



PEERreview

CELEBRATING 30 YEARS OF PEER

National Parks Need to Get the Lead Out

The National Park Service would no longer allow the use or sale of lead-based ammunition or fishing tackle under a rulemaking petition being advanced by a coalition of conservation and wildlife protection groups spearheaded by PEER. The ecological stakes are profound. Altogether, more than 130 park wildlife species are exposed to or killed by ingesting lead or prey contaminated with lead:

- Lead is a leading threat to birdlife, especially bald eagles, hawks, and other raptors, as well as other birds from loons to condors;
- Lead fragments from spent shells remain lodged throughout the wildlife food chain. Human consumption of lead-shot game also poses significant health risks; and
- Lost lead fishing tackle leads to elevated levels of lead in fish and amphibians.

“Banning lead would be one of the single biggest conservation advances for our national parks in a generation,” stated Rocky Mountain PEER Director Chandra Rosenthal, noting that early in the Obama years, the NPS briefly announced such a ban, called “Get the Lead Out,” but reversed course under opposition from the National Rifle Association and ammunition and gun manufacturers. “It is high time for our parks to ‘Get the Lead Out.’”

While most parks by law do not permit hunting, some 76 of the total 423 national parks allow recreational, subsistence, or tribal hunting. However, those parks with hunting (the largest are in Alaska) cover more than 60% of the land within the



PHOTO: USFWS

Lead Ammo Leading Cause of Condor Deaths. Carrion scavengers like condors ingest lead from lead-shot carcasses.

entire national park system. In addition, more than 85% of parks with fish (213 in all) are open for fishing.

While the National Park Service considers itself a global conservation leader, it has lagged in controlling lead. By contrast, 26 states and countries have already banned lead ammo. Meanwhile, this past fall, the Fish and Wildlife Service announced a phase-out of lead ammunition and fishing tackle in 18 National Wildlife Refuges.

Joining the PEER petition are the American Bird Conservancy and the Union of Concerned Scientists. In addition, the Coalition to Protect America’s National Parks, consisting of retired Park Service officials, is also urging their former agency

to go lead-free. The PEER petition will be a critical test of how aggressive the Biden administration will be in advancing conservation protections on public lands.



PHOTO: USGS

In the Claws of Death. In a recent study, nearly half of bald eagles tested across the U.S. show signs of chronic lead exposure.

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PEERreview is the quarterly newsletter of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**Celebrating 30 Years of PEER**

In 2023, PEER marks its 30th anniversary. Our story has been one of remarkable service, hard work, and a steadfast commitment to protecting human health and the environment.

I trace PEER's effectiveness to its unique role in helping public employees speak the truth, protect science, and stand up to powerful economic interests to safeguard the environment. When we answer the phone—we say, “How can we help you?” to employees who bring us concerns about the failure of government agencies to live up to their environmental mandates and commitments.

To mark this milestone, we are embarking on a year-long celebration and retrospective of our work through videos, webinars, and by sharing past successes in our publications. This retrospective is important to help us share with our growing number of followers the unique role PEER has played in the environmental movement over the past 30 years.

In this issue on page 3, we are proud to kick off this celebration by sharing PEER's origin story, which lies in the Timber Wars of the 1980s and the motivations of one of PEER's founders, Jeff DeBonis. Since those days in the early 1990s, PEER has grown, evolved, and carved out a unique role in the environmental community as an assertive, non-partisan watchdog, relentless in our mission to protect government employees and improve environmental and public health protections.

So, where will we be headed in the next 30 years?

We know that continuing attacks on government institutions and the growing environmental crisis will require us to recommit to our mission while strengthening our engagement with public employees, community groups, and environmental and public health organizations.

Let us know what you think. Through this coming year, we would like to hear from you about how we can improve and expand our work. Keep an eye out for our supporter survey in the summer issue of PEERreview, and in the meantime, please don't hesitate to reach out to me with your ideas.

With your continued support, PEER will be there as a resource for the next generation of public service. Thank you for being part of this journey.

Yours in the Fight,

— **Tim Whitehouse, Executive Director**

About Us

PEER protects public employees who protect our environment. We are a service organization for local, state, federal, and tribal public employees, including scientists, law enforcement officers, land managers, and all others dedicated to upholding environmental laws and values. Through PEER, public servants can choose to work as “anonymous activists”, so that public agencies must confront the message, rather than the messenger.

PEER'S BEGINNINGS

Timber Wars and PEER's Origin Story



PHOTO: KATHRYN/ADOBE STOCK

Clear-cutting in Oregon and Washington continue despite conservation efforts over the past 30 years.

The timber wars that shook this country in the 1980s and 1990s may seem a distant memory to some, but the struggles to protect our forests and wildlife habitats from the wanton destruction of logging continue to this day. PEER's origins began in Oregon's Willamette National Forest in the late 1980s, when a forest planner, Jeff DeBonis, concluded that the Forest Service was allowing over-logging that would lead to the type of eco-degradation that he had seen in Central America while in the Peace Corps.

Convinced that he was going to get fired for his views, Jeff came out openly against Forest Service clearcuts and urged his colleagues to join him. When thousands did, he formed the Association of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics. As the demand for an organization to assist government employees in all environmental fields spread, Jeff helped found PEER and became its first executive director.

As we celebrate our 30th Anniversary, we invite you to watch a short video by Jeff DeBonis to learn more about his work and PEER's origins.



A Poison Pill in the Omnibus Funding Bill

GUEST COMMENTARY

There is widespread agreement that climate change is an urgent threat demanding decisive government action. There is less agreement about what actions to take. Clearly, however, we are close to climate tipping points and need real emissions reductions, not government programs that generate an imaginary commodity called carbon offsets.

Unfortunately, the Omnibus bill passed by Congress on December 23rd includes twin provisions that require the U.S. Department of Agriculture to create a carbon offsets program. The laws lay the groundwork for farmers and forest owners to receive payments for allegedly improving practices to sequester carbon, so the claimed reductions can be sold to corporations to greenwash their operations. While limited to so-called "voluntary" carbon markets, the proposal provides a

U.S. government stamp of approval for carbon offsets, a camel's nose in the tent of U.S. climate laws.

So how do we know that carbon offsetting is an inherently flawed, unfixable concept? First, offsets are used to justify an additional ton of emissions by the purchaser for every ton of emissions allegedly reduced by the seller. But we don't want a policy that allows high industrial emissions to be excused based on alleged reductions or sequestration in forestry or agriculture (I preserve a tree, so you can keep burning coal). What we want is a policy that creates incentives to greatly reduce industrial carbon emissions and increase sequestration in agriculture and forestry (I plant a tree and you stop burning coal). We don't need either/or, we need both!

Second, the entire concept of a carbon offset is based on the idea that we can accurately determine what would have happened in a counterfactual future. We bet our climate on claims that I will preserve a forest because of the offset program. But perhaps I never intended to cut my forest. Or even if I did intend to, another forest is cut to satisfy the demand for wood.

This approach lacks scientific integrity. Congress should reverse course and choose real climate protections.

ABOUT US: *Laurie Williams and Allan Zabel are environmental attorneys. Allan retired from US EPA in 2021 and Laurie is an attorney in US EPA's Superfund program. These are personal views and are not intended to represent the views of US EPA or the Biden Administration.*



ALASKA AND MINNESOTA

Defunding Alaska's War on Predators

Federal wildlife aid to state game agencies is, by law, supposed to “benefit a diverse array of wildlife.” For that reason, “predator control”—killing predators, like wolves and bears, to increase populations of game animals, such as caribou and moose—is a prohibited use of these federal dollars.

That does not deter the State of Alaska from using millions of federal dollars to support what it calls an “Intensive Management” (IM) program of killing hundreds of wolves, and brown and black bears every year. This “harvest” of wolves and bears is facilitated by state game regulations that allow unlimited hunting and trapping of predators in targeted areas. In other instances, state game agents shoot predators from aircraft.

The state’s own figures show that nearly three-quarters of its IM program consists of federal wildlife aid. The state



PHOTO: R. STEINER

“Intensive Management” Illustrated: An extensive review of data shows that Alaska’s predator control efforts do not result in larger herds of game animals.

considers only a fraction (less than 1%) of its predator control program ineligible for federal aid.

The fiction the state maintains is that federal dollars may be used for “survey and inventory” even though the stated



PHOTO: NPS

Open Season. Federal rules allow “denning” – killing bear cubs and wolf pups in their winter dens inside park preserves.

purpose is to locate and target predators for lethal removal. PEER is pressing the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which administers this federal aid, to end this absurd and illegal subsidy of Alaska’s war on predators.

Axing Minnesota’s Timber Cord Quota

In 2021, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) held up a two-year \$26.4 million state block grant for habitat management in Minnesota’s Wildlife Management Areas because the state was allowing destructive logging practices in sensitive wildlife habitats to reach timber cord quotas.

Prior to timber harvest activities on MN DNR properties, FWS requires MN DNR to produce documentation to ensure that said activities primarily benefit wildlife, and are consistent with the Pittman Robertson Act—a federal law designed to limit federal funding to *only support* timber operations designed to benefit wildlife, not maximize timber production”. The purpose of Pittman Robertson Act needs clarification, the last bit is a contradiction and repetitive at the same time.

Late last year, MN DNR announced that it had agreed to “action items” that it suggested resolved the matter of the withheld grant. Yet, these action items do not meet the conditions laid out by FWS and, for the most part, contain no identifiable



PHOTO: JACOB/ADOBE STOCK

U.S. taxpayers should not be subsidizing Minnesota’s backward and destructive logging practices.

actions but merely “reaffirm” DNR’s good intentions. PEER has written to the Director of the FWS urging her to reject this sham agreement and to continue to withhold grant funds that violate federal regulations.

NASA's Climate Blind Spot: Aeronautics



PHOTO: NASA

New Supersonic Energy Hogs. NASA is pushing new quieter supersonic planes, such as the X59 QueSST shown here, despite their tremendously higher fuel consumption.

The significant climate contributions being made through several NASA projects are at odds with the significant investments being made by its Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate. These aeronautics programs are designed to find ways to increase air traffic and, not so coincidentally, provide R&D for big aviation firms such as Boeing and Lockheed-Martin.

Emissions from the commercial aviation sector have been rising exponentially in recent years. Yet, NASA's \$1.5 billion annual Aeronautics Research budget is dedicated to projects that may

add to aviation's carbon footprint. Three such projects are:

- Developing “quiet” supersonic jets that are expected to burn 7 to 9 times more fuel per seat-km flown than conventional aircraft. The research is designed to reduce the loudness of a sonic boom on the ground to that of “a gentle thump”, per an agency prospectus;
- Urban air mobility would facilitate everything from package delivery drones to passenger-carrying air taxis for intra-city flight. This would foster forms of transport that are among the least energy-efficient on the planet; and
- A “NexGen” air traffic management system would allow airlines to increase the number of flights per hour. This would have the perverse effect of making individual flights more efficient but facilitating an entire system that would be far more polluting.

If carried to completion, the net result of these projects will be higher polluting aircraft emitting more greenhouse gases and pushing the goal of zero emission by 2050 for air transport back decades further.

A central paradox here is the contrast between these impacts and the key role NASA plays in addressing climate change, with NASA Administrator Bill Nelson declaring “Climate change is an all-hands-on-deck, global challenge that requires action – now.” PEER's task will be ensuring that NASA's climate focus is extended to its aeronautics research program.

Less Than Monumental on Conservation

This past October, President Biden made the first use of his Antiquity Act powers to create a new national monument: The Camp Hale—Continental Divide National Monument. In so doing, he withdrew 53,804 acres from mining claims and mineral and geothermal leasing. However, he left this small site open to new or expanded facilities for telecommunications, rail corridors, pipelines, utility infrastructure, state highways, and flood control.

Although several past national monument proclamations have made exceptions for activities like grazing and hunting, none

greenlight the type of commercial and industrial development allowed here—making this perhaps the least protected national monument in American history.

Nonetheless, this modest monument will likely count toward President Biden's goal of conserving 30 percent of America's lands and waters by 2030.

“To meet this ambitious goal, the Biden administration will have to dramatically pick up the pace,” says PEER's Litigation and Policy Attorney Colleen Teubner. By most estimates, only 13 percent of U.S. lands are considered “conserved” today.



PHOTO: BRENDA YANKOVIAK/USDA

Camp Hale-Continental Divide National Monument joins the 130 monuments across the US with varying degrees of protection.

“Meaningful conservation goals are critical to addressing climate change and biodiversity loss,” Teubner notes.



ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

EPA Puts Workers at Needless Risk

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) managers routinely ignore risk calculations for new chemicals, thereby subjecting workers to dangerous exposures. Besides cancer risks, these inappropriate EPA practices mask severe developmental effects—which can result in miscarriage—and other neonatal developmental effects like cancer and neurotoxicity.

The Toxic Substances Control Act requires EPA to determine whether a new chemical substance is likely to present an unreasonable risk to health or the environment, including to workers. EPA scientists working through PEER have asked the agency's Office of Inspector General to intervene. These whistleblowers have documented examples of managers:

- Unilaterally deleting risk calculations from chemical assessments;
- Unrealistically assuming workers avoid exposure to a chemical once they experience pain from corrosive substances, thereby discounting any risks from single exposures; and
- Improperly applying this avoidance theory to chemicals that are not corrosive (i.e., will not cause any pain), thereby ignoring risks other than corrosivity.

“EPA managers overrule the professional judgment of staff scientists to significantly downplay or outright eliminate entire categories of hazards,” stated PEER Science Policy Director Kyla Bennett, a scientist and attorney formerly with EPA, noting that some manager actions may be criminal, such as making false official statements. “These actions range from the oblivious to



PHOTO: LITTLEWOLF1989/ADOBE STOCK

Breathe Deeply. Occupational diseases are the tenth leading cause of death in this country, killing more than 40,000 workers every year – a toll nearly ten times that of all workplace accidents combined.

the malevolent, such as using a bromide like ‘once burned, twice shy’ as the basis for minimizing a quantitative risk assessment.”

EPA is under considerable pressure from chemical manufacturers and their congressional allies to speed up approvals of new chemicals. Bypassing any analyses of hazards hastens approvals. Notably, since the reviews of new chemicals were required by a 2016 law, EPA has yet to formally reject a single chemical.

These risk calculations cannot be easily revisited once the chemical is approved. As a result, millions of people remain insufficiently protected from occupational chemical exposures.

Update: Industry Warnings

The Toxic Substances Control Act requires manufacturers to report any evidence to EPA that new chemicals for which they seek approval pose a substantial risk of injury to health or the environment. However, since the early years of the Trump administration, EPA management was not publicly posting these notices or sharing them with the scientists charged with analyzing these chemicals' risks. When we learned of this outrageous practice, we sued the agency. EPA responded by posting thousands of these notices in its publicly assessable chemical database. There is, however, a catch—these reports are extremely difficult to find in EPA's chemical database.

Our next goal – to make sure these reports are easy to find and access for the general public and scientific researchers. There is no excuse for EPA's continuing efforts to make these reports difficult to access.

Update: Corrosive Crouch

For more than a decade, PEER has waged a legal battle with EPA to significantly tighten exposure limits to corrosive dust, the source of much of the lung damage inflicted upon First Responders to the 9/11 World Trade Center attack. U.S. corrosivity regulations are ten times weaker than international standards as defined by the Basel Convention and the Globally Harmonized System.

Initially, EPA indicated it would act on our rule-making petition but stalled for years and then ultimately rejected it. PEER sued EPA and has argued its case before the U.S. Court of Appeals. We are awaiting their decision. To succeed, we must do more than show that EPA was wrong in its reasoning but was “arbitrary and capricious” -- the highest burden in civil jurisprudence. Undertaking this herculean legal task is PEER General Counsel Paula Dinerstein who has led our entire decade-long effort.

Closing Gaping PFAS Exposure Pathways



PHOTO: LUDMILA SMITE/ADOBE STOCK

Sludge to Table: PFAS in compost and biosolid fertilizers spread the PFAS footprint even farther in ways that are difficult to trace.

In recent years, a flood of public employees have come to us with concerns about the growing toxic crisis of PFAS (per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances) contamination. PFAS are called “forever chemicals” because they do not break down readily in the environment and many bioaccumulate in the food chain. They are associated with health maladies from thyroid disease, testicular and kidney disease, cancers, liver damage, and suppressed immune function.

Furthermore, they are ubiquitous. More than 200 million people have water contaminated with PFAS. To address this growing crisis, PEER is exposing hidden PFAS pathways and pressing for stringent regulations to remove their use from a variety of applications.

Containers for Food and Agricultural Products

In late December 2022, PEER and the Center for Environmental Health (CEH) sued Inhance Technologies for generating toxic PFAS or “forever chemicals” when fluorinating plastic containers, in violation of federal law.

Tens of millions of plastic containers used in vast sectors of the economy, undergo fluorination, which provides a chemical barrier to a pre-produced plastic

container. Handling or using fluorinated containers could be a significant pathway for unsafe human exposure to PFOA and other PFAS.

PEER’s work exposing PFAS in pesticides led to the discovery that these widely used containers had PFAS.

EPA also filed suit against Inhance after CEH and PEER wrote to the agency in late October of 2022 threatening to file suit against the company. The two organizations intend to use their suit to hold EPA’s feet to the fire to ensure that Inhance stops its unlawful conduct and prevents further contamination of PFAS by users of fluorinated containers.

Pesticides

PEER is confronting EPA with evidence that the most widely used pesticides contain disturbingly high levels of PFAS. Research now shows that PFAS are contaminating soil and being taken up into the roots and shoots of plants, which means that they are entering our food supply through treated crops.

PEER saw a small win when EPA recently removed twelve PFAS from its list of approved inert ingredients for pesticides after we confronted the agency about

these approvals, but this is not enough. PEER is pushing for EPA to ban the use of all PFAS in pesticides, including as active ingredients and as additives to the pesticide after it is purchased.

Biosolid Fertilizers

PFAS concentrates in sewage sludge which is then commonly reused as “biosolid” fertilizers. These biosolids are widely sold in stores and are even given away by water treatment plants. The net effect, however, recycles PFAS contamination from homes and industries back into food crops on farms and home gardens. Even Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack has decried the spread of PFAS through biosolid fertilizers as a national threat to agriculture, yet EPA has yet to take any meaningful regulatory action.

The lack of action on PFAS is symptomatic of an appalling regulatory breakdown by EPA. In September 2022, EPA concluded that there is virtually no safe level in drinking water for two of the most common forms of PFAS, yet has not begun to regulate them.

Consequently, PEER will continue to pursue legal actions and media actions to address this crisis.



PHOTO: MINNESOTA DOA

No Silver Lining: Fluorinated containers are widely used to ship foods, cosmetics, fragrances, health care products, pharmaceuticals, and agriculture products, such as pesticides.



CALIFORNIA

Boeing's Sickeningly Sweet Pollution Deal



PHOTO: PARENTS AGAINST SSFL

Santa Susana's Politics as Toxic as Its Groundwater. Governor Gavin Newsom's deal with Boeing will leave the site profoundly polluted "in perpetuity."

PEER is suing to invalidate an agreement between Boeing and the State of California that absolves the corporation from having to clean up 90% of the polluted soil at Santa Susana Field Laboratory. Located just 10 miles from downtown Los Angeles, Santa Susana is one of the nation's most polluted sites after 50 years of rocket tests, a reactor meltdown, and tons of chemical waste.

Since our lawsuit, we have discovered that:

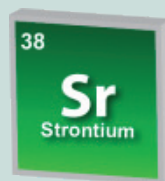
- The Newsom administration also executed a covenant with Boeing allowing the highly polluted groundwater to remain "in perpetuity" with no remediation required for "an indeterminate amount of time." This Covenant reversed the state's longstanding position that protecting public health required a complete groundwater cleanup;
- The Governor's staff spent \$60,000 in taxpayer funds on ads and social media messaging touting the Boeing deal and seeking to discredit PEER and other opponents; and
- Newsom officials are threatening whistleblowers for potentially breaching a non-disclosure agreement all employees were ordered to sign in 2021 when negotiations with Boeing began. One letter threatens "significant potential legal and monetary liabilities" for breaching the NDA but, in a Kafkaesque twist, the state refuses to release a copy of it to the employees being threatened.

"This deal condemns Santa Susana to serve as a perpetual sacrifice zone dedicated to corporate convenience through a deal any polluter would love to wangle," stated Pacific PEER Director Jeff Ruch, pointing to drinking and agricultural water supplies in Ventura County where contaminants from the Santa Susana aquifer are already appearing. "Unfortunately, the Newsom administration is now so deep into Boeing's pocket they could collect lint."

Hunters Point of No Return

In an October 2021 briefing, the U.S. Navy revealed that its soil sampling at Hunters Point Naval Shipyard found approximately "10% of samples indicate strontium-90 levels slightly above the remediation goal" – which is a level well above prudent health protection. Besides the obvious, there were two other major problems with this discovery. The strontium-90 was found in Parcel G, a portion of the longtime Superfund site where the Navy claimed there had been no prior radiological work. The second problem is the Navy is scheduled to release Parcel G for civilian use in 2023.

Since that time, the Navy has been engaged in a frantic effort to "remedy" the issue by, among other things, refining its "laboratory procedure to produce more precise analytical results." The Navy's attempt to make this issue go away is supposed to be overseen by the U.S. EPA, an interchange that PEER is monitoring through repeated Freedom of Information Act requests.



Nasty Stuff. Radioactive Strontium-90 is the longest-lived fission byproduct and is considered the dangerous constituent of fallout.

Initially, EPA resisted the Navy's plan to throw out the results altogether. As one EPA official wrote "the previous strontium-90 results are valid data. It's inaccurate to suggest the data were not precise enough. EPA has been clear that in the absence of convincing evidence, we cannot support using the new data to supersede existing results."

However, as the Parcel G handover date approaches, we hear that EPA's resolve is wilting and that the agency is declining to produce its more recent correspondence with the Navy, despite our formal request. We are now preparing to sue both to uncover EPA's distressing acquiescence and to force the agency to enforce its own Superfund regulations.

Alaskan Crab Fisheries Collapse



PHOTO: NOAA

Snow Crab Season Ended. NOAA improbably blames climate change for the sudden population implosion.

The federal agency that produced wildly inflated population estimates for the Bristol Bay red king crab has repeated the blunder with the Alaska snow crab. Now, both fisheries are shuttered, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries program does not have a good explanation for either closure.

On the red king crab, PEER filed a complaint on behalf of Dr. C. Braxton Dew, a fisheries biologist with more than 40 years of experience, 25 of which were with NOAA Fisheries. It charges that the agency engaged in systemic sampling bias and data falsification,

which inflated annual population estimates and led to a multi-year regime of disastrous overfishing.

Submitted under the Information Quality Act, the complaint seeks a correction of the record and an admission of the role that overfishing played. More than a year later and well past its own guidelines, NOAA Fisheries submitted a short unsigned non-explanatory answer that did not respond to Dr. Dew's charges and declined to take corrective action because doing so "does not serve a current management purpose." PEER has appealed this denial with the aim of prompting an independent investigation.

"Contrary to this response, no competent peer review would approve NOAA Fisheries methods for estimating the king crab population—that is the whole point of the complaint," said Dr. Dew. "There is no avoiding the long-term damage to end users, as well as to the credibility of 'government science' by this unfortunate violation of the Information Quality Act."

Then history repeated itself, when NOAA Fisheries issued ultra-high estimates for Alaska snow crabs shortly before that fishery also completely collapsed in 2022. The agency's suggestion that climate change was the culprit does not satisfy many experts who point out that its sudden about-face from estimates of super-abundance to commercial extinction within months does not match the evidence. In both cases, the crab habitat has been heavily trawled by commercial fleets.

NOAA Punting Right Whale to Extinction

The two leading causes of right whale mortality are entanglements in fishing gear and ship strikes. PEER is pressing NOAA Fisheries to do more on both fronts. First, NOAA Fisheries is postponing requirements for line-free lobster fishing gear to prevent entanglements until 2024. PEER has opposed the delays, which may be even further deferred.

Second, NOAA Fisheries wants to weaken proposed new rules to prevent ship strikes even as the agency concedes that "changes to the existing vessel speed regulation are essential to stabilize the ongoing right whale population decline

and prevent the species' extinction." PEER is urging NOAA Fisheries to set year-round mandatory speed restrictions – that are actually enforced – in areas where right whales are found. In addition, speed restrictions must also apply to ships between 25 and 65 feet, especially as new large-scale industrial wind power leases will increase maintenance ship traffic across the rights whales' migratory path.

The stakes are critical as the survival of the North Atlantic right whale is at a tipping point. Saving every right whale, especially the breeding females, is of the utmost importance.



PHOTO: FOTO440/ADOBE STOCK

Brink of Extinction. Only an estimated 368 right whales are alive today yet there is a collapse in population fecundity, with only approximately 72 breeding females remaining.



PEER PERSPECTIVES

American Grandstand



Australia Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek

Australia has lost more mammal species than any other continent over the past two centuries and continues to have one of the highest rates of species decline among major developed countries. In response, the new Labor government has committed to conserving an additional 235,000 square miles within the next decade so that 30% of Australia's entire land mass will be conserved. This commitment also targets 110 threatened species and 20 habitats for priority conservation action. "Our current approach has not been working," declared Environment Minister Tanya Plibersek, pledging to prevent the extinction of any more plants and animals. It is unclear, however, how the proposed initiative would protect all of Australia's more than 1,700 threatened species. Nonetheless, perhaps this ambitious effort will inspire the U.S. to also embrace a comprehensive no-more-extinctions posture.



Belize Prime Minister Johnny Briceño

Facing ruinous debt that was driving it into bankruptcy, Belize embraced a revolutionary refinancing plan. With a banking intermediary representing clients seeking to buy environmentally friendly financial products, the Nature Conservancy lent Belize more than \$350 million to buy back international bonds worth more than half a billion dollars. In return, Belize agreed to invest more than \$200 million, or nearly a tenth of Belize's annual economic output, to protect its biodiversity. The resulting deal (known as "blue bonds") is being used to allow a growing number of developing nations to cut their debt by investing in conservation. "It gave us breathing space. Instead of bondholders, we will now be paying to protect our environment," explained Prime Minister Briceño.



Former Arizona Governor Doug Ducey

With an immigration crisis growing on the southern border, former Arizona Governor Doug Ducey embarked on a destructive, costly, and pointless effort to stop illegal immigration by digging up the ground and stacking shipping containers along a 10-mile stretch of the state's southern border. Construction damaged a rich ecological system that is home to hummingbirds, the coatimundi and javelina, assorted reptiles, and pygmy mice. After the Biden administration sued the Governor, pointing out that the land in question is federal land and the Governor's action constituted unlawful trespass, Arizona agreed to remove the containers. Ducey counts this loss as a victory, but his ultimate goal maybe to lay the groundwork for his next run for office.



U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres

As part of a broad effort by Secretary-General António Guterres to address misleading climate claims by nonstate actors, the UN has adopted standards to deter false claims by corporations of eliminating their greenhouse gases. To date, some 1,500 companies have committed to net zero greenhouse gas emissions. While not directly enforceable, the standards draw "red lines" to label corporate actions that are not credible. They call out practices such as using cheap carbon credits in lieu of emissions cuts and omitting consideration of supply chains in calculating a company's carbon footprint. "The problem is that the criteria and benchmarks for these net-zero commitments have varying levels of rigor and loopholes wide enough to drive a diesel truck through. We must have zero tolerance for net-zero greenwashing," Guterres exclaimed.



Norwegian Sovereign Wealth Fund Director Nicolai Tangen

Republican pushback against corporate policies promoting environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG) factors is making scant headway internationally. For example, Norway's \$1.2 trillion sovereign fund (the world's largest) has come down firmly for ESG investment criteria. "We are observing the backlash against ESG in some places in America," commented Nicolai Tangen, the Norwegian fund's director. "What is very clear is that if you're a large investor with a diversified portfolio there is no way that you can run away from these problems." Under Tangen, the fund has signaled that it will vote against board members of companies it sees as slow-walking climate action. By the way, the source of this immense fund is North Sea oil.



Social Security Administration Inspector General Gail Ennis

In legal settlements, two senior attorneys in the Office of Inspector General for the Social Security Administration who blew the whistle on massive management have been returned to work – but not to their previous duties. The two have been at war with Inspector General Gail Ennis, a Trump-appointed IG who punished the attorneys for revealing the problems it was their job to uncover. Ironically, Ennis deployed the IG's whistleblower ombudsman as a major component of an elaborate harassment campaign that is still ongoing. Unsurprisingly, Ennis's office came in last of 432 federal departments in the most recent Best Places to Work in the Federal Government survey. The experience underlines the damage that can be wreaked when the official watchdog suffers from distemper.

U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY

Battle for Better Wildlife Disease Biosafety

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the peril posed by zoonotic diseases and the need to prevent the release of dangerous pathogens from research labs. Yet, the premier wildlife research agency in this country, the U.S. Geological Survey, has resisted strengthening the biosafety of its wildlife disease labs.

Recently, PEER made progress on two fronts. First, a federal administrative judge ruled that actions taken against a scientist constituted illegal retaliation for her repeated reports of dangerous biosafety breaches. The judge also found that Eveline (Evi) Emmenegger, a microbiologist, who managed the highest biosafety level laboratory at USGS's Seattle-based Western Fisheries Research Center, was improperly terminated in violation of the Whistleblower Protection Act.

That ruling entitles her to collect damages and would have entitled her to reinstatement if she had not already been reinstated due to other errors in the removal action. Unfortunately, USGS has appealed the ruling. While restored, Evi has not regained all her previous duties.

At the same time, the USGS National Wildlife Health Center in Madison, one of the few labs that experiments with the SARS-Covid virus in wildlife, has committed to obtaining independent accreditation. This step resulted after repeated complaints from PEER. It is a big step toward ensuring biosafety and protecting the welfare of animal research subjects.

Absent of independent accreditation, safeguards depend upon the discretion of facility managers and whether they have sufficient budgets to address breakdowns and inadequate staffing.



PHOTO: EVI EMMENEGGER

Whistleblower Finding. Despite a favorable ruling, Evi Emmenegger was not fully returned to her prior biosafety duties.

When scientists raise concerns they can face retaliation, as Evi's case illustrates. Maintaining accreditation can lessen the need for USGS scientists to risk their careers by becoming whistleblowers in order to report lapses.

We Thank You!

*Thank you to the **37 people** who made their first gift to PEER this quarter.*

PEER would like to thank the following Foundations for their continued support:

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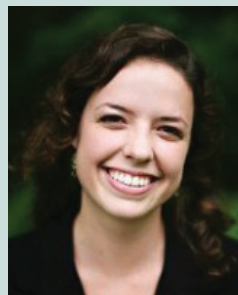
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30 Years of Dedication to PEER



Helen Pent Jenkins,
Director of Development

As the PEER community comes together in 2023 to celebrate our 30th anniversary, I am eager to learn the stories of the folks that have been with the organization since its inception. These thoughtful supporters have been with PEER through tough recessions and political upheavals, but their commitment has never swayed. Thank you to all who have stood with PEER for all these years.

New to the PEER community? Been a longtime supporter? I invite you to send me your story. How did you first come to PEER? How has PEER's work affected you or the issues you care about? What do you hope for PEER for the next 30 years?



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The Impact of Horses on Public Lands

Many private ranchers and public officials blame wild horses for degrading public lands in the west. Using Bureau of Land Management (BLM) data on rangeland health, we decided to investigate the matter after the BLM removed a record number of horses and burros from federally managed rangelands last year.

The finding from the Bureau of Land Management Land Health Status, highlighted in our new report, finds that while horses do play a role, the BLM is failing to address the main driver for degrading landscape health standards: overgrazing by domestic livestock.



PHOTO: BLM

The BLM must curtail the profound damage caused by overgrazing. This report provides concrete recommendations for the BLM to act on. Rangelands provide essential habitat and water quality protections that are becoming more critical with climate change.



Explore our interactive map and report, "Mapping the Range".

Supersonic Climate Debacle?

PEER is asking NASA to conduct a climate impact analysis of its major projects sponsored by its Aeronautics Research Mission Directorate.

Our concern is that NASA is spending taxpayer dollars in a partnership with Lockheed-Martin on developing supersonic aircraft that will only benefit a very small percentage of the population. Although supersonic air travel is significantly faster, it is far more fuel consumptive, burning 7 to 9 times more fuel per seat-km flown than the subsonic baseline.

When used for air travel, supersonic jets will cause greater transportation inequity and frustrate climate goals. (See page 5 for the full story).