



Top Stories

2/2/2015—President Barack Obama unveiled his budget request to fund the federal government for fiscal year (FY) 2016. The president's \$4 trillion budget requests \$8.6 billion for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and \$13.2 billion for the Department of Interior (DOI). See NCSL's NRI Committee [budget overview](#) for specific program funding details.

1/25/2015—The president announced that the Department of Interior, under his direction, will release a conservation plan to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska. The plan will include designating 12.8 million acres, of the 19.8 million acres in ANWR, as "wilderness" which is the highest level of protection given to public land in the United States. See [NCSL's Info Alert](#) for more details.

1/15/2015—EPA [released](#) the final scientific report on the connectivity of streams and wetlands to downstream waters. The report summarizes current understanding on how interconnected streams and wetlands may affect the physical, chemical and biological composition of downstream waters. EPA Administrator McCarthy has stated the report is vital to finalization of the agencies proposed rule defining which waters in the United States are protected under the Clean Water Act.

From the 114th Congress

2/12/2015—U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) [introduced](#) a bill that would renew certain programs for rural communities. The bill would renew the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program, which dedicates revenues from federal forests to rural communities,

and would restore mandatory funding for the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, which remits revenues to the states from federal lands. The SRS program expired this year.



2/11/2015—The U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill to approve the construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. The bill passed the Senate on Jan. 29 and will now go to the president for his approval. However, the president [announced](#) on Jan. 7 that he will veto the bill.

1/23/2015—U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) [introduced](#) a bill that would change how the U.S. budgets for wildfire protection and forest health. The bill creates a budget cap adjustment for 30 percent of wildfire disaster funding for the U.S. Forest Service and Department of Interior, similar to how the Federal Emergency Management Agency manages other natural disasters.

1/22/2015—Democrats from the House Appropriations Committee [announced](#) that Representative Betty McCollum (Minn.) will be the new ranking member of the subcommittee that covers Interior and EPA appropriations. Representative McCollum replaces now retired Representative Jim Moran (Va.).

From the Administration

2/17/2015—U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy [launched](#) a joint international air quality program that will be instituted at select U.S. diplomatic

missions overseas. The program will provide data from these overseas missions to EPA to better understand ambient air quality and possible air pollution health risks from around the globe.

2/11/2015—The White House **announced** a new Clean Energy Investment Initiative that will aim to gather \$2 billion in private investments for innovative solutions to climate change. The initiative is putting a particular emphasis on clean energy and carbon pollution reduction strategies.



2/11/2015—The President's Task Force on Combating Wildlife Trafficking, comprised of 17 federal agencies and offices, **released** its strategic implementation plan to stop the illegal trade of wildlife. The implementation plan builds upon a **strategy** released one year ago by the president to strength enforcement, reduce demand for illegally traded wildlife, and expand international cooperation.

2/6/2015—The White House released its second **National Security Strategy** which lists, for the first time ever, climate change as one of the top threats facing the U.S. The strategy states that climate change is “an urgent and growing threat” which contributes to “increased natural disasters, refugee flows, and conflicts over basic resources.”

1/30/2015—The president issued an **executive order** that establishes a new Federal Flood Risk Management Standard for federal agencies. The new standards give federal agencies three options for determining if a building is safe for federal investment. Agencies can use: data and methods based on best available climate science; require buildings to be two feet above the 100-year flood elevation; or require infrastructure is built to the 500-year floodplain.

1/21/2015—President Obama **signed** an executive order to establish the Arctic Executive Steering Committee that will coordinate federal policy efforts related to the Arctic region.

This year the United States will assume the chairmanship of the Arctic Council, an intergovernmental forum that addresses issues faced by governments with interest in the Arctic region.

1/14/2015—President Obama **announced** a number of initiatives related to methane emissions from oil and gas production, including a new goal to reduce methane emissions by 40-45 percent by 2025. Additionally, the president announced that EPA will be working on new methane emission regulations and a set of guidelines for other volatile organic compounds. Other agencies will take steps to reduce methane emissions as well, including plans from DOI to update standards to reduce wasteful venting, flaring and leaking from oil and gas development on public lands.

From the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

2/13/2015—EPA **finalized** the state implementation plan (SIP) requirements rule for the 2008 ozone standards. The final rule establishes requirements states and tribes will need to meet as they develop plans for areas that have not met the air quality goals under the 2008 standards.

2/10/2015—EPA **finalized** rules that will allow states to electronically submit their SIPs and any supporting documents. The ability for states to submit electronic copies in lieu of paper is expected to reduce burdens and costs to state agencies. Electronic submission will be active March 16, 2015.

2/5/2015—EPA **finalized** a pollution control rule limiting carbon monoxide and other gas emissions from wood heaters and stoves. The agency estimates the public health benefit to the rule will be between \$3.4 billion and \$7.6 billion annually and could avoid up to 800 premature deaths each year.

1/27/2015—EPA's Building Blocks for Sustainable Communities Program **announced** it will be providing technical assistance to 22 communities in 18 states to increase their capacity for smart growth and sustainable approaches to protect the environment. This will include assistance on creating green jobs, expanding economic opportunity,

preparing for the effects of climate change and improving public health.

1/21/2015—EPA [joined](#) the Environmental Council of the States (ECOS) and eight global automotive associations in signing a Memorandum of Understanding to advance the copper-free brake initiative across the U.S. The initiative aims to reduce copper, cadmium and other harmful chemicals in motor vehicle brake friction materials.



1/16/2015—According to EPA's annual [Toxic Release Inventory \(TRI\) analysis](#), 84 percent of the toxic chemical waste managed at industrial facilities was not

released into the environment and instead was managed through preferred practices such as recycling.

1/13/2015—EPA [revised](#) its 2008 Definition of Solid Waste rule, closing a gap that allowed the recycling of hazardous secondary materials without regulatory oversight. The revisions also mandate that third party recycling facilities have a verified EPA permit in order to receive secondary material.

1/13/2015—EPA [proposed](#) new requirements for monitoring dispersants and other chemicals that are used in response to oil spills, such as those that were used in the 2010 Deepwater Horizon spill. The proposed changes would ensure the products allowed to be used have met efficacy and toxicity requirements and that the manufacturers provide use and safety information.

From the United States Department of Interior (DOI)

2/18/2015—The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) [conducted](#) a competitive lease sale for areas off the coast of Massachusetts as potential wind energy development. According to the agency, if fully developed the lease area could support approximately 2 gigawatts of wind generation, enough to power 700,000 homes.

1/22/2015—DOI [released](#) the environmental assessment for a plan to lease 300,000 acres off the shore of North Carolina for the purpose of offshore wind farms. To date the Obama administration has awarded seven commercial Atlantic coast wind energy leases in Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Rhode Island and Virginia.

1/7/2015—The Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) [announced](#) more than \$21 million for 13 states to conserve coastal wetlands.

From the Courts



1/28/2015—The Environmental Integrity Project and the Humane Society [filed](#) two lawsuits against EPA in the U.S. District Court for D.C. related to EPA regulating air emissions. The environmental groups feel EPA neglected to regulate emissions from concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) in the same way that it regulates large industrial facilities.

1/28/2015—The U.S. District Judge for the District of Minnesota [ruled](#) in favor of EPA in a lawsuit filed by the American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Pork Producers Council. The farm groups sued EPA over the agency's release of documents related to concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), to environmental groups who requested the information under the Freedom of Information Act. The judge felt the farm groups lacked standing because the release of information did not cause "actual or imminent injury" to the farm operators.

1/25/2015—The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia announced it will hear oral arguments in a claim against EPA brought by 12 states related to the agency's proposed rule to control greenhouse gas emissions from existing power plants. The states contend that the Clean Air Act prohibits EPA from regulating emissions from existing sources.

The Department of Justice, on behalf of EPA, holds that the rules are not finalized and therefore cannot be litigated.

Additional Resources and Reports of Interest

2/19/2015—The National Park Service [announced](#) it will give fourth-grade students and their families free admission to national parks, public lands and wildlife refuges for 2015-2016, as a way to connect school-age children with the outdoors.

2/19/2015—The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) held a day-long [technical conference](#) at its headquarters to discuss EPA's greenhouse gas emission rules for existing power plants. Attendees heard from federal representatives, state agencies and associations and utilities to see how the rules may affect electric reliability and the parties involved. FERC plans to hold [three more regional conferences](#) throughout February and March in Denver, St. Louis and Washington D.C.

1/31/2015—The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) [launched](#) a satellite to more accurately measure Earth's soil moisture to better assist scientists in drought and flood prediction.

1/23/2015—The North American Electric Reliability Corp. (NERC) announced it is working on a study that will consider if states can mitigate possible electric reliability issues that may occur from compliance with EPA's greenhouse gas emission rule for existing power plants by signing on to regional plans. The study is slated to be released in December.

1/16/2015—The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and NASA [released](#) independent studies both showing that 2014 was the warmest year since 1880. According to the agencies the Earth's average surface temperature has increased by 1.4 degrees since 1880.

1/15/2015—USFS [announced](#) payments to states for its share of revenues from federal forests for fiscal years 2013 and 2014. The 2014 payments totaled \$50 million, an over 80 percent

decrease from 2013. The dramatic decrease is due to the expiration of the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program that dedicates federal forest revenue for use in building and maintaining rural schools.

1/9/2015—According to a [Bloomberg New Energy Finance report](#), clean energy investment rose in 2014, the first time in three years. Funds dedicated to wind, solar, biofuels, and low-carbon energy technologies increased by 16 percent. The report also predicts that installations for solar and wind power will grow by approximately 10 percent this year.

NCSL Resources

NCSL is already underway planning its 2015 Legislative Summit taking place Aug. 3-5 in Seattle, Wash. See [our website](#) for more details and resources from last year.

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