

Environment

2017 the year ahead

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What will be the big environment events in 2017?

From air pollution to Trump and wildlife extinction, we look at the major environmental issues for the year ahead



Exploratory fracking for shale gas will begin in England in 2017. Only 17% of British people are in favour of fracking. Photograph: McCaren/LNP/Rex/Shutterstock

After five years of false starts and delays, 2017 will see exploratory fracking for shale gas begin in earnest in England. The first wells will likely be drilled in Lancashire and Yorkshire by the summer, and Cuadrilla, [Third Energy](#) and other companies will hope to confirm commercially viable quantities of the gas by the end of the year. With only 17% of people in Britain in favour of fracking, local and national protests are certain.

Brexit negotiations will affect [farming subsidies](#) and possibly all European [nature protection laws](#), including those for birds and habitats, air and [water pollution](#), GM foods and [animal welfare](#). If ministers attempt to roll back or trade off decades of environmental regulation, as some have threatened, they are likely to meet the most intense opposition.

Air pollution, now known to [kill nearly 40-50,000 people a year in Britain](#), will be high on the political agenda in the spring with the [government under court orders to publish a new plan to meet EU legal limits](#). The draft, to be published in April, is almost certain to propose more fully funded clean-air zones in major cities, tighter restrictions on some vehicles and fuels, and further measures to encourage walking and cycling.

London will also come under pressure to join [Paris](#), [Madrid](#), [Athens](#), and [Mexico City](#) in pledging to ban diesel vehicles in the city centre within a few years. The movement of world cities signing up to be fossil-free within 30 years is expected to grow too.

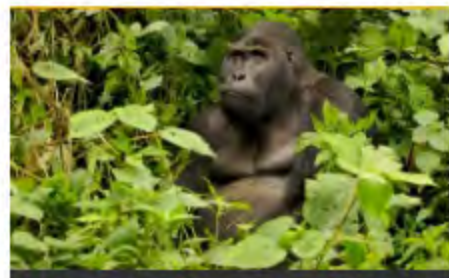
The global climate debate will be dominated by whether the president-elect [Donald Trump](#) withdraws the US from the Paris global agreement to reduce emissions.

He has [appointed climate sceptics to head all the key agencies](#) responsible for either monitoring or dealing with climate change and is known to want to increase oil, gas and coal production. If he pulls the US out of the Paris deal, it would gift China climate leadership, set back efforts to brake emissions and do untold diplomatic damage with [hundreds of countries who followed Obama's leadership in 2015](#). Insiders expect him to ignore the voluntary commitments the US has made and to increase fossil fuel emissions. Many US climate scientists expect to lose research grants in what some expect to become a witch-hunt.



Donald Trump has appointed sceptics to head key agencies responsible for monitoring climate change and has said he wants to increase coal production. Photograph: Steve Helber/AP

2016 saw the tail end of [El Niño](#), a naturally occurring warming of the Pacific, bring droughts, searing temperatures and food shortages to much of Africa, Latin America and south-east Asia. In 2017, we can expect a weak La Niña, a natural cooling of Pacific Ocean waters. This is likely to bring above average rainfall and cooler temperatures across much of the globe.



IUCN updates 'red list' of endangered species - in pictures

View gallery

Wildlife losses are expected to continue through 2017, despite more and more animals having been put on the IUCN's red list of threatened species and action to tackle the illegal trade. Candidates for effective extinction in 2017 include the Bornean orangutan, the South China tiger, the giant otter, the Amur leopard, the black-footed ferret and Darwin's fox.

The [Eurasian lynx](#) could be reintroduced in small numbers to the Kielder forest in Northumberland, and to remote areas of southern Scotland. The last time this wild cat was seen in what is now the UK was in about AD700. Other provisional sites have been selected including Cumbria, Aberdeenshire, the Kintyre peninsula and

Thetford forest in Norfolk.

Marine protection will be raised up the political agenda with [the first UN oceans conference in June](#). This will focus on the increasing quantities of plastics polluting the oceans, overfishing, the effects of climate change, and the need for more marine national parks.

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