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ENVIRONMENT

AMERICAN EMBASSY RESOURCE CENTER

OCTOBER 2006

IN BRIEF...

Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect U.S. government

Commercial Sources:

CAN A NEW KIND OF HEAT PUMP CHANGE THE WORLD?

Heat pumps -- refrigerant-based interior heating and cooling systems -- are widely used in the U.S. and other countries. About ten years ago, David Shaw, a retired refrigeration engineer, was shocked at a USD 400 electric bill one month for heating with an air-source heat pump; he set about developing a system that would provide heating even at sub-zero temperatures -- an innovation that the big U.S. manufacturers traditionally expressed little interest in researching. The key to his system was the addition of a secondary booster compressor and other devices to maximize heat absorption and extraction by the refrigerant.

AN ELEPHANT CRACKUP?

In the last couple of decades, across Africa, India and parts of Southeast Asia, elephants have been on a rampage, destroying villages and crops and attacking and killing humans. The author interviews researchers studying this disturbing phenomenon, who note that humans and elephants have lived in peace for centuries; they attribute this breakdown in elephant culture and social relations to decades of poaching, culling and habitat loss.

Government Sources:

U.S., European Environmental Policies Focus on Technology Advances

The United States and Europe enjoy significant common ground on environmental policies, Jim Connaughton, chief environmental policy adviser to President Bush, said in an online discussion from Frankfurt, Germany, October 23.
"We are working very closely with European policymakers on long-term technology opportunities such as fusion power, the next generation of nuclear power, and zero-emission hydrogen energy systems," Connaughton said.

U.S. Wildlife Agency Helps International Conservation

A census of elephant populations in Zimbabwe, equipment for scouts in a game management area in Zambia, and research on re-establishing a viable population of tigers in southwest China are just a few of the wildlife conservation projects around the world receiving support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

U.S. Agencies Measure Largest-Ever Ozone Hole in Antarctic

NASA and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) scientists report that this year's ozone hole in the polar region of the Southern Hemisphere has broken records for area and depth. The ozone layer protects life on Earth by blocking harmful ultraviolet rays from the sun. The ozone hole is a severe depletion of the ozone layer high above Antarctica caused mainly by human-produced compounds that release chlorine and bromine gases in the stratosphere.

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SEPTEMBER 2006

IN BRIEF...

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Commercial Sources:

COUGARS ON THE MOVE

The American mountain lion, the fourth largest cat in the world, has a range throughout much of the Western hemisphere, but they are such elusive creatures that their true numbers in the United States are unknown. For almost a century, lions have been spotted only in the mountainous Rocky Mountain and Western states, but now the big, roaming cats have been spotted farther east in isolated cases. Their spread is beginning to intensify the debate about whether the animal should be regarded as a threat to hikers and farmers, or as species deserving protection.

THE HEAT IS ON: A SURVEY OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Previous changes in the world's climate have been set off by variations either in the angle of the Earth's rotation or in its distance from the sun. This time there is another factor involved: man-made "greenhouse gases".
When the sun's energy hits the Earth, most of its bounces back into space. But carbon dioxide and around 30 other greenhouse gases, such as methane, help create a layer that traps some of the heat from the sun, thus warming the planet.

CAPTIVE WILDERNESS

Central Idaho is the least developed area in the United States outside of Alaska, and 2.4 million acres of it became the federal Frank Church--River of No Return Wilderness in 1980. Wilderness is supposed to be uninhabited, uncultivated, unspoiled terrain, and the area is recovering from past mining and ranching use. The Forest Service managers of the Frank are trying to balance personal and commercial hiking, camping and white-water rafting use with restoration and conservation of its natural systems.

Government Sources:

Antarctica Warmed in Past 150 Years, Scientists Say

Despite recent indications that Antarctica cooled considerably during the 1990s, new research suggests that the world's iciest continent gradually has been warming over the past 150 years

NASA Study Identifies Factors

A NASA-sponsored study shows that by using a new technique, scientists can determine what factors limit the growth of ocean algae, or phytoplankton, and how that growth affects Earth's climate.
Phytoplankton is a microscopic ocean plant and an important part of the ocean food chain. By knowing what factors limit its growth, scientists can better understand how ecosystems respond to climate change, according to an August 31 NASA press release.

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IN BRIEF... **AUGUST 2006**

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Commercial Sources:

GLOBAL WARMING "POINTS OF LIGHT"

Subtitled "The World Wakes Up to Climate Change", this series takes a regional look at successful country-level efforts to combat climate change. For example, the town of Hull, Massachusetts is investing in wind power while in Africa, Nigeria is ending gas flaring in the Niger Delta. Other countries include Domenica, Germany, Iceland, Spain, Sweden, Czech Republic, Estonia, Russia, China, India, Philippines, Kenya, Liberia, and Malawi. Each story comes with a contact for further information. Sidebars cover the trend at U.S. universities to switch to "green" power, a list of the ten "greenest" cities in the U.S. (with Chicago at the top), and a profile of the University of California-Davis Energy Efficiency Center, which tries to commercialize new energy technologies.

WADING IN WASTE

Rapid and poorly-planned development in recent years along coastal areas of the southeastern United States has resulted in increased pollution advisories and closures affecting beaches and shellfish beds. The author, an aquatic ecologist at the University of North Carolina, studies the effect of impervious surfaces such as roads, parking lots and rooftops on the health of tidal creeks.

Government Sources:

"Green Bus" tour Promotes Environmental Awareness

This summer, 12 students from Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire, embarked on an unusual summer road trip. They are traveling on the Big Green Bus, an old school bus that has been painted green and modified to run on waste vegetable oil. The purpose of the trip, according to their Web site, is to promote "the use of alternative energies through education and example … [and to] foster awareness about current global energy issues and create dialogue."

Toxic Chemical Releases in North America Continue to Decline

The amount of toxic chemicals released in North America continued to decline in 2003, according to a report released July 27 by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC). Canada, the United States and Mexico are parties to the CEC, which was created under the provisions of the North American Free Trade Agreement.

ELECTRONIC JOURNAL: Clean Energy Solutions

Projected dramatic increases in energy consumption in the coming decades, combined with a higher risk of climate change, require a massive global response based on technological innovation and the power of the marketplace.

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IN BRIEF... **JULY 2006**

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Commercial Sources:

RESCUING A PLANET UNDER STRESS

The Earth cannot sustain the levels of energy and resource consumption of the Western lifestyle if it is adopted by hundreds of millions of people in developing nations, writes the president of the Earth Policy Institute. The world must move toward a new economic model powered by renewable energy -- such as wind, solar, geothermal and biofuels -- and by a manufacturing strategy which designs and creates all products for ultimate recycling.

BRAVE NUCLEAR WORLD?

The article begins with a quick review of the ongoing health impacts of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster and then spotlights the serious concerns of several experts on the current oversight practices of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission in managing aging American nuclear power plants. New designs, such as the pressurized water reactor (PWR) and related configurations may not meet the safety claims of the manufacturers. Nuclear waste disposal is a problem without a ready solution, and reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel is complex and expensive, leaving more waste to manage.

Government Sources:

Scientists Explain Pollution, Clouds and Climate Interaction

Tiny bits of matter suspended in the atmosphere have a great influence on Earth's climate, and whether those particles are light or dark can lead to different climatic outcomes, U.S. and Israeli scientists reported July 13.

Heightened Carbon Emissions Could Disrupt Marine Ecosystems

Elevated levels of carbon dioxide emissions are affecting not only the atmosphere, but also oceans and sea life, according to a study issued July 5 by the National Center on Atmospheric Research (NCAR).

Electronic Journal - Clean Energy Solutions

Projected dramatic increases in energy consumption in the coming decades, combined with a higher risk of climate change, require a massive global response based on technological innovation and the power of the marketplace.

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IN BRIEF... JUNE 2006

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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY
JUNE 5, 2006
http://www.unep.org/wed/2006/english/

Commercial Sources:

CAN ORGANIC FARMING FEED US ALL?
For years, agricultural experts have argued that a widespread conversion to organic farming would result in lower crop yields and exacerbate the poverty of farmers in Third World countries. But, as Halweil proposes in this article, previous studies may have been based on faulty assumptions. Moreover, improved techniques that track world food production data indicate the economic viability of growing food without synthetic fertilizers and pesticides.

ANYTHING INTO OIL
Lemley detailed the thermal conversion process (formerly called the thermal depolymerization process) of using heat and pressure to convert waste materials into fuel oil and other recyclable materials in May 2003. Now he reports on the operation of the first commercial biorefinery in the world that can make oil from a variety of waste. This plant converts turkey slaughterhouse waste into fuel oil, high-grade fertilizer and water.
Future plans for the company include building plants in Europe to process beef slaughterhouse waste because it is expected that the process will destroy prions, the proteins that cause mad cow disease. The company has also demonstrated the process for automobile recyclers using their waste of plastics, fabrics, rubber and nylon that currently is dumped in landfills.

Government Sources:

United States, Paraguay Sign Pact To Conserve Paraguay's Forests
Grants intended to help conserve and restore tropical forest resources
The United States and Paraguay have concluded an agreement to reduce Paraguay's debt payments to the United States, according to the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Treasury Department. In separate, but identically worded, statements issued June 7, the two federal agencies explained that in return for the debt reduction, Paraguay will commit the equivalent funding over the next 12 years "to support grants to conserve and restore important tropical forest resources in the southern corridor of the Atlantic Forest of Alto Parana."

World's Deserts Are Threatened but Promising Ecosystems
U.N. Environment Program issues "landmark" survey of arid environs
Global climate change, water demands and human development all threaten deserts of the world, just as scientists are realizing the potential benefits these ecosystems might offer to humankind, according to *Global Deserts Outlook*, a report issued by the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) June 5.

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OUTREACH SERVICE
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MAY 2006

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IN BRIEF...

Commercial Sources:

THE DANGERS OF OCEAN ACIDIFICATION

Global warming and the rise of ocean levels has attracted a great deal of attention recently, but a lesser-known effect of mankind's burning of fossil fuels has been its effect on the acidity levels in the world's oceans. About half of all the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution has been absorbed by the ocean. The absorbed CO2 is turned into carbonic acid, and lowers the pH level, adversely affecting the ability of many forms of marine life, such as coral and shellfish, to build hard parts out of calcium carbonate.

OUR BROTHER'S KEEPER

The state of Idaho eliminated its last wolf in the 1930s; by that point, wolves had virtually disappeared throughout the continental U.S. Their comeback resulted from the 1973 Endangered Species Act, under which the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service captured wolves in Canada and reintroduced them in Idaho. This met with virulent opposition among anti-wolf groups, who did not want any government agency managing the wolves. The Indian Nez Perce tribe, however, developed a first-rate plan for managing the wolves, which involved radio monitoring, removing rogue animals that attacked livestock, and conducting seminars to allay fears of nervous citizens. Under the Nez Perce tribe's care, the new gray wolves have thrived, growing to a population of over 500 by mid-2005, up from the original 35 reintroduced animals.

Government Sources:

Pollution, Greenhouse Gases and Climate Clash in South Asia
Earth climate in delicate balance between natural, man-made forces

A new analysis by atmospheric scientists shows how air pollution, global climate change-producing gases and natural fluctuations in climate impact the world's most populous regions.
In a study funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF) and NASA, scientists Chul Eddy Chung and V. Ramanathan of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography in California describe their analysis of sea-surface temperatures and other data from the Indian Ocean region.

U.S. Environmental Agency Head To Visit Brussels, Paris
Talks to focus on joint work on pollution, environmental health

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Stephen Johnson is traveling to Brussels and Paris to further collaboration on environmental issues with European partners.
Johnson will continue to advance his goal of accelerating environmental protection while keeping the U.S. economically competitive. "Although newspaper headlines tend to focus on our differences," Johnson said, "the United States and Europe are joined by some of the strongest ties in the world"

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APRIL 2006

EARTH DAY
APRIL 22

http://www.american-embassy.pt/EarthDay.html

Views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect U.S. government

IN BRIEF...

Commercial Sources:

WHY GM IS GOOD FOR US; GENETICALLY MODIFIED FOODS MAY BE GREENER THAN ORGANIC ONES

Organic farmers have always boasted that their approach is naturally better for the environment than so-called conventional farming, writes Silver. This is false, he says. Genetic modification (GM), he explains, could help solve many environmental and health problems. Examples: GM pigs would reduce the phosphorous pollution problem currently plaguing countries with widespread dependence on pig farming. Examples: GM pigs would reduce the phosphorous pollution problem currently plaguing countries with widespread dependence on pig farming. More efficient crops produced with GM seeds would free up more land to return to the native ecosystem.

SAN FRANCISCO THEN AND NOW

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the 1906 earthquake in San Francisco. The article describes how the city recovered from one of the greatest natural disasters to strike the U.S., and the potential earthquake threats that lie ahead. The author, who studied earthquakes for 16 years at the U.S. Geological Survey, continues to monitor potential and real-time quakes.

Government Sources:

Earth Day Highlights Year-Round Eco-Friendly Activities
From space, to land, to Earth, Americans work to improve the environment

In parks, wetlands and forests, Americans will volunteer on Earth Day to pick-up trash, pull invasive weeds and perform a myriad of other tasks to help protect and improve the environment.
These activities are organized in a festive and celebratory way, but represent only a fraction of the work done day after day to protect the environment.

Wetlands Degradation Promotes Bird Flu, Study Finds
U.N. environment agency calls for restoration to reduce exposure opportunities

The threat of avian flu epidemics might be reduced if lost and degraded wetlands were restored to provide better habitat for disease-carrying migratory species and reduce their contact with domestic poultry.
The U.N. Environment Programme (UNEP) announced the findings of the study in Nairobi on April 11.

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IN BRIEF... MARCH 2006

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Commercial Sources:

AN ENERGY REVOLUTION

Zubrin, President of aerospace engineering and research firm Pioneer Astronautics, says energy independence can be achieved today if Congress would mandate car manufacturers produce flexible-fuel vehicles (FFVs), which use a mix of gasoline and methanol and/or ethanol. Zubrin writes that the technology already exists -- the problem is the lack of availability of high-alcohol fuel mixes at the pump, discouraging potential buyers of FFVs, and filling-station owners can't justify dedicating a pump to a fuel few will use. Mandating FFV standards would eliminate this stalemate, and initiate major changes in the global automobile industry, as foreign car manufacturers started producing FFVs for the U.S. market.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISEASE

This article reports that the regions of the Earth that have contributed least to global warming, most notably Africa, are the most vulnerable to its harmful effects. The article also explores the health dangers associated with climate change in cities and on coastal populations. Large cities experience "urban heat island effect," which can cause health problems. Coastal flooding as a result of storm surges will affect up to 200 million people by 2080. The highest risk coastlines are along the Pacific and Indian Oceans and in sub-Saharan Africa. The article also discusses the need of fast growing economies like China and India to develop sources of sustainable energy.

Government Sources:

NASA Survey Confirms Climate Effect on Polar Ice Sheets
Warming is changing amount of water in Earth's largest ice storehouses

In the most comprehensive survey ever undertaken of the massive ice sheets covering Greenland and Antarctica, NASA scientists confirm that climate warming is changing how much water remains locked in Earth's largest storehouses of ice and snow. This new survey is the first to inventory the losses of ice and the addition of new snow on both continents in a consistent and comprehensive way throughout an entire decade.

United States To Help Fund Amazon Basin Conservation Plan
Five-year USAID initiative intended to support Amazon's biodiversity

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) will provide an initial $50 million investment over the next five years – 2006 through 2010 -- in an initiative to help preserve the Amazon Basin's biodiversity. USAID's investment will support community groups, governmental entities and public and private organizations in the Amazon region to conserve the basin's "unique and globally important resources," the agency said in a March 2 statement, which also announced USAID had posted a "request for applications" from parties interested in obtaining grant money to participate in the Amazon Basin Conservation Initiative.

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IN BRIEF... FEBRUARY 2006

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Commercial Sources:

THE OUTLOOK ON OIL

The author notes that the age of cheap oil is over; global demand is soaring, and oil producers are struggling to keep up. World demand for oil is likely to grow 50 percent by 2025, yet Motavalli notes that some experts believe that global oil production may reach a peak in the near future and begin to decline, due to depletion. A debate is raging on whether the world has already reached an "oil peak" and that development of new oil sources will not keep pace with world energy requirements.

PROTECTING NEW ORLEANS

Millions of people worldwide live on river deltas that are vulnerable to flooding as human activity contributes to land sinking and sea levels rising. When Hurrican Katrina struck New Orleans in August of last year, levees (dikes) protecting the city failed during the storm surge, flooding wide areas of the city; loss of life and property was substantial. Plans are being developed to reconstruct and improve the levee system to protect from surges caused by category 5 storms, as well as restore coastal marshes that provide a natural buffer to hurricanes.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: WORKING TOWARD CLEAN, ABUNDANT, RELIABLE, AND AFFORDABLE ENERGY

The authors say worldwide energy use could grow by more than fifty percent -- with U.S. energy use expected to increase by a third -- in the next two decades. Increased global demand presents challenges to find new ways to increase energy efficiency, decrease carbon dioxide emissions, and replace aging electric grids that are growing increasingly vulnerable to power outages.

Government Sources:

Greenland Ice Loss Doubled in 10 Years, NASA Scientists Say

Warming climate, glacier melting are accelerating sea-level rise

Scientists at NASA and the University of Kansas say the loss of ice from Greenland doubled between 1996 and 2005, as its glaciers flowed faster into the ocean in response to a generally warmer climate.
The study, according to a February 16 NASA press release, concludes the changes to Greenland's glaciers in the past decade are widespread, large and sustained over time.

U.S. Study Finds There Is No Safe Level for Ozone

High ozone levels a growing concern for rapidly developing nations

A nationwide study sponsored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that even at very low levels, ozone -- the main ingredient in smog -- increases the risk of premature death. According to a February 16 Yale University press release, if a safe level for ozone exists, it is only at very low or natural levels and far below levels deemed acceptable by current U.S. and international regulations.

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IN BRIEF... JANUARY 2006

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Commercial Sources:

AN INTERVIEW WITH GUDMUNDUR EIRIKSSON

Eiriksson, former judge at the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea, discusses the achievements of the U.N. Conference on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), as well as challenges still to be resolved. He notes that a major accomplishment of the convention is the establishment of a 200-mile zone, in which countries have the right to set up protected waters, develop regional agreements to avoid marine pollution or regulate the release of materials into the sea from ships.

ENVIRONMENTAL TIPPING POINTS: A NEW SLANT ON STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENTALISM

Fishermen in the Philippines protecting reefs as fish nurseries, farmers in rural India revitalizing rainwater catch basins, and residents of New York City replacing trash-strewn lots with community gardens -- each a small change to correct a local problem. The results have been much larger -- more-sustainable environments, increased community cooperation, and brighter futures. The authors examine how these changes were tipping points that moved eco-social systems from destruction to sustainability.

SUNRISE FOR RENEWABLES?

Environmental concerns, higher energy prices, a desire for greater energy security and improved technologies are converging to create the best investing environment ever for renewable power, as renewables become more cost-competitive with conventional energy sources. Regulatory incentives such as taxes on carbon emissions or tax credits for renewables are impacting cost of use. Improved technologies such as larger wind turbines, simplified solar panel installation, "smart" meters that make it possible for power companies to charge more during peak hours, and new materials are providing new energy options that make renewables more competitive.

Government Sources:

Chengdu Panda Facility Teaches People About Endangered Species State's Zoellick calls panda symbol of U.S.-China conservation relationship

Facilities such as the Panda Research and Conservation Facility in Chengdu, China, help people throughout the world understand the importance of conserving endangered species such as giant pandas and preserving their habitats, according to U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick. Speaking to reporters at that facility January 25, Zoellick said giant pandas have been "a very practical symbol of the conservation relationship between the United States and China" for more than 30 years.

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IN BRIEF... DECEMBER 2005

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Commercial Sources:

AGRICULTURAL BIOTECHNOLOGY ADOPTION IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Qaim, an agricultural economist, says there are three main differences between agricultural biotechnology and previous crop technologies that influence availability and access to farmers. First, genetically modified (GM) crop developments are driven by the private sector, and therefore involve intellectual property rights (IPR). Second, GM crops are associated with new environmental and health risks that entail new and often cumbersome regulatory procedures at the national and international level. Third, GM traits can be incorporated into different varieties and adjusted to local conditions.

SUNRISE FOR RENEWABLES?

Environmental concerns, higher energy prices, a desire for greater energy security and improved technologies are converging to create the best investing environment ever for renewable power, as renewables become more cost-competitive with conventional energy sources. Regulatory incentives such as taxes on carbon emissions or tax credits for renewables are impacting cost of use. Improved technologies such as larger wind turbines, simplified solar panel installation, "smart" meters that make it possible for power companies to charge more during peak hours, and new materials are providing new energy options that make renewables more competitive.

Government Sources:

Census of Marine Life Finds New Species

International project creating unprecedented inventory of ocean life

The Census of Marine Life has collected almost 8.5 million records on more than 40,000 ocean species, and the 1,700 scientists involved are only halfway through the giant task they have undertaken. The Census of Marine Life issued a five-year progress report on the projected 10-year effort December 14, detailing some of the unexpected discoveries made by the scientists from more than 70 nations who are assembling the largest body of information ever accumulated on oceanic life forms.

U.S. Space Agency Responds to Coral Bleaching in the Caribbean

NASA's work is part of federal, international effort to assess bleaching

An interagency team led by the NASA space agency inspected coral reefs in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands in December to assess the possible damage from a "coral bleaching" event in the region.

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IN BRIEF... NOVEMBER 2005

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Commercial Sources:

GROUNDS FOR CHANGE: THE TEMPEST IN YOUR MORNING CUP

Globally, more than 500 billion cups of coffee are made each year. But the average consumer is scarcely aware that coffee production is the cause of widespread deforestation, loss of biodiversity, pollution and social ills -- but that it also has the potential to reverse these problems. About 30 years ago, many coffee farmers began converting to "technified" or "full-sun" production, which provides improved short-term yields of around 30 percent.

HOW SHOULD WE SET PRIORITIES?

Wayt Gibbs, senior writer for Scientific American, notes that the world faces no shortage of problems. The scientific community can help us understand which long-term problems need the most attention; however, even in advanced democracies, long-term planning and persistence is seldom rewarded, and the public attention span is usually limited to election cycles.

THE KILLER THAT MATTERS MOST

According to Roy Spencer, from University of Alabama, environmental and trade policies that benefit rich countries are obstacles to Africa's battle against poverty and disease. Global warming and diseases are best confronted by the technological advances that come with wealth, he explains, so the developed world needs to make overcoming poverty the most important criteria for achieving environmental goals.

Government Sources:

U.S. Announces $7 Million in Wildlife Conservation Grants
Wildlife Without Borders grants focus assistance in Latin America, Caribbean

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will award more than $7 million to other countries to help conserve wildlife, according to service's director, Dale Hall. In a November 29 press release, Hall explained that these funds represent a continuation of the U.S. commitment to international conservation efforts. "America has a rich tradition of taking a leadership role in supporting wildlife conservation globally," he said. The grants awarded through the service's Wildlife Without Borders-regional program will focus on Latin America and the Caribbean.

United States Marks 15 Years of Improving Air Quality
1990 changes in law result in cleaner air, better health, EPA says

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is celebrating the 15th anniversary of changes in U.S. law that have resulted in reduced emissions, cleaner air and better health. In 1990, the nation adopted broad changes to the Clean Air Act, including the creation of the Acid Rain Program. According to a November 15 EPA press release, that program has reduced sulfur dioxide emissions by 5 million tons and nitrogen oxides by 3 million tons from 1990 levels.

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IN BRIEF... OCTOBER 2005

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Commercial Sources:

CITIES OF THE FUTURE

The astounding urban growth in the last fifty years means that megacities are home to almost 3.2 billion people worldwide. The article describes how six superpopulated cities on different continents are facing the environmental, social and economic challenges created by concentrated population centers with local indigenous solutions. A companion article, CAN IMMIGRATION SAVE THE CITIES?, examines demographic shifts caused by increased immigration to the U.S.

MORE PROFIT WITH LESS CARBON

The author, co-founder of the Rocky Mountain Institute, notes that the energy sector of the global economy is woefully inefficient. Power plants, buildings, motor vehicles and consumer appliances waste huge amounts of energy, costing the businesses and consumers hundreds of billions of dollars. Lovins notes that if nothing is done, consumption of oil, gas and coal will continue to rise, adding to pollution and climate problems. Improvements in efficiency and use of renewable-energy sources would enable the U.S. to phase out oil use by the middle of the century, saving immense amounts of money.

SUSTAINING THE VARIETY OF LIFE

The authors, conservation ecologists at Duke University, write that the extinction rates of plants and animals today are now about 1000 times higher than the normal geological rate. They have identified 25 "hot spots" around the world -- areas that have lost large numbers of native plants and 70 percent of their vegetative cover -- that should be immediately protected, to preserve the largest number of species at the least cost, as well as the world's three remaining tropical forests. This article is one of a special series, CROSSROADS FOR PLANET EARTH, in the September issue of Scientific American.

Government Sources:

Satellites See Further Reduction in Arctic Sea Ice in 2005
Scientists are determining if decline is natural or human-influenced

Researchers from NASA, the National Snow and Ice Data Center in Colorado and others using satellite data have detected a significant loss in Arctic sea ice in 2005, according to a September 28 NASA press release. In September, the extent of sea ice dropped to 5.3 million square kilometers, the lowest yet recorded in the satellite record.

New Index Sets Benchmark for Atmospheric Greenhouse Gases
Tool provides better means to track annual changes in gas levels

Researchers at the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Climate Monitoring and Diagnosis Laboratory (CMDL) in Boulder, Colorado, have developed an index to help track the annual increase in greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.

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OUTREACH SERVICE

ENVIRONMENT

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IN BRIEF... **SEPTEMBER 2005**

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Commercial Sources:

BACK FROM THE BRINK

The recent reported sighting in a swamp forest in Arkansas of an ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird long believed to have been extinct, has given fresh hope to preservationists. The author writes that a surprising number of endangered-species stories in the U.S. have a happy ending, thanks largely to the Endangered Species Act (ESA), signed into law by President Nixon in 1973. The ESA's supporters decry efforts underway in Congress to weaken the law in favor of property development, noting that the ESA has been the key conservation law for 30 years. The article cites ten success stories of fauna and flora that have made a comeback since the passage of the ESA.

MAYORS OF THE WORLD SIGN URBAN ACCORDS

Leaders from many of the world's major cities have signed an international treaty that sets out 21 specific actions for sustainable, urban living. The declaration was signed by mayors from 50 cities, including Jakarta, Delhi, and Istanbul. The event concluded the 2005 United Nations World Environment Day Conference held in San Francisco in June.

Government Sources:

U.S. Agency To Study Effects of Hurricane Katrina on Ecosystem

Biologists will examine marine resources, toxic contaminants

A National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) research vessel is working off the coasts of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama to study the effects of Hurricane Katrina on marine resources and the ecosystem.

According to a September 13 NOAA press release, biologists will take water samples and examine sediments in the Mississippi River during the cruise.

Tropical Deforestation Affects Rainfall Across Globe, Study Says

Land-cover changes can help slow or speed greenhouse warming

A new study is offering insight into long-term impacts of changes caused by human development, particularly the effects on the global climate of large-scale deforestation in tropical regions.

Researchers from Duke University in North Carolina analyzed years of data using the NASA General Circulation Computer Model and Global Precipitation Climatology Project to produce several climate simulations.

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IN BRIEF... AUGUST 2005

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Commercial Sources:

FUELING THE DRAGON

Kriz, National Journal staff writer on the environment, explores the political implications of the dramatic increase in China's energy consumption. She notes that acid rain from China's coal-burning plants has triggered diplomatic tensions with downwind Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea.

CAN WE BURY GLOBAL WARMING?

The carbon dioxide (CO2) levels in the atmosphere are rising and the atmosphere is warming, but scientists do not know the long-term effects of these changes. Industrial plants producing hydrogen or purifying natural gas generate concentrated streams of CO2, and such facilities are considering capture-and-storage as well.

E-GAD!

At least 60 million personal computers are already buried in U.S. garbage dumps, and about 250 million more are expected to become obsolete in the next few years. Approximately 100 million cell phones are discarded in the U.S. each year, many of which also wind up in landfills. Action is urgently needed, the author writes, as ever-increasing amounts of heavy metals from electronic equipment poison the air and contaminate landfills and groundwater in the U.S. and abroad.

Government Sources:

An iceberg melts near the arctic circle in Greenland, August 16, 2005.

Arctic Ocean Could Be Ice-Free During Summer in 100 Years

Current warming trends in the Arctic might push the Arctic system into a seasonally ice-free state not seen for more than 1 million years, according to a new report announced in an August 23 University of Arizona (UA) press release. The melting is accelerating, and a team of U.S. and Canadian researchers, during a meeting funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), could not identify natural processes that might slow the Arctic de-icing.

Climate Model Links Warm Temperatures to Greatest Extinction

Scientists at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado have created a computer simulation showing Earth's climate in unprecedented detail at the time of the greatest mass extinction in history. According to an August 24 press release from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), the work supports a theory that an abrupt and dramatic rise in atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide triggered the massive die-off at the end of the Permian Era, 251 million years ago.

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IN BRIEF... JULY 2005

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Commercial Sources:

FOUND: ONE $10 MILLION BIRD

In 1944, the ivory-billed woodpecker (Campephilus principalis) vanished from the real world: It was believed to have gone extinct after its forested wetland habitat had all but disappeared, fragmented by deforestation and filled in for farmland. So when a kayaker spotted the big bird in eastern Arkansas' Cache River National Wildlife Refuge last year, scientists and conservationists were ecstatic. In late April this year, the search team, led by Cornell University ornithologist John Fitzpatrick, publicly announced they had indeed found at least one ivory-billed woodpecker, and the US Department of Interior and the Department of Agriculture pledged $10 million to aid the bird's survival.

CLEANER FUELS FOR DELHI AND BASEL

In an April 2005 article titled "Partnerships for Sustainable Mobility: The Pilot Region of Basel," the authors provide another piece of critical evidence in understanding how disparate countries are managing the transition to cleaner fuels for use in urban transportation. This careful exposition of the experience of Basel, Switzerland, offers an opportunity for further illumination of the New Delhi experience. Bell discusses the differences of the economic situations of the two countries--and the expectations of their people--in managing their transition to cleaner fuels.

CREATING EFFECTIVE MESSAGES ABOUT ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention supported research coordinated by the Association of Environmental Health Academic Programs (AEHAP) for the purpose of developing effective messages about environmental health. The purpose of these messages would be to increase the visibility of the environmental health profession and improve the public's awareness and understanding of the role played by the profession in protecting the public's health. To accomplish this task, AEHAP first collaborated with a marketing team to develop initial test messages. The core message revolved around five major themes: effects of pollution, susceptible populations, economics and prevention, homeland security, and specific environmental health issues.

Government Sources:

U.S. Program Helps Villagers in Fiji Conserve Coral Reefs
Project links environmental protection, medical research, economic development

A project funded by the Fogarty International Center of the U.S. National Institutes of Health is helping coastal villagers in the South Pacific Fiji islands reap financial benefits from conserving their tropical environment.

A July 19 press release from the Georgia Institute of Technology (Georgia Tech) describes an effort that combines environmental conservation, economic development and drug discovery research.

Collapsed Antarctic Ice Shelf Reveals Unknown Ecosystem
Discovery could aid in study of possible ocean on Jupiter moon Europa

Discovery of a vast ecosystem under the Larsen Ice Shelf will let scientists explore the uncharted life below Antarctica's floating ice and probe the origins of life in extreme environments.

According to a July 18 press release from the American Geophysical Union (AGU), researchers funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation discovered the sunless habitat after a recent underwater video study.

U.N. Removes National Park in Ecuador From List of Endangered Sites
Improved conditions prompt similar actions in Mali and Albania

Improved conditions have prompted a U.N. scientific and cultural agency to remove a national park in Ecuador from its list of sites around the world considered at environmental risk.

In a July 13 statement, the U.N. Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said Ecuador's Sangay National Park has been removed from its endangered list because of a sharp reduction in human activity at the park.

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IN BRIEF... JUNE 2005

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Commercial Sources:

MARK OF SUSTAINABILITY? CHALLENGES FOR FISHERY AND FORESTRY ECOLABELING

"Eco-labels" on food items and other materials were meant to increase consumers' choices and to motivate producers to adopt sustainable practices by rewarding them with a "certified" -- and potentially more lucrative -- brand. But has the use of such labels produced positive environmental impacts in farming, fishing, forestry, and other industries? The author, focusing on forestry and fishing, provides an historical overview of how eco-labeling developed and explores issues such as auditing, standards, supply-chain tracking and enforcement. He also describes the emergence of nongovernmental organizations as players in the certification structure. This extensively referenced article features comparison charts of international certification programs, case studies, and descriptions of international eco-certification laws.

METAL ATTRACTION: AN IRONCLOAD SOLUTION TO ARSENIC CONTAMINATION?

Inorganic arsenic-the more acutely toxic form of this metalloid element-contaminates drinking water supplies around the world. In the United States, the most serious arsenic contamination occurs in the West, Midwest, Southwest, and Northeast; as many as 20 million people-many getting their water from unregulated private wells-may be exposed to excess arsenic in their drinking water. In Bangladesh, it's estimated that as many as 40 million people may be suffering from arsenic poisoning; contaminated drinking water is also a problem in many other countries, including Argentina, China, Chile, Ghana, Hungary, India, and Mexico.

FIRE IN THE HOLE

Across the globe, thousands of coal fires are burning. Nearly impossible to reach and extinguish once they get started, the underground blazes threaten towns and roads, poison the air and soil and, some say, worsen global warming. The article assesses the efforts by local governments and international geology specialists to contain the fires, and examines the difficulties faced by residents in communities near some of these long-burning conflagrations.

Government Sources

Environment and Conservation

An expanding global population, rapid conversion of critical habitat to other uses, and the spread of invasive species to non-native habitats pose a serious threat to the world's natural resources and to all of us who depend on them for food, fuel, shelter and medicine. Policies that distort markets and provide incentives for unsustainable development intensify the problem. Every year, there is a net loss of 22 million acres of forest area worldwide. Every year, toxic chemicals, some capable of traveling thousands of miles from their source and lasting decades in the environment, are released into the earth's atmosphere.

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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY – June 5

IN BRIEF...

Commercial Sources:

EARTHQUAKE RISK FROM CO-SEISMIC STRESS

After the massive loss of life caused by the December 2004 Sumatra earthquake and tsunami in Indonesia, the possibility of a triggered earthquake on a nearby subduction (a geologic process in which the edge of one crustal plate is forced below the edge of another) zone is a real concern. The authors -- at the University of Ulster School of Environmental Sciences in the United Kingdom -- calculated the amount of post-earthquake stress on this zone and on another nearby fault, and found that an increase in stress on both structures significantly boosts the existing and considerable earthquake hazard. Considering past activity and the observed structural complexity on the northern Sumatra fault, which generated the December earthquake, they said an earthquake of magnitude 7 to 7.5 on this structure seems to represent the greatest immediate threat. The authors recommended establishing a tsunami warning system in the area as soon as possible.

RUSSIA'S PROPOSAL FOR A GLOBAL NUCLEAR WASTE REPOSITORY: SAFE, SECURE, AND ENVIRONMENTALLY JUST?

With more than 440 nuclear reactors currently functioning around the globe, the waste problem that has long plagued the nuclear energy industry is becoming ever more acute. After several years of hinting about Russian interest in the construction of a permanent geologic repository and all the money-making possibilities that would accompany such a plan, the head of Russia's Federal Agency for Atomic Energy, Alexander Rumyantsev, publicly came out in favor of such a facility in June 2004.

A SYSTEM OF SYSTEMS

Holton relates that the third Earth Observation Summit held in Brussels this past Feb 2005 had formally inaugurated the 10-year Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS) endeavor to monitor the world's environment, including a tsunami detection network. GEOSS was sparked in large measure by Conrad Lautenbacher Jr, US undersecretary of commerce for oceans and atmosphere and administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. His original goal was to improve studies of climate change, which he saw as handicapped by researchers' need to compete for grants, public results, and move on, without a way of capturing what is going on over the long term.

Government Sources:

Mayors from 60 Countries to Mark World Environment Day June 5

"Green Cities" theme of celebration to be held in San Francisco

A Brazilian mayor whose city has been called the "cleanest in the world," a mayor from the United Kingdom where a fee to ease traffic congestion is being pioneered, and a mayor from China who is grappling with one of the world's fastest-growing urban areas -- will converge on San Francisco June 1-5 for a variety of activities associated with the observance of the U.N. Environment Programme's (UNEP) World Environment Day. orld Environment Day, commemorated on June 5 each year, was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1972. The 2005 theme is "Green Cities -- Plan for the Planet."

United States Submits Greenhouse Gas Inventory to United Nations

41 countries submit annual reports on quantities arising from human activities

The U.S. Department of State submitted to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) April 27 an inventory produced by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) of greenhouse gases in the United States that are directly attributable to human activities. The annual report, *Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2003,* includes emissions and sinks – places in the environment where greenhouse gases collect. The inventory gives information about greenhouse gases, quantifies how much of each gas was emitted into the atmosphere and describes some of their environmental effects.

Bird Believed to be Extinct Rediscovered in Arkansas

U.S. agencies work to restore habitat for Ivory-billed woodpecker

The U.S. government is launching a program of cooperative conservation in response to the rediscovery of the ivory-billed woodpecker, a bird native to the United States thought to have become extinct more than 60 years ago. A yearlong research effort has produced reliable evidence that this woodpecker – the largest of its variety in the United States and second largest in the world – does survive in the Cache River National Wildlife Refuge in the state of Arkansas. The evidence has withstood peer review and is being published in the journal *Science*.

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APRIL 2005

APRIL 22 - EARTH DAY: "Protecting our Children's Health and our Future"

Despite the extraordinary and often false obstacles that we face in our efforts to protect our natural resources and our biodiversity, few will dare argue with the moral imperative to protect our children from harm. As a consequence of that imperative, we call on governments, corporations, faith-based organizations, and all people in our troubled world to work with us to ensure that children everywhere are healthy, educated, and free from oppression…

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Commercial Sources:

WHAT IS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT? GOALS, INDICATORS, VALUES AND PRACTICE

Since the term "sustainable development" was coined, a core set of guiding principles and values has evolved around it. However, its definition remains fluid, allowing institutions, programs of environment and development, and places from local to global to project their own aspirations onto the banner of sustainable development.

OUR PREFERRED POISON

Mercury occurs throughout the world and is used in products such as dental fillings, pesticides, vaccines, thermometers and batteries. It is released by many industrial processes and coal-fired power plants and accumulates in fish. It can be very toxic to humans, depending on its form and route of exposure. Some studies suggest low levels of exposure may cause cell damage associated with learning difficulties in children and heart disease in adults, and there may be a link to other diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, multiple sclerosis, and autism.

FUTURE SHOCKS: MODERN SCIENCE, ANCIENT CATASTROPHES, AND THE ENDLESS QUEST TO PREDICT EARTHQUAKES

The combined findings and calculations of U.S. and Japanese researchers have proven than a devastating tsunami swept ashore in what is now the Pacific Northwest state of Washington in January 1700. The discoveries of paleoseismologists -- those who study earthquakes of the past -- are shedding new light on the risks that the region faces for future earthquakes and tsunamis, and the devastation that could come with them.

MONITORING ELUSIVE MAMMALS

Camera traps provide direct proof of elusive mammals, their habitat and population, and help scientists identify the species and their probability of endangerment. When the Convention on Biological Diversity was ratified in 1992, a program was initiated called Tropical, Ecology, Assessment and Monitoring, or TEAM. The goal of TEAM is to set up research centers around the world, installing cameras in high-habitation regions to record mammals in their environment.

Government Sources:

International Scientists Assess Health of Global Environment

Basic necessities rapidly being degraded worldwide, report finds

An international group of scientists has evaluated the status of all Earth's ecosystems for the first time, and "the outlook is troubling," according to a March 28 Stanford University press release. More than 2,000 scientists from 95 countries participated in the assessment and concluded that the environmental benefits that human societies depend on and take for granted -- necessities such as food, clean air, potable water and fuel -- are rapidly being degraded.

Atmospheric Soot Might Cause Arctic Warming, NASA Finds

Black carbon particles travel north, causing snowmelt

Acceleration of snow and sea-ice melting and warming temperatures in the Arctic might be caused by particles of soot, according to new findings from NASA. The latest findings are the result of ongoing work in which the space agency uses satellite data and computer models to study how the Arctic climate is affected by soot particles traveling on wind currents from populated regions.

U.S. Climate-Change Scientists Win World Prize

Tyler Prize honors "founding fathers of climate change research"

Two U.S. scientists whose work has been fundamental to the current understanding of climate-change science have won the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, one of the world's most prestigious awards in this field. Charles David Keeling, a professor at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, was recognized for his measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide concentrations that generated the data supporting the greenhouse-effect theory. Lonnie G. Thompson, professor of geology at Ohio State University, won the award for his examination of the ancient trapped gases encased in glaciers in the world's tropical regions.

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MARCH 2005

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Commercial Sources:

How did Humans first Alter global Climate?
Conventional wisdom has it that the start of the industrial era set global warming in motion. Ruddiman, marine geologist and professor emeritus of environmental sciences, University of Virginia, offers his provocative and controversial hypothesis that human-induced global warming began thousands of years earlier.

The irony of climate
While scientists debate on the pace and effects of global warming and climate change, the author notes that farmers around the world are already dealing with increasing erratic weather, previously unknown pests, desertification, more severe storms and altered growing seasons.

Government Sources:

Bush Nominates Johnson to Head Environment Protection Agency
Would become first scientist to lead EPA
President Bush nominated Stephen Johnson to be administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), describing him as a "talented scientist and skilled manager with a lifelong commitment to environmental stewardship."

Interior Secretary Addresses U.S. Coral Reef Task Force
U.S. agencies support imperiled coral reef ecosystems worldwide
Addressing the 13th meeting of the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, Interior Secretary Gale Norton commended the work of federal and state agencies to protect coral reefs, and emphasized the importance of continuing to build partnerships to protect the fragile ecosystems from destruction.

NASA Satellite Shows Ocean Plants Increasing Along Coasts
Phytoplankton help regulate atmosphere, health of ocean ecosystems
NASA researchers have used NASA satellite data from 1998-2003 to show that amounts of tiny free-floating ocean plants called phytoplankton have increased globally by more than 4 percent, mainly along coasts.

World Day for Water 2005
World Water Day (WWD) 2005 will be guided by the upcoming water decade's theme "Water for Life". It will be the starting day for this International Decade for Action, "Water for Life" 2005 - 2015, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly in its resolution A/RES/58/217

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