



My family is about to take a road trip. Out our window we will see beaches, lakes, and a whole lot of public land that would be eligible to be sold off to developers and corporations under the recent version of a budget bill that Republicans want to rush through this week.

Welcome to The Drain, a weekly roundup of environmental and climate news. [Subscribe to the newsletter here.](#)

There are many unpopular ideas in the Republicans’ mega bill, known officially as the “One Big Beautiful Bill, but this particular proposal [mandates](#) the “disposal,” aka the sale, of up to 3.3 million acres of federally owned public land to “interested parties.” The potential sell-off could begin by fall, **Kevin Lind** [reports](#) at the Deseret News, and include land from 11 states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington and Wyoming.

You may have seen this widely shared [map](#) created by **The Wilderness Society** that [illustrates](#) the more than 250 million acres that fit the criteria to be eligible for sell-off. This includes local recreation areas, wilderness study areas, and critical wildlife habitat. In California, 10 million acres of land would be eligible, including large chunks of the Angeles,

Los Padres, San Bernardino, and Cleveland national forests, **Erin Stone** [reports](#) for LAist. Places like Castaic Lake Recreation Area, Frazier Park, Wheeler Springs, the Santa Ynez Mountains above Santa Barbara, the Sierra Madre Mountains between Santa Maria and the Cuyama Valley are all areas surrounded by tracts that could be on the auction block. And those are just the areas that my family will be passing through on our trip.

Utah Senator Mike Lee who is pushing the budget bill and this provision argued it would open land to build affordable housing, expand local sources of oil and gas, and help reduce the budget deficit. Lee called The Wilderness Society map “disinformation,” [telling](#) right-wing media the eligible areas are “garden variety land” and “vacant land where people can and should live.” That’s not true. Explore the map yourself.

I asked The Wilderness Society about Lee’s charge. “Our map uses the exact criteria included in the most recent publicly available draft of the Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee’s bill to identify the lands that are eligible for disposal, and our data and methodology are easily accessible on our website for anyone to review,” said **Michael Carroll**, BLM program director for The Wilderness Society, in an email on Monday.

But a funny thing happened on the way to the fire sale.

Late Monday night, the Senate Parliamentarian Elizabeth MacDonough advised senators that several provisions in the Republicans’ budget bill [violate](#) the so-called Byrd rule and would be subject to a 60-vote threshold if they remain in bill language — including the mandatory sale of public lands. They don’t have 60 votes for this stuff. And so late Monday night, Sen. Lee [posted on X](#) that he was removing Forest Service land and making other changes.

Tracy Stone-Manning, president of The Wilderness Society, cheered the news, saying “This is a victory for the American public, who were loud and clear: Public lands belong in public hands, for current and future generations alike. We trust the next politician who wants to sell off public lands will remember that people of all stripes will stand against that idea. Our public lands are not for sale.”

This is not the only provision in the reconciliation bill that the Senate Parliamentarian (a nonpartisan referee) says would violate Senate rules. Consider another part of the bill that actually seeks to senselessly waste more than a billion dollars of taxpayer money.

This provision would mandate the confiscation of 7,200 brand new EVs operated by the US Postal Service in order to sell them at auction, [reports](#) **Jacob Bogage** in a scoop for the

Washington Post. A few years ago, the USPS announced it was updating its aging fleet with mostly gas-powered vehicles. Advocates campaigned for cleaner vehicles to cut pollution, and California [led a lawsuit](#) by 16 states seeking to electrify the mail trucks. Then the Postal Service decided to electrify. California’s intervention “played a big part in stopping USPS from committing to decades of air pollution around the nation,” Liane Randolph, head of the state’s Air Resources Board, [said](#).

The new trucks won’t win any beauty contests, but they have started to get rave reviews for their safety and comfort features from the mail carriers who drive them. “I promise you, it felt like heaven blowing in my face,” postal worker Avis Stonum [told](#) the Associated Press of her first shift working in an air-conditioned EV truck.

Republicans want to take away these new vehicles, tear out the infrastructure, and sell it all for scrap. No, there’s not a second-hand market for thousands of mail trucks and dismantled charging systems, so this wouldn’t raise revenue. The Postal Service would lose \$1.5 Billion and struggle to deliver mail, USPS [said](#) this month.

This mail truck scheme is as pure an example as you’ll find of Republicans trying to replace good policy with nonsensical policy that wastes money simply to wage a culture war. But it looks now like mail carriers may get to keep those new trucks.

Again, Senate Parliamentarian MacDonough has [ruled](#) that this “disposal” of USPS vehicles violates the Byrd rule, which dictates provisions must truly be budget related. She ruled the same for sections that repeal statutory authorizations for Inflation Reduction Act programs, repeal EPA vehicle emissions rules, and amend the [National Environmental Policy Act](#) to streamline certain permitting processes. The [list](#) of no no’s is getting quite long.

The budget bill still slashes clean energy funding. Nuclear, hydropower, and geothermal win while solar and wind lose. It looks like what Secretary of Energy Chris Wright envisions for American energy, [writes](#) **Matthew Zeitlin** for Heatmap News. It’s also risky. When so much of the electricity generation pipeline is solar, wind, or storage, “cutting off their tax credits risks leaving the country at an energy shortage while gas turbines take years and years to actually get on the grid,” Zeitlin notes. If the Republicans pass a version that cuts clean energy funding, they will increase the average U.S. household energy costs by roughly \$270 to \$415 dollars per household per year in 2035, according to [estimates](#) by Yale’s **REPEAT Project**.



At least [10 Senate Republicans](#), including **Sen. John Curtis of Utah**, **Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska**, **Sen. Susan Collins of Maine** and **Sen. Thom Tillis** of North Carolina, have opposed or criticized the current version of the bill citing renewable energy and Medicaid cuts. North Carolina and the south in general have a lot to lose if Inflation Reduction Act credits are repealed. Utah’s Sen. Curtis argued in a [recent Deseret News op-ed](#), that the bill must not end all clean energy tax credits because “we simply cannot afford to treat good policy ideas as guilty by political association.”

I don’t know what will happen this week with the bill, or whether Republicans may try to make an end run around the Senate Parliamentarian’s rulings. But I do know that more Americans should know about these provisions. Many are not popular with voters. Recent polls from the [Washington Post](#), [Fox News](#), [KFF Health](#) and [Quinnipiac University](#) show that on average 55% of surveyed Americans opposed it, while 31% supported it. The bigger problem, as **Michael Thomas** [points out](#), is that 70% of Americans know nothing or little about the bill.



I also know that Democrats could be more creative in their opposition. Critics have labeled Trump’s “One Big Beautiful Bill” as a “big ugly bill,” but that type of lame one-liner doesn’t do it justice. This bill is a damn dirty deal. It’s a total swindle. It’s a gutless giveaway to robber barons. The most recent version would have auctioned off public lands and brand-new vehicles to extend tax cuts to the wealthiest Americans and score cheap political points while actually making energy more expensive. Advocacy groups like The Wilderness Society are finding some success reaching people with these dire messages. The bill still treats good policy as “guilty by association,” in the words of a Republican no less, and it fails to address the growing costs of the climate crisis that are making life less affordable for most Americans. If you hit the open road this week, look out the window and pay attention.

Here’s what else is going on. Scroll all the way down for good news...

National Parks etc.

The Senate bill provision mentioned above explicitly excludes national parks and monuments, and historic sites but that’s not the end of the story. Officials at the Trump DOJ have concluded that President Trump has the authority to entirely abolish protected areas set aside as national monuments by past presidents, according to a [legal opinion](#) released earlier this month, Jake Spring [reports](#) for WaPo.

Turns out that the administration is also [seeking](#) to cancel the leases for 34 National Park Service buildings, think visitor centers, law enforcement offices and museums that house millions of artifacts. But wait there’s more: LAT [reports](#) Trump has instructed the National Park Service to scrub any language he would deem negative, unpatriotic or smacking of “improper partisan ideology” from signs and presentations visitors encounter at national parks and historic sites.

Eric Katz at Government Executive [obtained](#) the first 200 submissions from park visitors to the National Park Service and they are mostly people imploring NPS *not* to censor history.

While they’re at it, the administration [plans](#) to repeal protections for nearly 60 million acres of designated roadless areas shut off to logging in national forests. That means more roads and timber harvesting. In California, the rule covers about 4.4 million acres across 21 national forests, including the Angeles, Tahoe, Inyo, Shasta-Trinity and Los Padres national forests, **Hayley Smith** [reports](#) at LAT.

Supreme Court

The US Supreme Court [sided](#) with fossil fuel producers, saying that they have standing to challenge California’s stringent vehicle emissions standards. The US Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit had dismissed the fuel makers’ claims. Justice Brett Kavanaugh wrote the opinions for the [7-2 court](#) on Friday that rejected the argument made by California and EPA that oil and ethanol fuel producers must produce more evidence — like affidavits from automakers themselves about the impact of invalidating California’s emissions standards — to prove standing.

Yes, the ruling comes a week after Trump signed stuff trying to revoke EPA waivers that allow California to enforce its emissions rules. But as **Alex Nieves** [points out](#) at Politico the decision “is still impactful, because it offers liquid fuels companies a clear path to fight any future clean cars rules.”

In a separate case, a unanimous Supreme Court “[raised the bar](#) for EPA to steer challenges over ozone pollution State Implementation Plans to its preferred venue, the US Court of Appeals for the D.C. Circuit,” [reports](#) Bloomberg Law. Only EPA actions where “justification of a nationwide breadth is the primary explanation” can be transferred to that forum, the justices said.

Climate Costs

In the 12-month period ending on May 1, the US spent \$1 trillion on disaster recovery and other climate, according to an [analysis](#) released last week by Bloomberg Intelligence. Much of the burden comes from rising insurance premiums, reports **Kate Aranoff** at The New Republic, noting that homeowners’ insurance rates have risen [more than 40 percent](#) in the last six years.

Now add the expensive disasters of disasters, like Hurricanes Helene and Milton (\$113

billion) and the Los Angeles firestorm (\$65 billion). By the way, Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem asked her staff to prepare a memo titled “Abolishing FEMA,” according to Bloomberg [which obtained](#) it.

Climate-fueled disasters are costing us way more than economists predicted just a few years ago, as **Ryan Cooper** [writes](#) (with his apologies) at The American Prospect.

“Wild how the Fed chair saying that *entire regions of the United States* won’t be able to get a mortgage in the next decade barely registered as a news event,” Aranoff pointed out in a [skeet](#) that had several thousand reshares on Bluesky.

California and Los Angeles



The Blue Ribbon Commission on Climate Action and Fire-Safe Recovery recently [released](#) its final recommendations for rebuilding more resiliently from the January firestorms. My colleague **Julia Stein** helped lead the UCLA research team that supported the independent commission. She has [a new blog post](#) explaining two of the big governance proposals included in the final report: A Resilient Rebuilding Authority and a new LA County Fire Control District.

Susanne Rust who covers single-use plastics and SB 54 for the Los Angeles Times incurred the wrath of Gov. Newsom and his press team by [writing](#) a story all about how most of the YouTube video recordings of Newsom’s new podcast, “This is Gavin Newsom,” feature a single-use plastic water bottle on a table nearby. It would not otherwise be news except that environmentalists are angry at the governor for trying to defang the landmark plastics law.

California Attorney General Rob Bonta last week co-led a coalition of 12 attorneys general in [issuing](#) a multistate guidance “affirming the necessity and legality of environmental justice initiatives.” Bonta’s office is hosting a community briefing about the guidance on July 22.

Waymo, the autonomous taxi company, is [expanding](#) its service area in LA and San Francisco. Here the service will cover more than [120 square miles](#) of Los Angeles County, stretching from Santa Monica to downtown and from West Hollywood to Inglewood. I’m curious how that will collide with the Santa Monica Waymo NIMBYs who’ve [been at war](#) with Waymo over the beep boop beep of their charging facility.

LA2028’s plan for moving people around during the Olympics hinges on a [\\$2-billion ask of the Trump administration](#) to lease 2,700 buses to join Metro’s fleet, **Colleen Shalby** [reports](#) for LAT. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy wrote LA officials a letter June 4 pledging that the US Department of Transportation “stands ready to help implement and offer technical assistance should the House and Senate advance legislation providing additional funding for mobility needs during the Games.”

Earthjustice announced last week it will tap **Adrian Martinez** as the director of the organization’s innovative [Right To Zero](#) campaign designed to drive city, state, and regional action to electrify the transportation, building, and industrial sectors.

Climate Litigation

The New York Times [ran a story](#) on how the oil industry has filed anti-SLAPP motions in one-third of the climate liability lawsuits they’re facing in US courts — “the latest tool the companies are using to try to persuade judges to dismiss or narrow individual cases before they get to a jury.” California’s lawsuit and Bonta’s response gets extra attention ahead of August arguments. Theodore J. Boutrous Jr. represents Chevron.

Speaking of which, a new [NYU Environmental Law Journal](#) titled “Representing Climate Wreckers” examines how professional responsibility rules and principles in the US should be interpreted when it comes to representing Big Oil and other so-called “climate wreckers” in civil matters. It argues that dominant approaches to attorney ethics are frustrating

private governance efforts to persuade attorneys to fulfill their duty to the rule of law by securing a transition away from fossil fuels.

Energy

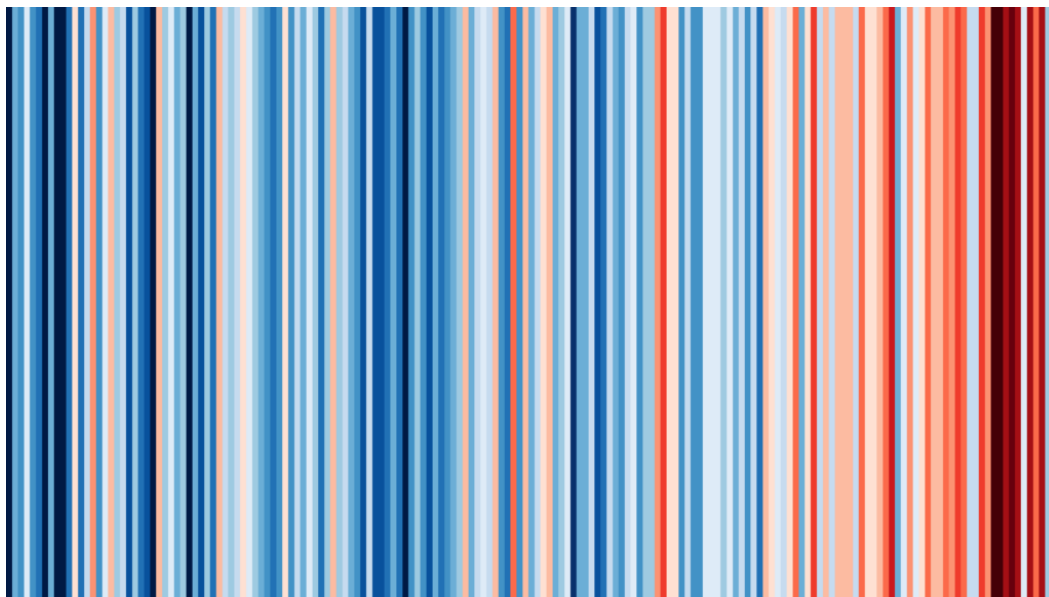
Businesses canceled \$1.4 billion in new clean energy projects and factories in May, according to E2’s [latest monthly analysis](#).

China’s amazing EV growth has the International Energy Agency now [predicting](#) that the country’s oil demand will peak in 2027. Despite that good news out of China, the IEA is sticking to its prediction that global demand will peak by 2029.

By contrast, BloombergNEF now predicts EVs will make up 27% of U.S. passenger vehicle sales in 2030, a severe cut from the 48% it estimated in last year’s report.

AI is estimated to increase data centers’ energy use from 4 to 12% by 2028, the Energy Department says, often by burning more natural gas. Relatedly, xAI, Elon Musk’s artificial intelligence company, is [facing a lawsuit by the NAACP](#) over air pollution from its supercomputer facility in Memphis, where xAI has been operating gas-burning turbines without the proper permits, the NAACP alleged.

Media Industry News



Social media and online video networks have officially overtaken TV news as the most

widely used source of news among Americans, according to a new [Reuters Institute report](#).

And in May, more Americans watched content on streaming platforms than on cable and network television combined, according to [Nielsen](#), which declares it is the first time that has happened over an entire month.

This Saturday saw a **#ShowYourStripes campaign**. The goal was to get people, businesses, and orgs to share the warming stripes representing their area of the world. 2024 was the warmest year on record globally. You’re likely familiar with these ‘warming stripe’ graphics? The mostly blue lines on the left give way to mostly red lines on the right. They visually represent the change in temperature as measured in each country, region or city over the past many decades. Above is Los Angeles, California. You can [create your own image](#), representing your county or region’s warming. The stripes were created by Professor **Ed Hawkins** at University of Reading.

LA Times Studios has [launched](#) “Rebuilding Los Angeles,” a weekly podcast and video podcast that will explore the region’s recovery from the Palisades and Eaton fires. It’s hosted by **Kate Cagle**, the Spectrum News anchor.

Climate scientist **Kate Marvel** has a new book “Human Nature” that explores climate science through emotions like anger, fear and pride. She [talks](#) with NPR about it.

Drilled Media now [has a YouTube channel](#)

Good news

A group of Indigenous youth is on a journey to descend the full length of the Klamath River, now that dams have been successfully removed. Their 300-mile trip south through Oregon and California will be the first of its kind in many decades. **John Branch** [profiles](#) the journey for the New York Times.

Renewables fulfilled 100% of California’s electricity demand for up to 10 hours on 98 of 116 days, a record for the Golden State. Those figures, gathered last year, were just published in a [study](#) in the journal Renewable Energy. “This study really finds that we can keep the grid stable with more and more renewables,” Stanford researcher and study author **Mark Z. Jacobson** [told](#) Grist.

Bans on plastic bag do work. A new study published Thursday in the journal Science [finds](#) that plastic bag policies lead to a 25-47% decrease in plastic bags as a share of total items

collected relative to areas without policies.

A majority of people surveyed support a global carbon tax — and are willing to pay it. That’s according to a survey of 40,680 people in 20 nations [published](#) in the journal Nature. Less good is the fact the policy was the least popular in the US, Grist [reports](#).

Vacation

As I mentioned at the outset, I’ll be on vacation next week, humming Woody Guthrie while we drive past public lands. The Drain will be back the second week of July. Please share it with anyone you think could use help managing the flood zone that is environmental and climate news.