)

3. Algae Bloom Cripples Israel's Desalination Capacity: Mediterranean algae bloom, possibly fed by sewage from Gaza's damaged wastewater system, knocked out five of Israel's six desalination plants, disrupting 80%+ of drinking water supply. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2026/09/04/water-crisis-israel-raises-fears-over-impact-gaza-sewage/>

4. Once-in-50-Year Storm Floods Saskatchewan: Labour Day weekend storm dumped ~108mm of rain on Regina, causing widespread flooding and days of cleanup across southern Saskatchewan; Regina came close to declaring a state of emergency. <https://globalnews.ca/news/12051279/saskatchewan-clean-up-labour-day-storm/>

5. Human-Caused Fire Burns Nearly 13,000 Acres in Mount Hood National Forest: Oregon's Austin Fire, burning in steep timbered country southeast of Estacada, reached 12,879 acres at 56% containment as of the week of Sept 14, up sharply from 19% earlier in the month. Residences and energy infrastructure threatened; investigators confirmed a human cause. Property Guardian: <https://www.propertyguardian.com/news/weekly-u-s-wildfire-outlook-week-of-september-14th/>

6. Colorado Kills Three Yearling Wolves in Three Days: Colorado Parks and Wildlife killed three yearling wolves from separate packs across three counties between Sept 7-9 following livestock depredation, drawing condemnation from conservation groups who say lethal control targeting uncollared, unconfirmed individuals amounts to "blind retribution" against entire packs rather than the specific offending animal. Brings total wolf deaths since 2023 reintroduction to 20. Center for Biological Diversity: <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/colorado-announces-killing-of-third-yearling-wolf-in-three-days-2026-09-10/>

7. Arctic Sea Ice Nearly Matches 2012's Historic Low: 2026's summer melt closely tracked the all-time-record 2012 melt season for most of the summer, until a cold-cored weather system

in August pulled it back to the 7th-lowest extent in 47 years of satellite records. Starting ice volume in March 2026 was already the lowest ever measured. TechTimes, Sept 7, 2026:

<https://www.techtimes.com/articles/326901/20260907/arctic-sea-ice-2026-shadowed-2012-catastrophe-until-august-2012-record-intact-only-chance.htm>

8. Earth Just Had Its Hottest August on Record: Europe's Copernicus climate service confirmed August 2026 was the hottest August ever measured globally, driven mostly by human-caused climate change. NPR, Sept 10, 2026:

<https://www.npr.org/2026/09/10/nx-s1-5964676/scientists-august-hottest>

9. Data Center Spills Thousands of Gallons of Diesel Into New Jersey Creek: An Equinix data center in Secaucus discharged roughly 5,000-5,500 gallons of diesel fuel from a storage tank on Sept 11, sending fuel into Anderson Creek, a tributary of the Hackensack River running through the environmentally sensitive Meadowlands. Cause cited as a "computer glitch"; cleanup contained the spill before it reached the main river, but the incident has intensified local backlash against data center expansion. Gothamist, Sept 15-16, 2026:

<https://gothamist.com/news/data-center-spills-5k-gallons-of-diesel-into-new-jersey-meadowlands>

10. WWI Submarine Wreck Still Leaking TNT: A World War I submarine wreck off Denmark is leaking TNT into the surrounding water, seabed, and marine life more than a century after it sank; scientists warn thousands of similar wrecks worldwide pose a growing environmental risk as they continue to corrode.

ScienceDaily, Sept 14, 2026:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260913081919.htm>

11. Britain's Wasps Mysteriously Vanishing: Britain's wasps have become unusually scarce this summer; scientists suspect an unusual combination of temperature swings, heatwaves, and food shortages. ScienceDaily, Sept 11, 2026:

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/09/260911003901.htm>

12. Anak Krakatau Erupts for Over 24 Hours: The Indonesian volcano sent ash up to 50,000 feet into the atmosphere in early September, shutting down eight airports, disrupting nearly 3,000 flights, and degrading air quality as far away as Jakarta. Al Jazeera, Sept 8, 2026:

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/9/6/indonesias-main-airport-suspends-flights-due-to-anak-krakatoa-eruption>

Wake up. Speak up. Be heard.

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