



Top Stories

3/19/2015—President Barack Obama signed an [executive order](#) directing federal agency officials to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by at least 40 percent by 2025. The order also mandated the increase of electricity generation from renewable sources by 30 percent in the next 10 years. Concurrently, the president met with 14 of the largest federal contractors to announce that the companies would also commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3/10/2015—U.S. Senators Tom Udall (D-N.M.) and David Vitter (R-La.) [introduced](#) legislation to reform the Toxic Substances Control Act, the law that regulates toxic chemicals in commerce. The Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act (S. 697), would create a uniform federal system to regulate toxic chemicals that would be overseen and enforced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The bill would preempt state action on “high-priority” dangerous chemicals, but does grandfather in all state chemical actions taken before Jan. 1, 2015. On March 12, Senators Barbara Boxer (D-Calif.) and Ed Markey (D-Mass.) [introduced](#) their own TSCA reform legislation that focuses on specific harmful chemicals such as asbestos, and does not pre-empt state laws. Read [NCSL’s blog](#) for more details.

From the 114th Congress

3/31/2015—More than 100 members of Congress sent a [letter](#) to President Obama applauding him for his leadership related to climate change. The members also pledged their support for an international global warming agreement, coinciding with the president releasing his domestic strategy to the U.N. (see later story under “From the Administration”).

3/18/2015—The U.S. House of Representatives passed two bills related to EPA scientific process for regulations. [H.R. 1029](#), would reform the membership and procedures of the EPA’s science advisory panels and [H.R. 1030](#), the Secret Science Reform Act, would require the Environmental Protection Agency only use publicly available, reproducible data when writing regulations. The White House [issued](#) veto threats for both bills. In discussing H.R. 1030, a White House representative [stated](#) that while the administration supports regulatory transparency the bill would impose “arbitrary, unnecessary and expensive requirements.”



3/27/2015—Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Michael Dean Crapo (R-Idaho) [added language](#) to the Senate Budget Resolution that would adjust a funding cap that previously prevented agencies from treating wildfires as natural disasters under the federal budget. The language is a precursor to the senators’ Wildfire Disaster Funding Act that would fund wildfires from disaster accounts rather than having to borrow from fire prevention funds, as is current practice. The Senate Budget Resolution passed the chamber on March 27 with the language attached.

3/26/2015—The U.S. House of Representatives passed [legislation](#) that included a two-year extension of the Secure Rural Schools program, which provides assistance to rural communities situated on or around federal land. The money comes from revenues received from foresting operations on the federal land. The extension was included in the Medicare

Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (H.R. 2) that passed 392-37.

3/4/2015—The Senate did not garner the [necessary votes](#) to override President Obama’s veto of a bill that would approve construction of the Keystone XL pipeline. Under Senate rules, three-fourths majority is needed to override a presidential veto; the vote was 62-37.

From the Administration

3/31/2015—The White House [submitted](#) its domestic climate strategy to the United Nations (U.N.), which formalizes targets and plans announced by the administration throughout the past year. One such announcement central to the U.N. plan is the 26-28 percent reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector by 2025, proposed last year by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The U.S. plan and the plans promised by almost 200 other nations will form the foundation for an international climate deal, to be proposed by the U.N.

3/27/2015—The Administration [announced](#) a joint task force with Mexico to help the latter country achieve carbon emission reduction targets. Mexico recently promised to peak emissions by 2030 and reduce carbon from “business-as-usual” levels by 22 percent in the same timeframe. The task force will be led by U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz and Mexican Environment Minister Juan Jose Guerra Abud.

2/13/2015—Fannie Mae, the federal national mortgage association, [announced](#) it will provide lower interest rate loans to green multi-residential buildings. The U.S. Green Building Council supported the move, saying it is “both an incentive to build green and an incentive for existing buildings to achieve certification.”

From the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)

3/31/2015—The agency awarded 34 fellowships in 25 states and Puerto Rico for undergraduate students to pursue

environmental science and related fields at universities across the country.

3/26/2015—EPA released its second annual [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Standards for Light Duty Vehicles](#). The report shows information from manufacturers performances on how individual firms are complying with greenhouse gas emission standards for cars. The report found that overall, 2013 industry compliance was 12 grams/mile better than required.

3/25/2015—EPA [proposed](#) one-time reporting and recordkeeping requirements for nanoscale chemical substances in commerce. Companies that manufacture or process chemical substances involved in nanotechnology will need to provide EPA with certain information such as specific chemical identity, production value, methods of manufacture, and available health and safety data. The proposal will be open for 90 days of public comment, after it is posted in the Federal Register.



3/20/2015—EPA [awarded](#) projects in 21 states and Puerto Rico grants to reduce emissions from diesel engines through the Diesel Emission Reduction Act program. The grants will go to projects such as retrofitting school buses to improve air quality for the children inside, upgrading marine propulsion engines, and replacing long haul truck engines.

3/16/2015—In a [speech](#) before the National Farmers Union, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy announced she is renaming the Waters of the U.S. proposed rule that would define which water bodies should be permitted under the Clean Water Act. The agency will now call the proposal the “Clean Water Rule.” McCarthy also vowed that the final rule would be released this spring. On April 3, EPA sent the rule to the Office of Management and Budget for final review.

3/12/2015—EPA [released](#) proposed requirements for state and local air agencies to comply with its fine particulate matter standard from 2012. The proposed requirements include

deadlines for states to submit pollution cleanup plans for those areas out of compliance and updated requirements for construction permits for new pollution sources.

3/2/2015—EPA [announced](#) it will release new guidelines for vehicle fuel economy testing. The guidelines will apply to 2016 and will update how vehicles should be prepared and driven before fuel economy testing. The guidelines have not been updated in 10 years.

2/24/2015—EPA [released](#) an updated draft of its Greenhouse Gas Inventory which shows that methane emissions from natural gas have fallen 35 percent since 2007, even though natural gas production in the U.S. has increased by 22 percent during that same time period. EPA stated that implementation by the oil and gas industries of new technologies and operational improvements are why emission levels have been reduced.

From the United States Department of Interior (DOI)

4/1/2015—DOI [listed](#) the northern long-eared bat, which has seen its population decline by as much as 99 percent in recent years, as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. DOI retreated from its original proposal in 2013 to grant the species endangered status, which would have given more protective measures to save its habitat.

3/27/2015—U.S. Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell [announced](#) an agreement with Oregon Governor Kate Brown and the USDA to allow landowners with greater sage-grouse habitat on their property to enroll in a voluntary conservation program. Landowners who participate will receive assurances that they will not face additional regulatory requirements if the bird is protected under the Endangered Species Act. The land area under this agreement totals 2.3 million acres.

3/10/2015—DOI [released](#) the first of two reports compiled by the Rangeland Fire Task Force that looks at immediate actions to be implemented by the agency to address the threat of

rangeland fire. The release of the report was specifically timed to come out before the 2015 wildfire season began to help ensure the Task Force's recommended actions will better prepare response and recovery strategies. The Task Force will continue its consultation with state and local governments and stakeholders to identify longer-term actions to improve the efficacy of rangeland fire management. These actions will be included in a final report due May 1, 2015.

3/4/2015—The Fish and Wildlife Service [awarded](#) grants to wildlife agencies in all 50 states totaling nearly \$46 million. The State Wildlife Grant Program bases its distributions on population and geographic area. Texas, California and Alaska received the largest amount of grants totaling \$2.3 million.

2/26/2015—Jewell spoke before a hearing of the House Interior-Environment Appropriations subcommittee stating that DOI would not be tailoring its Endangered Species Act listing of the sage grouse to any regions or states within the West, where the sage grouse lives. DOI has a Sept. 30 court-ordered deadline to finalize an endangered species listing decision on the bird.



From the Courts

3/25/2015—The U.S. Supreme Court [heard](#) oral arguments in a challenge to EPA's Mercury Air Toxics Standards rules that limit the allowable amount of mercury emissions from power plants. The Supreme Court combined three cases against the EPA brought by various groups and states that feel the agency did not adequately factor in the cost of the rules to the power sector, and that the rules amount to federal overreach.

3/18/2015—The Western Energy Alliance and the Independent Petroleum Association of America [filed three petitions](#) against DOI's habitat protection documents for the greater sage grouse. The plaintiffs say that the reports advance "a one-sided narrative" that is not fully supported by science and skews

protection for grouses against state and local conservation efforts.

Additional Resources and Reports of Interest

4/1/2015—California Governor Jerry Brown [imposed](#) a statewide 25 percent reduction in potable water use through the end of February 2016, as the state is currently facing serious drought conditions. Within the governors' executive order was also a directive that waived California regulations for any power utility that modifies its facility for the "purpose of securing an alternate water supply necessary for continued power plant operation." The order also creates a Water Energy Technology program that would attempt to accelerate the use of "cutting-edge technology" to achieve water and energy savings, such as renewable energy-powered desalination.

3/10/2015—The American Farm Bureau Federation (AFBF) sent a [letter](#) to EPA warning the agency that its proposal to tighten the ozone standards would damage agriculture and rural communities. AFBF stated that "basic farming activities" such as animal feeding, pesticide application and waste management would be restricted by the proposed standards and would incur high costs.

3/2/2015—The scientific journal Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences [published a study](#) examining the effects of climate change on California weather patterns. The study found that climate change will increase temperatures and change rainfall patterns which could result in more frequent droughts in the state.

2/19/2015—USDA [announced](#) \$37 million was awarded in Forest Service and Natural Resources Conservation Service funding to help mitigate the threats of wildfires across the United States.

NCSL Resources

NCSL's NRI Committee has launched its [2015 Spring Webinar Series](#). Beginning April 30, the committee will host a webinar almost every Friday through June (for exclusions—[check website](#) for specific dates). Topics include: EPA regulations, general aviation, falling oil prices, invasive species, food safety and more. [Register online for free!](#)



[Registration](#) is open for NCSL's 2015 Legislative Summit taking place Aug. 3-5 in Seattle. See [the website](#) for more details and resources from last year. [Click here](#) to find resources from past meetings including session presentations, information, videos and more!

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