

STAFF SUMMARY FOR JUNE 21-22, 2017

20C. OTHER INFORMATIONAL ITEMS – FEDERAL AGENCIES REPORT**Today's Item****Information** ☒**Action** ☐

Standing agenda item to receive reports on any recent federal agency activities of interest not otherwise addressed under other agenda items.

Summary of Previous/Future Actions (N/A)

New Administration: As of Jun 12, 2017, appointments had not yet been made for the NOAA administrator or assistant administrator for fisheries (National Marine Fisheries Service), director of the National Park Service, or director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): The U.S. experienced the 8th warmest and 11th wettest spring on record, while the slightly warmer-than-average May makes the country's year-to-date temperatures the 2nd warmest in recorded history, at 4.7 degrees above the 20th-Century average (Exhibit 1).

U.S. Secretary for Interior: On May 1, Secretary Zinke signed two secretarial orders, one to direct development of a new five-year outer continental shelf oil and gas leasing program to spur offshore energy development, and the other establishing the position of counselor to the secretary for energy policy (Exhibit 2).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Millions of acres of public lands are being overrun with illegal marijuana growing operations, leading to degraded habitat and toxic trash that directly leads to wildlife deaths and threats to local water supplies (Exhibit 3).

Significant Public Comments (N/A)**Recommendation (N/A)****Exhibits**

1. [NOAA news release: U.S. had the 8th warmest, 11th wettest spring on record, dated Jun 7, 2017](#)
2. [DOI news release: Secretary Zinke Signs Orders Implementing America-First Offshore Energy Strategy, dated May 1, 2017](#)
3. [USFWS news release: Illegal marijuana grow sites: A stain on public lands, dated Jun 6, 2017](#)

Motion/Direction (N/A)



National Oceanic and Atmospheric
Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

U.S. had 8th warmest, 11th wettest spring on record

Slightly warmer-than-average May puts year to date at 2nd warmest

Climate | climate analyses and statistics | spring

June 7, 2017 — The month of May typically signals both an ending and a beginning: The waning days of spring and then the time-honored leap into summer vacation season.



Before we throw on our bathing suits and flip flops, let's first take a look back at how last month, spring and the year to date fared in terms of the climate record:

Climate by the numbers

May

Last month, the average contiguous U.S. temperature was 60.6 degrees F — 0.4 degrees above the 20th-century average — ranking near the middle of the 123-year period of record. Parts of the West and Southeast were warmer than average with near- to below-average temperatures in parts of the Central and Eastern U.S., according to scientists from NOAA's National Centers for Environmental Information.

The average precipitation total for May was 3.31 inches, 0.40 inch above the 20th-century average and tying with 2009 as the 25th wettest on record. Above-average precipitation fell across most of the East and parts of the Rockies and Great Plains.

Spring

The average spring (March-May 2017) temperature across the contiguous U.S. was 53.5 degrees F, 2.6 degrees above average, making it the 8th warmest spring on record. From the Rockies to East Coast, most of the seasonal warmth occurred during the early and middle parts of spring.

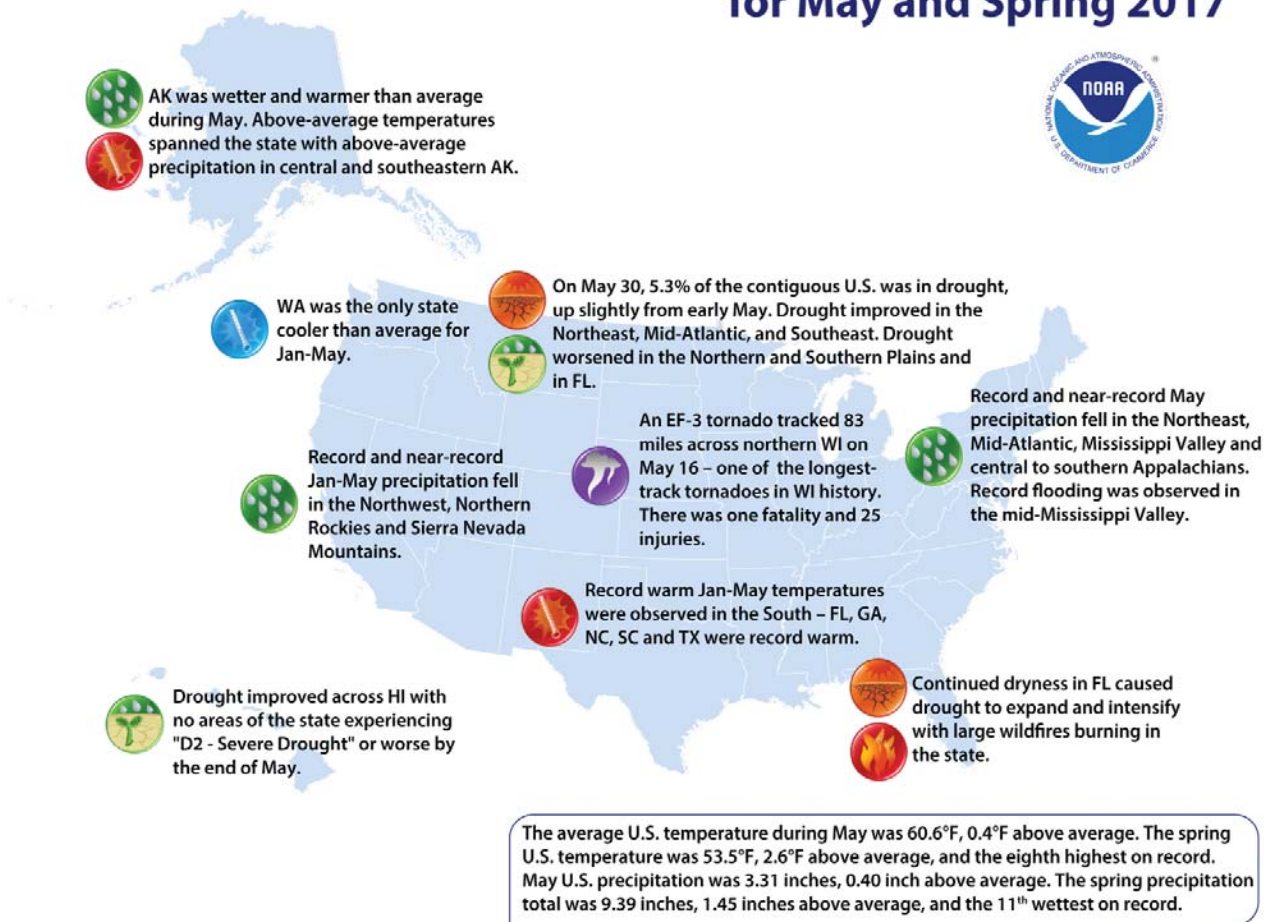
The average spring precipitation total was 9.39 inches, 1.45 inches above average, making this spring the 11th wettest on record.

Year to date

The year to date (January through May 2017) average temperature for the contiguous U.S. was 47.0 degrees F, 3.7 degrees above the 20th-century average. This YTD period was the second-warmest on record for this period.

The YTD precipitation total was 14.85 inches, 2.46 inches above average, making it the third-wettest January-May on record.

U.S. Selected Significant Climate Anomalies and Events for May and Spring 2017



Please Note: Material provided in this map was compiled from NOAA's State of the Climate Reports. For more information please visit: <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/sotc>

A map of significant climate events that occurred in the U.S. during May and Spring 2017. (NOAA)

Other notable climate events and facts included:

- **Record rains in the U.S. East, South:** Record and near-record May precipitation fell in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Mississippi Valley and central to southern Appalachians. Record flooding was observed in the mid-Mississippi Valley.
- **Florida remains tinder dry:** Continued dryness in Florida caused drought to expand and intensify, prompting large wildfires across central and northern areas of the Sunshine State.
- **A record-breaking Wisconsin tornado:** An EF-3 tornado tracked 83 miles across northern Wisconsin on May 16 resulting in one fatality and 25 injuries. This was one of the longest-track tornadoes in the state's history.
- **Continued drought relief:** On May 30, 5.3 percent of the contiguous U.S. was in drought, up slightly from early May. Drought improved in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic and Southeast. Drought worsened in the Northern and Southern Plains and in Florida.
- **Washington State had a cool start to year:** Washington was the only state cooler than average for January to May.

- **Coastal flooding events rose markedly last year:** An update to [NOAA's annual report of high-tide flooding](#) (sometimes referred to as nuisance flooding) found that among most of the cities studied, flooding increased in 2016 by 130 percent on average since the mid-1990s and continues to accelerate.

Find [NOAA's report and download images](#) by visiting the NCEI website.

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OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

U.S. Department
of the Interior

www.doi.gov

News Release

Date: May 1, 2017

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Secretary Zinke Signs Orders Implementing America-First Offshore Energy Strategy

Directs Development of New Five-Year Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program to Spur Safe and Responsible Energy Development Offshore

HOUSTON — On the stage of the Offshore Technology Conference, flanked by men and women who work on offshore oil and gas platforms, Secretary of the Department of the Interior Ryan Zinke today signed two secretarial orders aimed at unleashing America's offshore energy potential and growing the U.S. economy. The first order implements President Trump's Executive Order signed Friday and directs the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) to develop a new five-year plan for oil and gas exploration in offshore waters and reconsider a number of regulations governing those activities. The second order establishes a new position – Counselor to the Secretary for Energy Policy – to coordinate the Interior Department's energy portfolio that spans nine of the Department's ten bureaus.

"Following through on the leadership established by President Trump, today's orders will help cement our Nation's position as a global energy leader and foster energy independence and security for the benefit of the American people, while ensuring that this development is safe and environmentally responsible," Secretary Zinke told industry representatives at the annual Offshore Technology Conference in Houston. "We will conduct a thorough review of the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS) for oil and gas exploration and listen to state and local stakeholders. We also will conduct a thorough review of regulations that were created with good intentions but have had harmful impacts on America's energy security."



Secretarial Order 3550 directs BOEM to immediately develop a new "Five Year Outer Continental Shelf Leasing Program" with full consideration given to leasing the OCS offshore Alaska, mid- and south-Atlantic, and the Gulf of Mexico. It also directs BOEM to work with the Department of Commerce's National Marine Fisheries Service to expedite authorization requests for seismic surveys, particularly for new or resubmitted permitting applications in the Atlantic to understand the extent of America's energy potential. The Secretary's order also directs prompt completion of the Notice to Lessees No. 2016-N01 dated September 12, 2016, and ceases all activities to promulgate the proposed "Offshore Air Quality Control, Reporting, and Compliance Rule." The order also directs BOEM and BSEE to review a host of other rules and report progress within 21 days.

"We're going to look at everything and make sure the policies are appropriate for each local community, rather than force a Washington-driven one-size-fits-all plan," said Zinke "There's no predetermined map of development, but if there are areas that are acceptable, that have resources, and states and local communities support offshore development, we could include those area in the next 5-Year Program."

As a featured speaker at the Offshore Technology Conference in Houston, TX, on Offshore Energy Policies: Harnessing the Full Potential of America's Offshore, Zinke highlighted that OCS production currently accounts for about 18 percent of domestic crude oil and 4 percent of domestic natural gas supply. In Fiscal Year 2016, federal leasing revenues for the OCS were about \$2.8 billion. By contrast, in 2008 federal leasing revenues for the OCS were nearly \$18 billion dollars. "That's a drop of more than \$15 billion that would otherwise go to the Treasury or toward funding important conservation programs like the Land and Water Conservation Fund and the Historic Preservation Fund," Zinke noted.

"Interior's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (BOEM) will play vital roles in this expansive energy policy," Zinke noted while discussing the importance of strengthening frontline staffs to help them work closer with industry and communities. "We are committed to fuller cooperation with the offshore industry and coastal communities to expand responsible energy development while holding industry accountable to strict safety and environmental protections."

BSEE engineers work with offshore operators to carefully review and introduce new technology and ensure that operations remain safe and are conducted responsibly. BSEE inspectors conduct more than 19,000 inspections a year to ensure the safe and environmentally responsible operation of nearly 2,400 offshore oil and gas drilling and production facilities and 27,000 miles of pipeline.

Of the 1.7 billion acres on the OCS, only 16.9 million acres are leased for oil and gas development with 4.4 million of those acres (885 blocks) producing oil and gas. About 97 percent of all OCS leases are currently in the Gulf of Mexico. BOEM estimates the U.S. OCS has about 90 billion barrels of undiscovered technically recoverable oil and 327 trillion cubic feet of undiscovered, technically recoverable natural gas. The Gulf of Mexico, covering 160 million acres of the OCS, has an estimated 48.46 billion barrels of technically recoverable oil and 141.76 trillion cubic feet of technically recoverable natural gas.



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Pacific Southwest Region

California, Nevada and Klamath Basin

Illegal marijuana grow sites: A stain on public lands



Millions of acres of public lands are being overrun with illegal marijuana growing operations, resulting in degraded habitat and toxic trash that leads directly to wildlife deaths and serious threats to local water supplies. "Not only is it expensive to find and reclaim these sites, they are hazardous to our employees, the public, the environment and the wildlife that live on our refuges," said Polly Wheeler, chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System in California, Nevada and the Klamath Basin.

Credit: USFS, Region 5

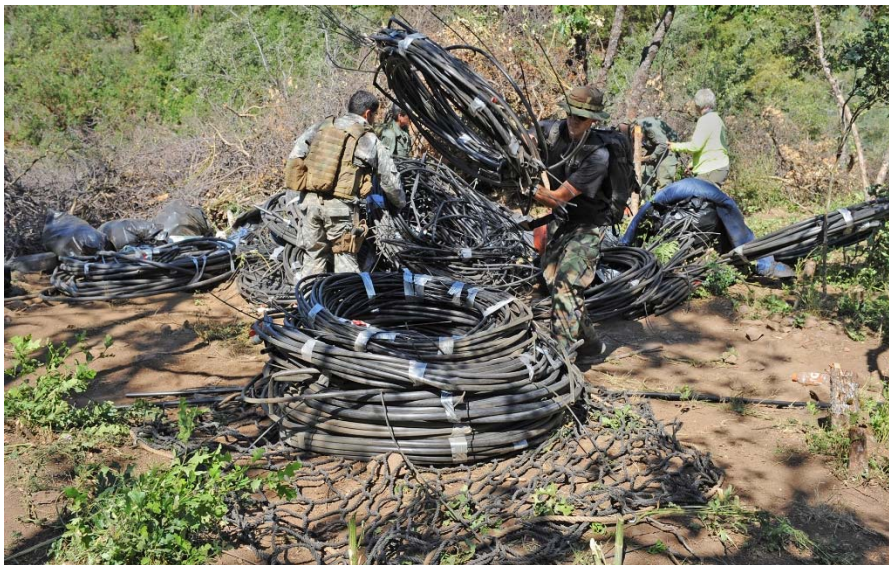
By Jane Hendron

June 6, 2017

At first glance, California's 45 million acres of public lands seem like havens for recreation and wildlife. But off the beaten path, away from the maintained trails and people, there is a different story. Some of these secluded areas are being overrun with illegal marijuana growing operations, resulting in degraded habitat and toxic trash that leads directly to wildlife deaths and serious threats to local water supplies.

"Illegal marijuana grow areas really put a strain on our resources," said Polly Wheeler, chief of the National Wildlife Refuge System in California, Nevada and the Klamath Basin. "Not only is it expensive to find and reclaim these sites, they are hazardous to our employees, the public, the environment and the wildlife that live on our refuges."

The refuge system law enforcement program began tracking marijuana cultivation sites in 1997. In recent years, refuge law enforcement officers have discovered and eradicated destructive sites on Stone Lakes National Wildlife Refuge outside Elk Grove, San Luis National Wildlife Refuge near Los Banos and the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge near Willows, California. On average, the Service discovers about three major grow sites a year in the state.



California National Guard personnel and partner agency staff remove thousands of feet of irrigation tubing from a grow site in 2014.

Credit: CalGuard Public Affairs

Grow sites are especially common in "the Emerald Triangle" – an area encompassing Humboldt, Mendocino and Trinity counties. They have been found on the Bureau of Land Management's Beauty Mountain Wilderness Study Area in Riverside County, in Shasta-Trinity National Forest, and in a designated Wilderness Area of Sequoia National Park.



To let light in for the illegal crop, growers "girdle" trees, essentially strangling the tree, causing leaves and branches to die, while concealing the marijuana plants below.

Credit: USFS, Region 5

In California, between 2011 and 2015, more than 8,000 illegal outdoor grow sites were detected and eradicated, and most of them were on federally managed land.

"Illegal marijuana grow sites have been a problem for a while, but they get worse every year," Wheeler said. "Earlier this year, we found about 15,000 plants and 1,400 pounds of trash at an illegal site on Sacramento Refuge."

Many of these marijuana cultivation sites are made up of several acres that are linked together by networks of unauthorized trails and irrigation lines.

The amount of new habitat impacted by these grows amounts to several thousand acres annually.

Typically, when one site is eradicated, another site goes up in a different spot. One of the major impacts from these operations is water diversion from streams and creeks.

Taking a Toll on the State's Natural Resources



“There were more than 26,000 plants spread among six different patches along a mile of stream ...To grow that many plants, they needed enough water to fill about 27 Olympic-sized swimming pools. And that’s just one site,” said Mark Higley, a biologist for the Hoopa Tribe, shown here with a juvenile Pacific fisher, whose habitat is threatened by chemicals used at illegal marijuana grow sites.

Credit: Courtesy of the Hoopa Tribe

Illegal marijuana cultivation requires water—and lots of it. Scientists estimate it takes six gallons of water per day for a single marijuana plant. When wildlife biologist Mark Higley discovered a grow site on the Hoopa Tribe’s reservation in 2012, he was taken aback by the expanse.

“There were more than 26,000 plants spread among six different patches along a mile of stream that supports anadromous [salmon and steelhead] fish,” Higley said. “To grow that many plants, they needed enough water to fill about 27 Olympic-sized swimming pools! And that’s just one site.”

In addition to the water, trash on these illegal cultivation sites is also a problem.

“Everything from tents and utensils to fuel and human waste is left out on these sites,” said Rick Fleming, executive director of the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew. Fleming’s trail crew is trained to clean-up these illegal sites, which can be toxic to humans and to wildlife.

In 2013, Higley and his cleanup crew were at an illegal grow site when they discovered how some growers were keeping wildlife from destroying the marijuana plants.

“Growers strung hot dogs on fish hooks to attract and kill nearby animals. While I was there, I came across a dead Pacific fisher,” Higley said.

The crew collected samples of the nearby fish hooks and sent the samples in for testing.

The hooks tested positive for methomyl, a powerful, broad-spectrum insecticide that is highly toxic to humans, livestock and wildlife. Formulations with more than one percent of methomyl are considered restricted-use pesticides and are not allowed for use in households or by non-professionals.



The damage done at grow sites, like this one from Lassen National Forest, is extensive. “Earlier this year, we found about 15,000 plants and 1,400 pounds of trash at an illegal site on the Sacramento Refuge,” Polly Wheeler said.

Credit: USFS, Region 5

“These are dangerous chemicals, and it’s alarming that some people are using them for this,” Higley said.

While there is no research to quantify how these chemicals are affecting the aquatic environment, Darren Mierau, North Coast director for CalTrout, says the illegal marijuana cultivation sites are adding to the already serious issue.

“It’s nearly impossible to track impacts from these illegal sites to native fish populations,” Mierau said. “But we are currently at five to 10 percent of historic population levels, and this is another wound.”



Many government agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing their best to combine funding, hazardous materials expertise and muscle to reclaim as many illegal grow sites as possible. Here, a clean up team is accompanied by law enforcement officers to a site in Trinity National Forest in 2015.

Credit: USFS, Region 5

The Mammoth Task of Cleanup

With the quantities of trash and hazardous chemicals at these illegal grow sites, cleanup is complicated, time consuming and costly. However, many government agencies and non-governmental organizations are doing their best to combine funding, hazardous materials expertise and muscle to reclaim as many illegal grow sites as possible.

Donna Rupp, project coordinator for the Trinity County Resource Conservation District, obtained funding for cleanup efforts through the CalRecycle Program, a program for cleaning up illegal dump sites on public or private land that is zoned for timber or agriculture. The Resource Conservation District has a core group of four to five trained employees who assist with grow site cleanups. In addition, the Watershed Research and Training Center provides additional manpower for cleanup projects.

“We work together on many projects, and this kind is important to both crews,” Rupp said.

Since 2014, the Trinity County Resource Conservation District and the Integral Ecology Research Center, led by Dr. Mourad Gabriel, a biologist and the center's executive director, have partnered to reclaim eight illegal grow sites. CalRecycle recently awarded the conservation district a two-year (2016-2018), \$90,000 grant. The grant is split between illegal grow cleanup and other illegal dump sites. CalRecycle also provides more than \$140,000 to the Coursegold Resource Conservation District for illegal grow cleanup on Sierra National Forest and private lands.

In addition to Integral Ecology's trained staff, the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew has a special cadre of volunteers called the ERT – Eradication Response Team – who are certified to handle hazardous materials and provide help with cleanup efforts.

“The ERT began in 2008 because the Forest Service needed folks to help with cleanups,” Fleming said. “We work mostly in the Sierra and Sequoia National Forests, but we’ve been to Mendocino and Los Padres National Forests as well.”



“Whether you are there to conserve the fish or there to recreate, this problem conflicts equally with those goals. And we all have to do something to tackle this issue,” said biologist Dr. Mourad Gabriel, shown here helping with the clean up of an illegal marijuana grow sites in the Trinity National Forest in 2015.

Credit: USFS, Region 5

Although many individuals and groups are willing to help with reclamation activities, the scope and overall costs are overwhelming.

According to Carol Underhill, a public affairs officer for the Shasta Trinity National Forest, limited hours in a day and limited funding and staff all play a part in how much time their law enforcement employees spend at the sites after eradication and security duties are done.

Costs include: staff time for law enforcement officers needed to ensure crew safety, employee salaries, fuel, and the costs of disposing of hazardous materials. For remote sites, helicopters are sometimes needed.

However, just because a site is cleaned, does not mean it will stay that way. If the infrastructure—water lines or plant roots—remains, sites may be re-established. This is something Higley saw first-hand.

“We went back to one site a few weeks later and found an upturned bucket with a fresh bar of soap,” he said. “Someone was back at work.”

The Service works with other federal agencies to locate, eradicate and reclaim illegal grow sites. It costs the Service between \$10,000 and \$15,000 per acre to eradicate and reclaim illegal sites on refuge land.

“Reclaiming these sites is just as important as getting rid of the illegal plants, and rehabbing these areas is the most expensive part.” Wheeler said.

While the various organizations continue to work together to limit habitat loss and disturbance from illegal marijuana grow sites, that’s not all they are aiming to accomplish. They are hoping this issue will bring people together.

“When you bring up public lands and the legacy of contamination of our lands, both sides of the aisle can come together,” said Gabriel, who continues to lead efforts to combat illegal marijuana growing on public lands. “Whether you are there to conserve the fish or there to recreate, this problem conflicts equally with those goals. And we all have to do something to tackle this issue.”

Jane Hendron is the public affairs officer for the Carlsbad (California) Fish and Wildlife Office.