

- WEBINAR -

# Environmental Protection, Public Service, and the Rise of Authoritarianism



**PEER**  
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES  
FOR ENVIRONMENTAL  
RESPONSIBILITY



**Environmental  
Protection Network**



**NEXT  
INTERIOR**





How can we be more effective in our work supporting public employees, the civil service, and the environment in a period of rising authoritarianism?



Tim Whitehouse, JD, Executive Director, PEER  
*Authoritarianism, the Civil Service and the Environment*



Joanna Citron Day, JD, General Counsel, PEER  
*The Rule of Law, Public Opinion, and Environmental Protection*



Peter Murchie, Sr. Dir. for Policy & Public Affairs, Environmental Protection Network  
*EPA's People and Mission Being Attacked*



Jacob Malcom, Executive Director, Next Interior  
*How Authoritarianism is Coming for Interior*



Kyla Bennett, PhD, JD, Director of Science Policy, PEER  
*What is Science and Why Does it Matter?*



Q&A



# About PEER: Protecting Public Employees Who Protect the Environment

- Protecting Whistleblowers
- Shining the Light
- Addressing Environmental, Public Health, and Public Lands Issues
- Improving Governance
- Building Networks



# Authoritarianism, the Civil Service and Environmental Protection

- We are in an authoritarian state
- Things will change rapidly in the coming months and years
- We will need to adjust and be nimble

## Trump carries out his 'flood the zone' strategy, creating a week of whiplash

FEBRUARY 7, 2025 - 5:00 AM ET

HEARD ON MORNING EDITION



Domenico Montanaro

## AFL-CIO President on Trump's First 100 Days: 'The Labor Movement Does Not Fall in Line for Autocrats'

## The US is transforming into a 1930s-style autocracy, says billionaire Ray Dalio

SEP 2, 2025



By Olesya Dmitracova



# The Civil Service

- Return of the Spoils System
- Crony Capitalism
- Open Corruption
- Conflicts of Interest
- The Rise of AI



Musk, Trump, Vance, Burgum, Zeldin, and Lutnik  
fired for failing their probationary period.  
This is what democracy should look like.



# Concluding Thoughts

- Environmental Challenges Are Real and Growing
- We can make a difference
  - Fight the spoils system – it will ruin democracy
  - Address corruption and the use of artificial intelligence
  - Governance issues must be part of the environmental movement
  - Demand Transparency
- Let us know what you think!





# The Rule of Law, Public Opinion, and Environmental Protection

- Rule of Law Essential
- Public Opinion Matters
- Need Federal Government for Environmental Protection





# PEER is Fighting for the Rule of Law by:


- Pushing Back against the Federal Government Purge
- Fighting for Science and Free Speech
- Working with Diverse groups to Protect Public Health





# Public Opinion Matters – How to Make an Impact

- Don't be Afraid of Difficult Conversations
- Listen and Find Partners
- Use Existing Tools
- Be Open to New Ones

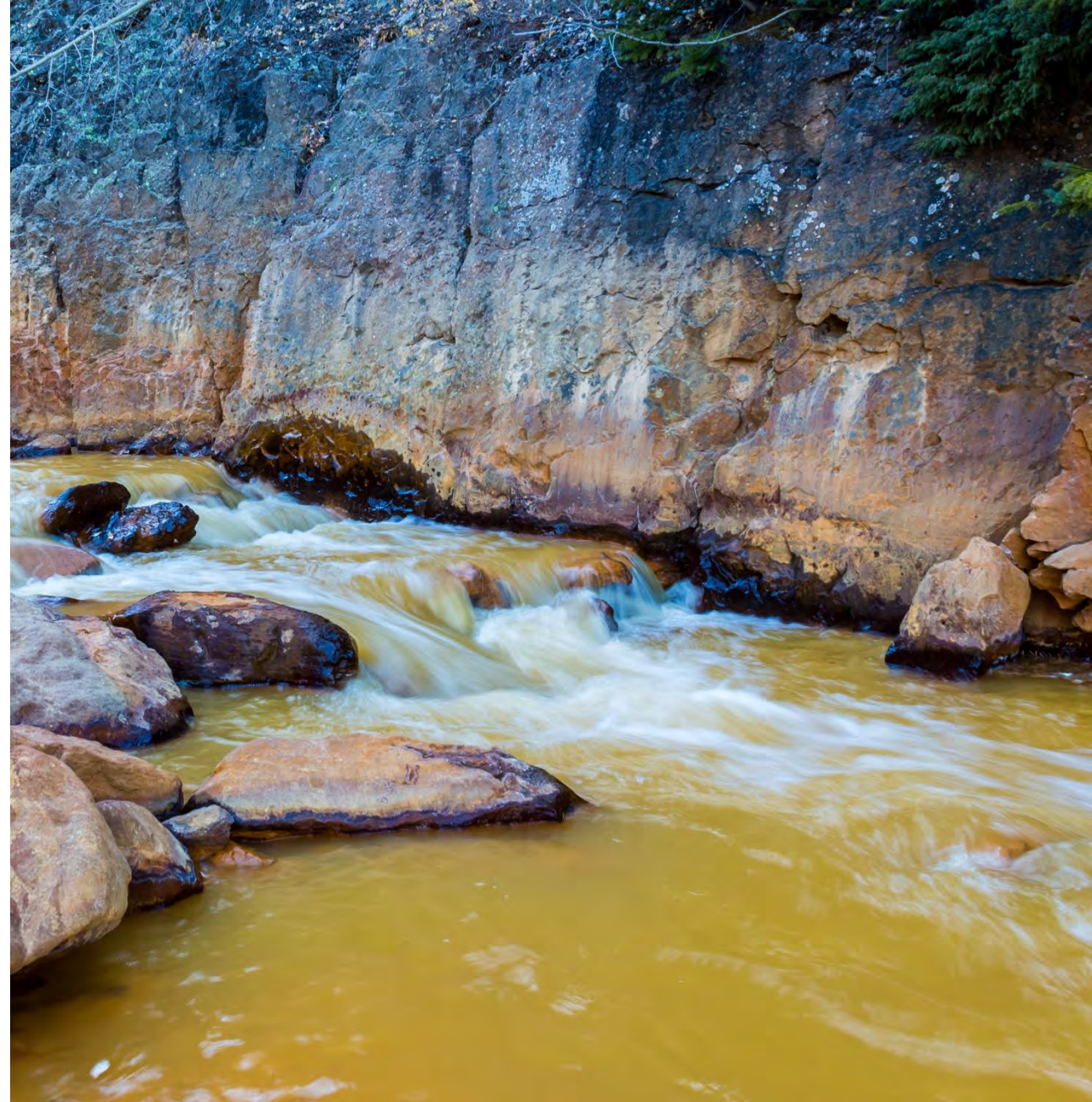


**Make  
Yourself  
Heard**



# Federal Government Matters

- Pollution Travels
- Federal Employees Protect Public Health, Environment, Public lands
- States Can't Do It All
- Attack Also Directed at States





# Take Action. Repeat.

- Dissent is More Important Than Ever
- If You are a Public Employee, Find Ways to Tell Your Story, but Be Smart
- We Need a Functional Federal Government and Federal Laws to Protect Public Health







# Environmental Protection Network

Founded in 2017, the Environmental Protection Network harnesses the expertise of more than 700 former EPA career staff and confirmation-level appointees from Democratic and Republican administrations to provide the unique perspective of former scientists and regulators with decades of historical and subject matter knowledge.

# EPN - Our Programs



- National Policy
- Civil Service Resilience Initiative
- Save EPA Campaign
- Safeguarding Funding
- Pro Bono Technical Assistance for Communities





# Promoting a Culture of Fear



- Using Threats and Fear Tactics
- Quickly Targeting DEI & EJ Staff
- Disproportionate & Egregious Response to Dissent
- Staff Monitoring and Sowing Dissention



# Serial Shutdown of EPA Functions and Mission



- Regulatory Rollback
- Diminished Oversight
- Weakened Enforcement
- Dismantling of Science





# Prioritization of Unqualified and Conflicted Appointees



- Subverting Political Appointee Processes
- Conflicts of Interest
- Advisory Boards & Committees
- Willful Disregard of Ethics and Scientific Integrity

# What EPN is Doing:



- Protect and Defend
- Ensuring Truth/Facts are Told
- Telling the EPA Story
- Documentation and Accountability
- Proactive Strategies and Partnerships





# EPN 2024 Voter Priorities Poll



**Voters overwhelmingly support a strong EPA to protect public health.**

- 76% of Trump voters oppose attempts to weaken EPA
- 81% of Trump voters want congress to increase EPA funding or keep funding steady
- 72% of Trump voters support increasing federal funding to communities disproportionately harmed by air and water pollution

Scan here to see the poll ↓







# Why Interior matters

- Largest land manager in the country: 1/5 US land base (plus OCS)
- Parks, wildlife, and public lands
- Water, energy, and minerals
- Science and data
- Trust and treaty obligations for Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians



# Example 1: Attacks on civil servants

## ***Mass Firing of Probationary Federal Employees Was Illegal, Judge Rules***

Months have passed since the lawsuit was filed, and many of the fired employees have moved on, the judge noted.

## **Court Issues Widescale Ban on RIFs, Reorganizations; Administration Appeals**

*Published: May 13, 2025*

*More in: Fedweek*

## **Labor unions sue OMB, OPM for 'unlawful' threats of mass layoffs ahead of shutdown**

The lawsuit comes after Russell Vought outlined reduction-in-force plans for a government shutdown.





## Example 2: Attacks on renewables



**Data show U.S. has no energy 'emergency,' despite Trump order directing agencies to fast-track fossil fuels**

## Example 3: Attacks on public lands

top EXCLUSIVE

### Trump officials consider shrinking 6 national monuments in the West

Interior Department officials are considering scaling back the boundaries of national monuments in the West to encourage energy development on public lands.

Politics

### Utah Sen. Mike Lee Says Selling Off Public Lands Will Solve the West's Housing Crisis. Past Sales Show Otherwise.







## Action matters: public lands

### Lee pulls federal land sales from megabill

Sen. Mike Lee's decision to withdraw his proposal removes a major headache for GOP leadership in both chambers as they look to advance their megabill.



# TAKE ACTION

- Be honest and have integrity
  - Practice kindness
- Support the Department of the Interior







# What is Science and Why Does it Matter?



Source: nist.gov

# What science is...

- Science is a body of knowledge, and the *process* of acquiring that knowledge.
- We engage in scientific endeavors not only for the sake of knowledge, but also for the sake of building a better world for everyone.

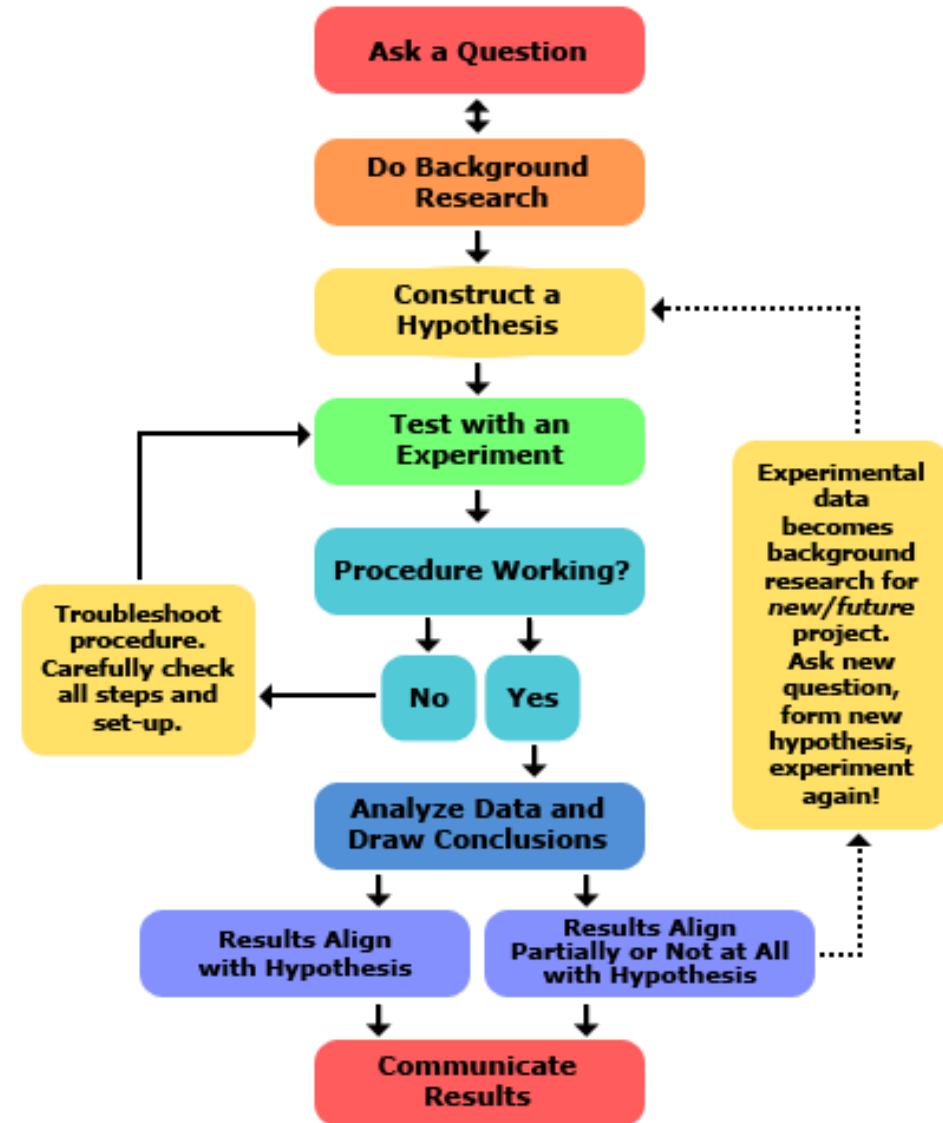


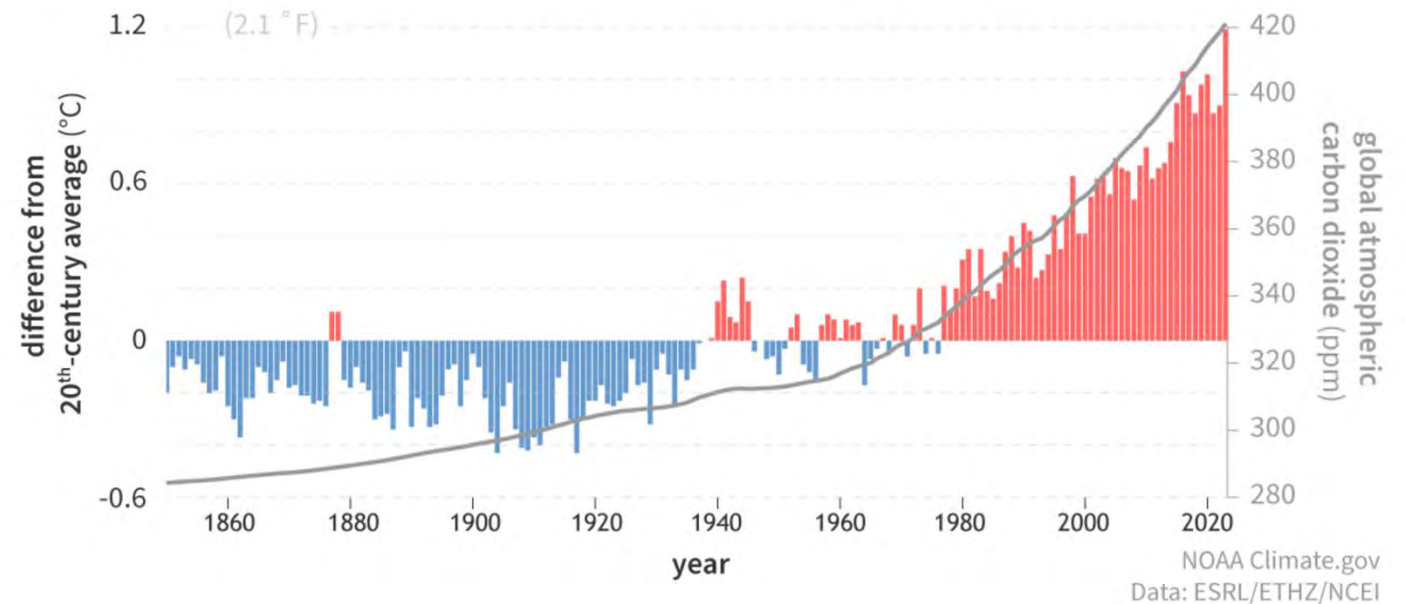
Image Credit: [created by Amy Cowen for Science Buddies / Science Buddies](#)



# What science is not...

- Science is *not*:
  - A belief system
  - Immutable
  - Debatable when it comes to *established* facts

Earth's surface temperature and atmospheric carbon dioxide (1850–2023)



# Science Under Authoritarianism

- Independent and government scientists silenced/fired
- Research, funding, and collaboration are controlled/eliminated
- Facts twisted
- Fake science is pushed
- Uncertainty is weaponized





# Repercussions of science under authoritarianism

- Public health and the environment are at risk
- No scientific integrity
- Brain drain
- Science becomes a tool to keep ruling party in power

## Hurricane Dorian Forecast Track and Intensity



# What can we do to protect science/scientists?

“CALIFORNIA WILL NOT BANKROLL SCHOOLS THAT SELL OUT THEIR STUDENTS, PROFESSORS, RESEARCHERS, AND SURRENDER ACADEMIC FREEDOM.” ~







## Keep in Mind That

- Much of the work done by federal scientists is behind the scenes
- The public does not understand how much federal scientists do that affect their everyday lives
- Lag time of adverse impacts
- This is the beginning – coalitions are crucial

- Don't give up, and don't allow established science to be debated
- Be vocal in support of science and scientists at all levels of government
- Join coalitions
- Take comfort in the fact that ultimately, science **will** win

**What you do makes a difference,**  
and you have to decide what  
kind of difference you  
want to make.

— *Jane Goodall*

AZ QUOTES





# Want to get further involved?



[PEER.org](https://www.pear.org)



[EnvironmentalProtectionNetwork.org](https://www.EnvironmentalProtectionNetwork.org)



[NextInterior.org](https://www.NextInterior.org)