

ENVIRONMENTAL ROUNDUP

By Heather Frisch



It can be hard to stay positive about the fate of our planet. We see natural disasters increasing in frequency and intensity, heat waves tearing across the globe, wildfires advancing on cities. Few political leaders are making courageous decisions to think long term and put the planet first. However, within the density of negativity, there are still beacons of hope that signal opportunities for change and reversals of the negative impacts of climate change we have seen thus far. .

GAVEL V GASLIGHT: JUDICIAL REVIEW OF TRUMP'S EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Since his inauguration in 2025, President Trump has sought to undo environmental protection laws across the United States, including the removal of the [Endangerment Finding](#) and withdrew from the [Paris Agreement](#) (for the second time). The unraveling of these environmental protections has not come without resistance. Non-profits, states, companies, and more are challenging the President's decisions through various legal routes that protect our country from complete executive control.

There are currently [71 legal challenges](#) to Trump's executive orders. Despite the Supreme Court embrace of the [Unitary Executive Theory](#), Trump's success rate has been low, with 17 losses and only 5 wins. A primary area of loss for Trump in court surround his blocking of offshore wind projects. His orders to end construction have been overturned in New York, Virginia, New Jersey, and Rhode Island. Courts have also overturned executive actions to block Hawaiian and Michigan lawsuits against fossil fuel companies, the termination of federal energy grants, the removal of the EPA's Green Bank Program, and an attempt to establish a working group to dispute climate science. While judicial challenges to Trump's actions have met with mixed success, judicial review remains a powerful weapon to resist Trumps executive overreach.



FREE ELECTRICITY? IN THIS ECONOMY?

On July 1, 2026, Australian utility companies offered a startling new energy offer: free electricity! During the middle of the day, Australia was producing so much solar energy that there was typically an overflow, as traditional peak hours of usage misaligned. As a solution, households with a smart meter can access the Solar Sharer offer from 11am to 2pm in New South Wales, Queensland, and Victoria, and from noon to 3 pm in South Australia. The idea is that households can strategically use more energy when there is a surplus and require less during peak hours. While households have an energy cap of 24kWh per day, this policy still allows houses without solar panels to contribute to sustainable energy development. When consumers strategically use their energy window, it is both cost-efficient and helpful for the electrical grid.

This is one of many ways that solar and green energy are making strides across the world, including the US, where solar is expanding into everyday backyards with plug-in panels that do not require an electrician to install. These initiatives have culminated in real change. As of 2025, renewable energy has overtaken fossil-fuel power for the first time in history, with solar, wind, tidal, and more producing a greater share of the Earth's power supply.



FRACK OFF! – DELAWARE RIVER BASIN FRACKING BAN HOLDS FIRM

In 2021, the Delaware River Basin Commission, a regulatory agency that's responsible for supplying water to more than 13 million people in four Northeastern states, voted to permanently ban natural gas drilling and fracking near crucial waterways. The decision was taken because drilling had been cited as causing "immediate damage" and posed long-term risks to the water quality of those reliant on it. Republicans largely opposed this decision, and in July 2026, U.S. Rep Scott Perry authored an amendment to strip the DRBC's authority and resume hydraulic fracking across the watershed. What could have been a tragic fate for the Basin was stopped. However, through a legislative loophole, the amendment did not appear before a committee. Thus, despite conservative backlash, the longstanding protection of this vital resource was maintained for the time being, although members of the commission are concerned that further challenges to the protections will follow.

WASTE NOT, WEAR NOT: EUROPE DRAWS THE LINE ON FASHION WASTE



On July 19th, 2026, the European Union's ban on destroying unsold clothes took effect. The ban prohibits large fashion retailers, wholesalers, and manufacturers from disposing of unsold clothes and shoes. Companies with more than 250 employees and over €50 million in net annual turnover must now find ways to sell products, ranging from discounts to alternative markets and charity donations. One caveat exists: Clothes can be discarded if they are deemed unsafe, damaged, counterfeit, or rejected by charities. In addition, companies are now required to publish annual reports on the goods they have retained and discarded over the past five years. In 2030, this rule will be expanded to medium-sized firms.

Why create this policy? The European Environment Agency (EEA) estimates that 4-9% of unsold products are destroyed every year. Online shopping and returns have exacerbated the problem. The discarded clothes have resulted in hundreds of thousands of tons of waste, including clothing, accessories, and footwear. The new ban aims to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions and cut waste from raw materials by reusing and recycling unsold clothes.

ENERGY ON THE MOVE: NORTH CAROLINA INSTALLS NEW MOBILE ENERGY GRIDS



Following the devastation of Hurricane Helene in 2024, which caused extensive damage to North Carolina's energy grid, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality's State Energy Office began installing renewable energy microgrids. Mobile Beehive Microgrids provide energy outside the central grid, keeping rural areas served during extreme weather. The North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality announced a \$5 million investment in these grids, along with bolstering existing infrastructure to resist extreme weather.

The "Beehive Microgrids" are solar-powered shipping containers, retrofitted with panels on the top and batteries on their sides. The internal part of the device can be used to store cool produce, medicine, and other items that need refrigeration and might be vital should a community lose power. The hives will be strategically placed at community centers in at-risk communities, including food banks and public libraries, providing stability to communities that have experienced immense loss these past few years.

CTRL + ALT + DELAY: NEW YORK HITS PAUSE ON DATA CENTERS

New York Governor Kathy Hochul signed an executive order on July 14, 2026, beginning a one-year moratorium on approving new data centers. The one-year moratorium on permits for new data center gives the state time to develop regulatory protections for the community and the environment. Four hyperscale data centers recently began operations in the state. A further 39 applications are pending, raising concerns about environmental protections in local communities. Data centers have become an increasingly controversial topic on both sides of the aisle. Voters largely oppose their construction, with only 30% in favor. For those in favor, 8 in 10 voters would prefer slower construction than the current pace to address environmental and community infrastructure concerns, with only 2 in 10 favoring quick construction to maintain a competitive advantage over China and other countries. The New York decision gives the state time to adjust and ensure that if development continues, voters and community members will have their concerns addressed, and infrastructure and the environment will be protected.



ROOTING AROUND FOR A COMEBACK: MANGROVE FOREST HEALING AFTER YEARS OF DESTRUCTION

A new study show that since 2010, the world has been gaining more mangroves than it has been losing. Mangrove forests are coastal forests that protect millions of people from storms and soak up vast amounts of planet-warming gases. These trees can store up to five times as much carbon dioxide as land-based forests, and their roots can slow ocean waves to protect coastal communities. This resurgence has been largely driven by stronger legal protections and increased public awareness of their importance, often through lived experiences following their removal, including disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. From the 1980s to 2010, over 4,600 sq miles of mangroves were cleared across Asia, Africa, and the Americas. However, since 2010, net losses have decreased to only 328 sq miles. This comes as people have worked to limit the removal of mangroves for fish farms and the construction of new housing, giving them a chance to regenerate, typically taking 3-5 years for sapling, on their own.



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