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STATE OF THE WORLD

Into a Warming World

THE WORLDWATCH INSTITUTE

State of the World: A Year in Review

Compiled by Lisa Mastny

This timeline covers some significant announcements and reports from October 2007 through September 2008. It is a mix of progress, setbacks, and missed steps around the world that are affecting environmental quality and social welfare.

Timeline events were selected to increase awareness of the connections between people and the environment. An online version of the timeline with links to Internet resources is available at www.worldwatch.org/features/timeline.

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NATURAL DISASTERS

Wildfires across drought-stricken southern California char some 2,000 square kilometers, destroying at least 1,500 homes and forcing more than half a million people to evacuate.

© 1986 Andrea Fisch/courtesy Photoshare



POLLUTION

Russian tanker spills 2,000 tons of heavy fuel oil near the Black Sea, affecting local fishing and bird populations and coating beaches with a thick black sludge.

CLIMATE

Former US Vice President Al Gore and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change win the Nobel Peace Prize for galvanizing international action against climate change.

HEALTH

China reports that birth defects in the nation's infants have soared nearly 40 percent since 2001 due to pollution and worsening environmental degradation.

WILDLIFE

Conservation groups and the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo create a vast new reserve to protect the endangered bonobo ape, the closest human relative.

OCTOBER

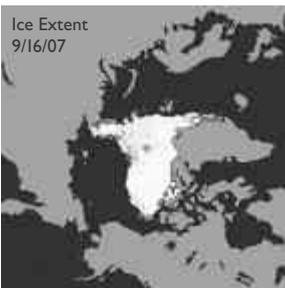
NOVEMBER

2007 STATE OF THE WORLD: A YEAR IN REVIEW

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CLIMATE

Scientists say Arctic sea ice has declined to its lowest level since satellite assessments began in the 1970s, opening the Northwest Passage fully for the first time in memory.



NASA

FISHERIES

Experts say Southeast Asia's oceans are rapidly running out of fish, threatening the livelihoods of some 100 million people and increasing the need for government protection of fish stocks.

WATER

ADB says developing countries in Asia could face an "unprecedented" water crisis in a decade due to climate change, population growth, and mismanagement of water resources.

HEALTH

In a one-day snapshot of obesity, doctors report that 24 percent of men and 27 percent of women worldwide are obese—nearing the obesity levels found in the United States.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Cyclone Sidr lashes Bangladesh, killing some 3,000 people and destroying an estimated 458,000 houses, 350,000 head of livestock, and 60,700 hectares of crops.

BIODIVERSITY

WWF reports that four Antarctic penguin populations are under pressure from climate change as habitat loss and overfishing disrupt breeding and feeding.

© Jenny Rollo



NATURAL DISASTERS

Officials say China is suffering from its worst drought in a decade, leaving millions of people short of drinking water and shrinking reservoirs and rivers.

CLIMATE

Scientists demonstrate that recent warm summers have caused the most extreme Greenland ice melting in 50 years, providing further evidence of global warming.

CLIMATE

Report warns that as many as 150 million people in the world's big coastal cities are likely at risk from flooding by the 2070s, more than three times as many as now.

D E C E M B E R

J A N U A R Y

2008

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ECONOMY

UN says climate change is creating millions of "green jobs" in sectors from solar power to biofuels that will slightly exceed layoffs elsewhere in the economy.

TRANSPORTATION

Indian auto manufacturer Tata unveils its \$2,500 "people's car," the Nano, raising concerns about crowded roads and rising pollution.



Tata Motors

CLIMATE

Group reports that trade in global carbon credits rose 80 percent in 2007, to \$60 billion, up from \$33 billion the previous year.

CLIMATE

At UN climate talks in Bali, nearly 200 nations agree to launch negotiations on a new climate change treaty following a groundbreaking reversal of US position.

FORESTS

Brazilian scientist says Amazon deforestation is likely to increase in 2008 for the first time in four years, raising concerns about the effectiveness of national forest protection policies.

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© Lyle Rosbotham



WILDLIFE

The eight South Asian nations agree to cooperate more in addressing wildlife trade problems in the region, one of the prime targets of organized wildlife crime networks.

ECONOMY

Report says global investments in renewable energy topped \$100 billion for the first time in 2007, led by wind power and driven by supportive policies.

ENERGY

Price of oil passes the all-time inflation-adjusted peak of \$103.76 set in April 1980 and is now three times what it was four years ago.



Photodisc

CLIMATE

Study reports that the US West is warming at nearly twice the rate of the rest of the world and is likely to face more drought conditions in many of its fast-growing cities.

F E B R U A R Y

M A R C H

2008 STATE OF THE WORLD: A YEAR IN REVIEW

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AGRICULTURE

Global seed vault in Svalbard, Norway, opens with 100 million food crop seeds from more than 100 countries, the most comprehensive and diverse collection in the world.



Adzuki beans, Wikimedia

Switchgrass, NREL



ENERGY

Studies report that more greenhouse gases are released when clearing land to grow current biofuel crops than would be reduced when the biofuels displaced fossil fuels.

CLIMATE

UN reports that the world's glaciers are continuing to melt away, with record losses reported between 2004–05 and 2005–06 and the average rate of melting and thinning more than doubling.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Some 50 million people worldwide participate in Earth Hour, switching off lights in some 370 cities in more than 35 countries to raise awareness of climate change.

CLIMATE

Report says capping carbon emissions would cost US households less than a penny on the dollar over 20 years, refuting claims that mandatory limits would damage the economy.

NATURAL DISASTERS

Cyclone Nargis kills some 78,000 people and leaves millions homeless in Myanmar, while critics blame mangrove destruction and a slow government response for the high fatality rate.



Sgt. Andres, USMC

FORESTS

Brazilian environment minister and rainforest activist Marina Silva resigns after facing ongoing struggles with the Lula administration over Amazonian forest policies.

CLIMATE

Study says financial incentives for cutting carbon emissions from deforestation could earn developing countries up to \$13 billion in carbon credits per year.



Agência Brasil

A P R I L

M A Y

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CONSUMPTION

San Francisco reports a 70 percent recycling rate—the highest in the United States—through measures such as recycling, composting, and reuse.



Vicky S

NATURAL DISASTERS

A 7.9 magnitude earthquake hits China's Sichuan province, killing some 70,000 people, injuring 374,000 more, and leaving 4.8 million homeless.

ENERGY

Texas oilman T. Boone Pickens places the largest-ever order for wind turbines, spending \$2 billion for 667 turbines to develop the world's largest wind farm.



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CONSUMPTION

China bans the production and use of plastic bags in supermarkets and retail shops as part of a campaign to fight "white pollution" in the country.

FOOD

FAO says rising land degradation reduces crop yields and may threaten the food security of 1.5 billion people, about a quarter of the world's population.

Photodisc



GOVERNANCE

Internal review says World Bank investments fail to give enough attention to long-term sustainability and place uneven emphasis on economic benefits of environmental preservation.



Ove Tøpfer

ENERGY

US average price for a gallon of regular gasoline tops \$4 for the first time ever.

FORESTS

Reports say booming demand for food, fuel, and wood as world population surges will put unprecedented and unsustainable demands on remaining forests.

J U N E

J U L Y

2008 STATE OF THE WORLD: A YEAR IN REVIEW

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FOOD

World Food Programme announces it will provide \$1.2 billion in additional food aid for the 62 countries hit hardest by the food and fuel crisis.

CLIMATE

Study reports that China's CO₂ releases accounted for two thirds of increased global emissions in 2007 and are 14 percent higher than those from the United States.



Photodisc

ENERGY

The price of oil hits a new all-time inflation-adjusted high of \$147.27.

WILDLIFE

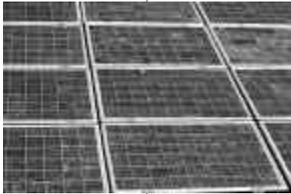
China wins the right to make a one-off purchase of registered elephant ivory stocks from four African countries under strict conditions.



Photodisc

ENERGY

Pacific Gas and Electric agrees to purchase 800 megawatts of solar cells, the largest such sale ever, to be installed in two solar farms that can supply electricity to 239,000 homes.



Ewout Bos

MARINE SYSTEMS

Researchers say the number of "dead zones" in the world's oceans and coastal areas has nearly doubled every decade since the 1960s, to some 400, due mainly to fertilizer runoff.

ENERGY

Report says US installed wind capacity exceeds 20,000 megawatts, enough electricity to serve 5.3 million American homes and making the US the world leader in wind power capacity.



NREL

CLIMATE

Ten northeastern states hold the first US cap and trade auction of carbon dioxide emissions allowances, raising nearly \$40 million for renewable energy technologies and energy efficiency programs.

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

See page 205 for sources.

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CONSUMPTION

China celebrates the opening of what it calls the first "green" Olympics, after spending some \$20 billion on mass transit and the addition of new renewable energy systems in Beijing.



Joowwww

ENERGY

UN says abolishing some \$300 billion in global subsidies for fossil fuels could cut world greenhouse gas emissions by up to 6 percent while also boosting economic growth.

CONSUMPTION

Study says exports now account for one third of China's CO₂ emissions as manufacturers there feed a growing global appetite for cheap goods.

DOE



ENERGY

U.S. government lifts a longstanding ban on offshore drilling, opening most of the country's coastline to oil and gas leasing and exploration.

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To purchase the complete *State of the World 2009* report
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ext. 520, or pshyne@worldwatch.org.

