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Trump withdraws U.S. from Paris Climate Accord; scientists respond

1 June 2017 / Commentary by [U.S. and global scientists](#)

Donald Trump has announced the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord; scientists from around the globe respond in this exclusive Mongabay commentary.



- On June 1, 2017 Donald Trump withdrew the United States from the Paris Agreement, joining Syria and Nicaragua as the only two nations on Earth not to be part of the climate pact.
- Critics around the world are blasting Trump for his rashness, saying that his decision threatens climate stability, the U.S. and global economies, ecosystems and even civilization.
- In this Mongabay commentary, scientists from around the globe offer their immediate responses to Trump's Paris departure. We will continue to update this story in coming days, adding further responses from the scientific community as Mongabay receives them.



What's at stake. Planet Earth seen from space. Image courtesy of NASA

Donald Trump, who called climate change "a hoax" during his campaign, has withdrawn the United States from the Paris Climate Agreement, rejecting a pact that is being honored by more than 190 nations.

The U.S. signed and ratified the agreement under President Obama, and it is a pact that is also heavily backed by U.S. and global corporations, including oil companies ExxonMobil, BP, and Royal Dutch Shell.

The U.S., the world's second largest producer of greenhouse gases after China, committed in Paris to cutting its carbon emissions by between 26 to 28 percent from 2005 levels by 2025.

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Trump justified his reversal of the U.S. commitment made to the world in Paris with the wholly unsubstantiated claim that the agreement is bad for U.S. business and labor.

The Paris Agreement aims at preventing dangerous climate change and keeping the world well below a 2 degree Celsius (3.6 degree Fahrenheit) average temperature rise over preindustrial levels. Studies have shown that the emission cuts volunteered by the world's nations in Paris are still deeply inadequate for meeting that goal, and Trump's move will only steepen the very difficult climb to climate stability and safety.

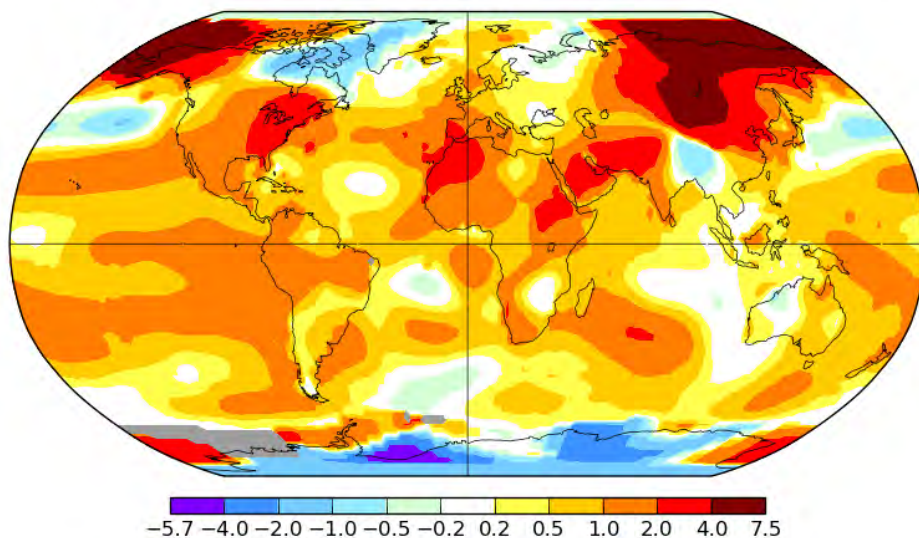
How much the U.S. withdrawal will endanger people and planet is uncertain, as no one can say how the departure will impact the actions of other nations, possibly causing some to back away from the agreement. Turkey and Russia, for example, have signed the pact but still not ratified it. So far, the world has stood firm in its Paris commitments, with only the United States, Syria and Nicaragua now not parties to the agreement.

Scientists over coming months will need to make a full assessment of the harm Trump's decision will do to the earth's climate, environment and ecosystems, and to its nations and people.

But for the moment, scientists are responding with deep concern. What follows are reactions from scientists in a wide variety of disciplines in the U.S. and around the world. Over the next several days, Mongabay will continue to update this article, publishing additional comments from the scientific community to Trump's decision.

— story introduction by Mongabay editor Glenn Scherer; responses compiled with the help of the Mongabay team

April 2017 L-OTI (°C) Anomaly vs 1951-1980 0.88



NASA GISS Surface Temperature Analysis. Courtesy of NASA

For the U.S. to withdraw from the Paris Accord would have catastrophic consequences for the natural world, accelerating species extinctions worldwide.

— Edward O. Wilson, University Research Professor Emeritus, Harvard University

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About 20 years ago the effects of changing climate became evident nearly everywhere I went in the world. Most of my travels are to temperate and tropical coasts, coral reefs, and polar systems. At home in the Northeast U.S., climate-related changes to marine-life distributions are also evident.

The United States has long lagged at solutions, ceding leadership on clean energy technology to Europe and especially China. But it is one thing for our nation to fail to lead, or to come grudgingly along with mainstream science. But it is quite another thing for a man with no qualifications and no apparent grasp of information or the issue to simultaneously undermine world consensus and abandon world leadership.

There are no words for how horrifying it is to watch my country embarrass itself on the world stage and so severely injure its status and standing in the eyes of the world. I'd like to see us make America great again.

— Carl Safina, Ph.D., Endowed Professor for Nature and Humanity, School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences

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The Paris agreement was a remarkable achievement involving unanimous agreement among over 190 countries. The way the UN operates is to achieve unanimity, which is a major problem. It means that it is impossible to put together binding

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targets. The whole of the Paris agreement is based upon goodwill. There are no punitive actions or means to enforce the agreement. The goodwill also includes the Green Climate Fund, to which the U.S. pledged \$3 billion and has delivered \$1 billion — but it seems unlikely [that Trump will] add to that. That alone undermines a lot of the good will. And it will be a major sore point in all the small island states and developing countries, who have not caused the problem.

The U.S. leadership was essential in Paris. If the U.S. does not lead by example — and we have a moral and ethical responsibility to do so as the largest accumulated emitter — then why should anyone else go along? Unless there is a universal carbon tax, fossil fuels appear to be the cheapest form of energy. It is not true, of course, because of all the downstream effects on air quality and climate change. So either some form of trade wars are realized in which heavy tariffs are used against the U.S. and other renegades, or the whole thing collapses and we all spiral into a race to the bottom, to see who can destroy the planet first.

Yes, other things are moving in positive directions, but not yet fast enough: ask India what they will do if they do not get technology transfer and help.

The U.S. cannot opt out without major other consequences.

Without the US and Paris, we crash through the 2 degree Celsius (3.6 degree Fahrenheit) threshold before 2060, perhaps a decade earlier owing to U.S. pullout. And this means increasing trouble with ecosystems being out of whack with the climate, trouble farming current crops, and increasing shortages of food and water.

But if Paris is fully implemented and feeds back on itself to a new energy economy, we can delay 2 degree C by 40 years, maybe. I believe that we will go through 2 degree C by 2100 regardless. But we can adapt better. It will be bad enough under the best scenarios, but [the withdrawal of the U.S. from the Paris accord] could be bringing doomsday forward by fifty to a hundred years.

— Kevin Trenberth, Distinguished senior scientist at NCAR (National Center for Atmospheric Research)



Glacier in Alaska. Glaciers worldwide are melting due to rising temperatures. Photo by Rhett A. Butler

President Trump should remember that the Paris Climate Agreement remains one of our best chances to protect the millions of farmers, ranchers, foresters, and manufacturers across rural America whose jobs are threatened by global climate change.

U.S. agriculture and its related industries provide about **11 percent** of national employment — that's 21 million jobs. Every year we produce nearly **\$330 billion** in agricultural commodities, not to mention the U.S. forest product industry that is valued at **\$282 billion**. By contrast, the U.S. coal industry employs **fewer people than Arby's** (76,572 people in 2014).

Signs of stress on U.S. agricultural markets due to global climate change are already apparent. Heatwaves, droughts, floods, stronger windstorms and other climate change impacts exacerbate the stresses already occurring from weeds, insects and disease.

Severe drought cost California about **\$2.7 billion** and 10,000 jobs in 2015 — a huge blow for the farming economy of a single state. Increased frequency and severity of **wildfires** puts our forest land at risk and **strain our budgets** by demanding more taxpayer dollars for firefighting.

And what about feeding ourselves? At a time when the world must find a way to produce **70 percent** more food in 2050 than in 2006, we cannot afford the possibility of lower agricultural yields in the American Midwest, one of the world's most productive breadbaskets.



The agriculture and forestry sectors play a complex and critical role in our country's social and economic fabric. States, cities, businesses and citizens — both red and blue — must band together in support of those who work the land and push for ambitious climate action in the United States.

— **Nancy Harris, Ph.D., Research Manager, Forests Program, World Resources Institute**

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Donald Trump seems determined to turn a malfunctioning presidency into one that will, as confirmed by many observers, be considered disastrous.

Trump seems capable of almost any self-delusion — of convincing himself he is correct no matter the weight of evidence against him.

But to drag the U.S. down into his rabbit hole of bizarre beliefs regarding climate change is going way, way too far. For America to become one of only three nations on Earth that is not a party to the Paris climate accord is unthinkable, a bridge too far even for Trump.

This is the price that Americans are paying right now for electing this very peculiar megalomaniac as their president.

— **William F. Laurance, PhD, FAA, FAAAS, FRSQ, Distinguished Research Professor, Australian Laureate & Prince Bernhard Chair in International Nature Conservation (Emeritus), Director of the Centre for Tropical Environmental and Sustainability Science (TESS)**

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The rest of the world should pay no attention to the venal men who have temporarily taken command of our great nation.

The United States is suffering from a political disease that prevents us from showing the rest of the world and ourselves what is good in us. We will rid ourselves of this malady. America will be great again.

It will take time to undo the damage that the Trump Administration and his Congressional co-conspirators are doing to our nation and the world. But rest assured, that damage will be undone. The United States will work with the rest of the world to create a world where the poor become prosperous and where the environment is respected and protected.

The rest of the world must continue on its path to a better future. Today, we are lagging behind and moving backward, but tomorrow we will run ahead and help lead the way.

The Trump Administration and his co-conspirators in Congress are a historical aberration, the last dying gasps of a failed ideology. Future historians will see the Trump Administration and his congressional co-conspirators as tragic figures fighting a failed rear-guard action against the inevitability of historical progress. What is good in America will eventually triumph.

— **Ken Caldeira, Carnegie Institution for Science, Department of Global Ecology**



Climate change is increasing the vulnerability of some areas to drought.

U.S. President Trump's decision to pull out of the Paris Accords is disastrous for the U.S. and for the other 194 signatory countries, including Brazil.

Brazil, where droughts and floods predicted to intensify in a warmer world, are already increasing in frequency, is one of the countries expected to lose most from climate change. Amazonia, where drought-provoked forest fires are rapidly increasing, holds an immense stock of carbon that represents a time bomb for the world's climate if global emissions are not contained.

— Philip M. Fearnside, Ph.D., Research Professor, National Institute for Research in Amazonia (INPA), Manaus, Brazil.

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Our withdrawal from the Paris Climate Accord is shameful and is an abject embarrassment to not only our immediate past leadership but to all Americans who came first and exerted primacy for so many topical issues of vital health to our planet — from oceans and clean air, to biodiversity conservation and education.

There is hope down the road; it's called elections and sovereignty.

— Joel Berger, Cox Chair of Conservation Biology and Senior Scientist, Wildlife Conservation Society

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A lack of U.S. government support for the Paris climate agreement will mean that the United States will further isolate itself from international collaboration and cooperation on multiple fronts. It will affect U.S. security, the provision of jobs; U.S. business operations, and U.S. diplomatic efforts.

The agreement, because it has a broad basis of support, will continue with or without the United States. Many of the stipulations in the agreement further U.S. strategic interests, and cities and states will be hard pressed to fully carry out the diplomatic dimensions that the agreement brings with it. Many U.S. states and cities are centers of innovation, resilience and prosperity. Those [states and cities] will continue — as they work to meet the goals, aspiration and logical objectives under the Paris Agreement — but it will be harder for them to do so without overall U.S. government support.

If President Trump agrees to support the agreement there will be additional respect and receptivity to his administration and the United States in international circles. Members of the G7 and the Pope have encouraged the President to carefully consider supporting the agreement. Should he not support the agreement, it could potentially lead to colder relations with well-established partners for the United States and could mean that others could be willing to step in to increase their support and engagement as outlined in the Paris Agreement. Eyes will be on Europe and China in particular.

The Paris Agreement represented an unprecedented moment for a collective climate action plan. Because of the way that it is structured — with each country determining the best way for it to decarbonize and to revisit its progress in five year intervals — countries have the flexibility to be aspirational and inspirational. I anticipate that this momentum will continue.

The U.S. withdrawal will present a unique opportunity for China to provide some global leadership and goodwill — in much the same way that it did leading up to the Paris Agreement. China seems interested in doing so. So there is a clear opportunity for leadership in this space. That leadership could be one of taking concrete specific action to meet its [own national] obligations, but also by inspiring others to engage and work towards the benefits that the agreement provides for job creation, for prosperity and for a clean environment that protects its citizens. So the leadership space is one that is infused by action and by inspiration.

— Roger-Mark De Souza, Director of Population, Environmental Security and Resilience, Wilson Center, Washington, DC

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Climate change is already happening. A world leader retracting from the Paris Agreement is no more than a short-term economical bet.

What is always surprising to me is to see someone thinking that climate change action is done only to protect the planet / nature, while such efforts should be seen as a major move for the survival of the next generations.

What Donald Trump and others like him do not understand is that the planet will survive the human race, with some important losses of course. But life will go on without us... The planet does not really need us to be saved.

On the other hand, we are currently building our own graves.

Humans will probably not survive climate change and its rapid modifications to complex environments that took us many centuries to adapt to, and to learn how to manage.

Trump's withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement, before anything else, puts the human species at risk.

— Jean-François Bastin, Research associate at Université libre de Bruxelles.



Amphibians are already dying en-masse due to the effects of climate change and human impacts. Photo by Rhett A. Butler.

In 2007 my research team and I projected that by the middle of this century we could lose two-thirds of the world's polar bears if we continued our present greenhouse gas emissions path. By century's end, we projected we could lose them all. This projection led Secretary of Interior Kempthorne to list polar bears as a Threatened Species. Polar bears reliably catch their seal prey only from the surface of the sea ice. Their food supply, therefore, depends on habitat that literally melts as temperatures rise – making them a great messenger about the dangers of global warming and its climate change symptoms.

The agreement reached in Paris in December 2015 was great news. Earlier that year, we found that the northern Alaska polar bear population, the one I'd spent most of my adult life studying, had declined ~40% during the first decade of the 2000s. Reducing emissions to hold global temperature rise below 2°C, would mean the average temperature in Barrow Alaska would rise only about ~4°C rather than the ~10°C we'll reach on our current path. Such a change in future warming could make the difference between polar bears surviving in parts of their current range or going the way of the dinosaur.

But the benefits of adhering to the Paris Agreement goes way beyond polar bears. They, in fact, are just sitting on the tip of the climate change iceberg. Across Africa and the Middle East, for example, where warmer temperatures and drying landscapes already have challenged human welfare leading to massive humanitarian and refugee crises, annual average temperatures are projected to be 3-5°C warmer by the end of the century.

Because a 1°C rise is associated with a 4-6% decline in wheat yield, a world that is 3-5°C warmer is likely to offer significant nutritional challenge for many of the world's people!

At our current rate, end-of-century summer temperatures over much of the world will be hotter than anything we ever have experienced. Water availability for people, livestock, and wildlife, will be dramatically reduced and/or less predictable.

It is clear that if we fail to halt global temperature rise, numbers of refugees challenging the world's national boundaries, including our own, will exceed anything we currently can imagine. If we meet the Paris goals, however, warming over the most populous parts of the world will be under 2°C and the future world will be a more recognizable and friendlier place.

The benefits of following the goals set in Paris are perhaps even more apparent in the world's oceans – increasingly important sources of human nutrition. Following the Paris goals would mean sea surface temperatures would rise by only 1/4th of what they will rise if we continue along our current path. Likewise, we'd see 1/3 of the change in ocean salinity, 1/4 the pH decline and less than 1/3 the decline in ocean oxygenation.

The Paris goals, therefore, will minimize negative impacts on global ocean productivity – holding hope for continued human benefits from the sea. The bottom line is that the Paris Agreement charts a way to avoid the worst changes that future global warming has to offer. Striving for the goals set forth in the Paris Agreement will save polar bears and benefit the rest of life on earth, including ourselves.

The world's ultra-rich, may survive and even flourish for some time in the dystopian world toward which we are now heading. However, if President Trump cares about the rest of us as he says he does, he'll put America full force behind the Paris Agreement rather than withdrawing from it.

– Steven C. Amstrup, Ph.D., Chief Scientist Polar Bears International



Low-lying areas are expected to be swamped by the end of the century due to rising sea levels. Photo by Rhett A. Butler

A decision by President Trump to remove the United States from the 2015 Paris climate Agreement would be a shameful act of self-harm.

The decision would hurt everyone in the world, and **poor people most**, by making it harder to avoid a future of **bigger storms and fires, disappearing coastlines, and tougher crop-growing conditions**. But the most severe and immediate harm would be to the United States, which by banishing itself from the community of nations trying to prevent dangerous climate change would irrevocably damage its global standing.

The Paris Agreement will go on as planned, with or without US participation. Indeed, the agreement was **ratified** by countries at record pace in order to have it come into force before a possible Trump Administration — in hindsight a prudent maneuver.

And although there's no substitute for strong federal climate policies, actions toward a safer climate will go on within the U.S. too, with state-level climate policies and increasing adoption of renewable energy due to technological advances and falling costs.

A decision to leave Paris would harm the U.S. in multiple ways. Americans would suffer more from climate-charged fires and floods. International rules on climate would be made without American input, meaning fewer opportunities for U.S. companies to take advantage of a growing low-carbon economy. But the biggest loser from this decision would be the United States' standing in the rest of the world, where climate change is **seen as the world's greatest threat by most countries**.

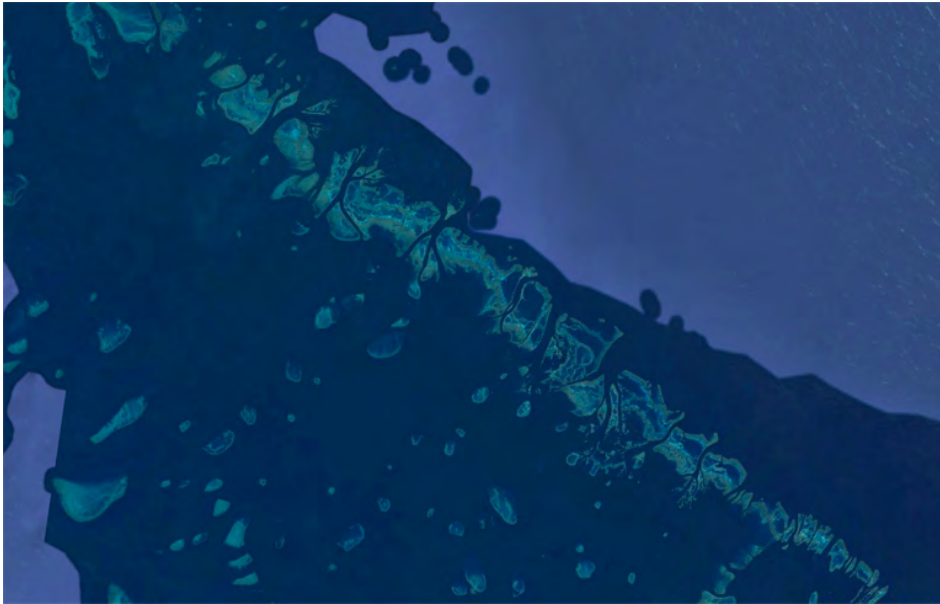
For years to come, millions of parents will attempt to explain to their children why Donald Trump didn't want them to grow up on a planet with a stable climate.

The global goodwill which the U.S. has earned on climate will ebb to Europe and **China**, which have **reaffirmed their commitment** to climate action and the Paris Agreement regardless of what the United States does. It's not just governments that would be more reluctant to deal amicably with the United States. Companies would be less likely to sign deals with American businesses than their overseas competitors. Individuals would choose to study, work, vacation, and buy their products elsewhere.

Leaving Paris would be part of a pattern by the Trump Administration of disowning U.S. leadership on multilateral issues that are too big for any nation to solve on its own: **Global health and disaster response**. **Trade**. Even **defense**. Each of these abdications in turn diminish America's stature in the world even as they harm old friends who have counted on us.

But when future historians look back to pinpoint the exact moment when the US irrevocably ceded international leadership to others, leaving Paris will be it.

— **Jonah Busch, Ph.D., Senior Fellow, Center for Global Development (environmental economist)**. Dr. Busch's complete statement can be found **[here](#)**.



Google Earth image of Australia's Great Barrier Reef, which has suffered widespread bleaching due to rising ocean temperatures.

The implications of the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement are more intricate than what people have been fixating on so far.

1) There will undoubtedly be a **countervailing increase in effort** to reduce emissions on the part of Europe. When George W. Bush announced that he was not going to submit the Kyoto Protocol to the Senate for ratification in 2001, it had the effect of dramatically speeding up the ratification process in other countries. In fact, his decision plausibly helped guarantee Kyoto's entry into force.

The Paris Agreement is designed to encourage effective adjustments to this kind of development. All parties have committed to do all they can to keep climate within safe limits, and there are procedures to review what that takes and whether the accumulated commitments are adequate. With the U.S. signaling a retreat from the climate cause, the Paris mechanisms will induce many countries to dig deeper.

2) Even before Trump, the trajectory of U.S. emissions was driven much more by market conditions and local/regional politics than it was by what happened in Washington. What happens in Washington matters, but the bottom-line impact of the Trump-Obama shift, with respect to U.S. emissions, is probably less than people are fearing.

In that light, **we can expect increased enthusiasm for subnational climate agreements**, e.g. involving cities. If the federal government nails shut its climate window, other countries will pursue other venues for engaging the U.S., and agreements with individual cities, which have already proven useful, will become all the more attractive.

3) **Proponents of geo-engineering will have a much easier time making their case now.** Geo-engineering (e.g. reflective aerosols in the stratosphere) is not very popular right now — people prefer to reduce emissions. But we have continued talking about geo-engineering, largely under the premise that it may turn out that emission reductions may end up being insufficient. Trump's move strengthens the argument that reductions are not sufficient.

4) **Nuclear power is also more attractive to many countries.** Many countries have already included expansion of nuclear power in their DNCs. But enthusiasm is muted, and some countries have chosen not to use them or even phase them out. All the nuclear plans that were just below the threshold of acceptability have now become acceptable.

5) People worry about the impact on research and development in the U.S., but the long-term effects are likely not so severe, even if the short-term effects will be very bad. During the battles over whether to phase out CFCs to protect the ozone layer, the French government opposed all such action and French companies refrained from investing in the search for substitutes. When the phase-out happened anyway, the French companies were not disadvantaged appreciably. They simply purchased access to the technology that other companies had developed (in one case buying a whole U.S. company). It would be better if we deepened investment in climate-related R&D, but a hiatus need not be catastrophic.

5) **So on balance I think we have to look at this as part of a multi-player, multi-step strategic game. Trump has made a move that looks overwhelmingly bad. But how bad it becomes will depend on how everyone else reacts to it. Many of the reactions will offset the negative impacts.**

Most of the world wants to reduce emissions and control climate change. Trump has not changed that fact. And that fact will continue to drive innovation and progress. We will see it manifest in some new ways — e.g. more treaties with cities, more exploration of geo-engineering and nuclear, and more roundabout pathways to relevant technology — but the incentives to solve this problem have not diminished in the slightest, and that's what will drive progress.

— Marc A. Levy, Deputy Director | CIESIN, Earth Institute | Columbia University



Many species will be forced to migrate to new habitats due to changing conditions, but deforestation and human encroachment has cut off traditional migration corridors, increasing the risk of extinction. Photo of a tarsier in Sulawesi by Rhett A. Butler.

I am writing this note at noon on Thursday May 1, 2017, anxious to hear President Trump's decision regarding the Paris Climate Agreement. While I hear a lot of calming announcements that this is merely a symbolic act and that our economy is moving to effectively reduce its dependence on fossil fuels, I am not relieved. I hear about States and cities organizing to act deliberately and forcefully to meet the US commitment to the Paris Agreement, but I am not comforted.

As a climate scientist who directly engages in studying the phenomena and mechanisms of climate variability and change I am convinced that we are headed towards a different, and to many people hostile, state of the climate system, with a worldwide impact including many parts of the United States. Sea level rise will threaten many of the country's major cities, many towns, and major transportation hubs. More frequent heat waves — a major cause of climate-related deaths in the U.S. and worldwide — will result in more casualties and damage, and the same fate will result from more frequent wild fires and floods.

All these changes are likely, and highly likely to occur because of humanity's dependence on fossil fuels. In light of such possible dire consequences, do we take the chance that the act of U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement may do little to distract the rest of the world from its agreement in Paris? Or will the U.S withdrawal from Paris cause parties to drop out and thus risk dire environmental consequences?

Do we want the U.S. to join Syria and Nicaragua as the only two other countries that did not sign on to the Paris Agreement?

What damage are we causing to our national standing and our economy by turning our back to the rest of the world in its effort to move forward? What legacy are we leaving to the next generations who will have to deal with the consequences? How do we respond to a leadership that defies scientific knowledge and the opportunity for economic development embedded in the rise of new technologies?

All these thoughts are extremely disconcerting and depressing. Action is needed to respond to our rapidly changing environment and the global interest. Inaction on climate change is not a solution because due to the nature of the problem we cannot wait to act in the future and we must begin the implementation of the Paris Agreement now.

Avoiding reality under the pretense that "economic damage" will hurt the U.S. economy in the not so long run [is a bad idea]. If the U.S. government decides to abandon its Paris commitment, we must express our grave concerns and demonstrate to the world that we, as global citizens, are committed to joining in support of the principles of the Paris Climate Agreement.

— Yochanan Kushnir, Lamont Research Professor, Division of Ocean and Climate Physics, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Columbia University, NY

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As a climate scientist, and also as someone who is interested in non-fossil fuel energy, I view it as incredibly shortsighted from both a diplomatic and economic standpoint [to withdraw from the Paris Agreement].

Pulling out and reducing supports for clean energy and energy conservation such as fuel economy standards for cars and incentives to use solar and wind power will make the U.S. economy less competitive in the global marketplace.

The jobs in solar, wind and the auto industry are all relatively well paying, middle class jobs. Those jobs that can be done by robots are largely already in place.

If Trump genuinely wants to keep more high paying jobs in the United States, he should not pull out of the Paris Agreement.

— Dr. Dallas Abbott, Research Scientist at LDEO of Columbia University



Climate change is expected to further stress rainforests already damaged by fragmentation and degradation. Photo by Rhett A. Butler

Major cracks have appeared in recent months in a glacier in Greenland and an ice shelf in Antarctica. They are advancing and will soon release enormous icebergs into the ocean, one the size of the state of Delaware. And they will allow ice from the interior of Greenland and Antarctica to flow into the ocean, contributing to sea level rise. Coastal areas in the U.S. experience increasing floods, disrupting ports and airports, and interfering with the American economy that Trump claims to support.

And today a major crack appeared in the Paris Agreement. It threatens to release, not icebergs, but distrust and despair, and disruption of the mechanisms that had begun to slow down global greenhouse gas emissions. This crack — in policy agreements rather than in masses of ice — can be sealed, by efforts of other countries, and of states and cities in the United States, by actions of the corporations and organizations that sought to keep the U.S. in the Agreement.

The laws of physics indicate that ice will continue to flow from Greenland and Antarctica, at least as long as global warming is not abated. But the processes within global society are not as inevitable. With concerted action, the Paris Agreement can still be a vital force to preserve our planet from one of the greatest threats it has ever faced.

— Ben Orlove, School of International and Public Affairs, Columbia University, New York



Eighteen months ago, the world felt hope when the global community came together in Paris to forge a path forward to halt climate change. Today, we take a step backward in disappointment.

The science is clear that human-caused warming of the planet and other climate change impacts are harming people, livelihoods and wildlife, and it will get worse unless something is done to curtail it. It is not just the climate scientists and conservationists who are raising this alarm; business leaders, economists and national security experts are urging global action to address climate change.

The withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement creates a leadership void in the world that will be filled by other countries. The U.S. is ceding its historic role as an innovator, convener and global problem solver.

This is a missed opportunity for U.S. leadership and it's a missed opportunity for our planet.

Thankfully, the rest of the world, and states across the U.S., will continue this effort. At WCS, we work with local communities in nearly 60 countries and all the world's oceans that depend on healthy ecosystems and they are seeing the effects of climate change now; from coral bleaching and depleted fisheries to drought, infectious disease and invasive

pests. Every day, we are working with these communities to address issues of deforestation and we are helping both wildlife and people adapt to the impacts of climate change by ensuring the protection of functioning ecosystems and the services they provide that support all life on our planet.

We all need to take further action to promote clean energy, wean our economies off fossil fuels, curtail deforestation, and focus even more on applied solutions to both the current and future impacts of a warming planet. And we must continue to push for a fully global response to the greatest of ecological challenges despite this setback.

– **Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) President and CEO Cristián Samper**



Marine species are projected to be especially impacted by climate change. Photo by Rhett A. Butler.

The Paris Agreement represents an unprecedented collaboration among nations who choose to work together to address climate change in their own countries and globally. Dr. Jane Goodall participated in the 21st Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on Climate Change in Paris and, at that time, [she called on each of us](#) to take action ourselves to protect our natural world. Amidst all of the evidence and already occurring changes, threatening all living things in the oceans and on land (including humans), the Trump Administration is set on withdrawing from the Paris Agreement. In response to this, we must use Jane's message of action as a beacon to call upon ourselves and others to make decisions to help in curtailing climate change – an agreement we all make with the planet and all the other creatures we share this world with to protect life.

The climate is changing, and not in a subtle or “cyclical” way. According to an Intergovernmental Panel on Climate, predictions for accelerated climate change indicate that average global temperatures could increase between 1.4 and 5.8 degrees Celsius by the year 2100 ([IPCC](#)). Though that may seem “small,” the reality of this is several fold – causing alterations to global and smaller ecosystems varying between drought and flooding, increased frequency and intensity of storms, desertification, species migrations and extinctions, and reduced agricultural yield, just to name a few. Additionally, environmental refugees, scarcity, famine and conflict are sure to increase as these conditions do, and the economic losses due to climate change are massive, costing the global economy \$700 billion annually by 2030 ([Business Insider](#)). The “greenhouse effect” is the main culprit, as the burning of fossil fuels like oil and coal increases the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, trapping heat ([NASA](#)). We must reduce emissions and protect natural areas which sequester (trap) carbon, in order to prevent further and catastrophic warming.

The Paris Agreement

The [Paris Agreement](#), established in 2015, enlisted all of the nations in the world, (with the exception of Syria and Nicaragua – who felt it was not “tough enough”) to pledge to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in an attempt to slow the consequences of increasing global temperature. Within the initial agreement, the United States committed to reducing carbon emissions by 26-28% within 10 years ([White House Archives](#)). A withdrawal from these commitments would not only endanger billions of lives, but will also portray the United States as detrimental to the progress and safety of international communities, environments and species.

“It would also devastate our international credibility. We are one of the two largest carbon emitters, with China. We are the ones who put this deal together. It is the first step to try to do something about climate change. For President Trump to take us out, it is anti-science.” – Nick Burns, former Under Secretary under the George W. Bush administration ([CNN](#))

What Now?

Following massive movements like the March for Science and the People's Climate March to underscore the necessity and integrity of science and science backed policy, we are even more aware how crucial it is to become informed about this enormous issue and to make it a priority in our planning, decisions, and policy as an international community. The Jane Goodall Institute has [committed to protect forests](#) and thereby ensure that stored CO₂ is kept out of the atmosphere and that the trees can continue to absorb more. By [protecting these habitats and biodiversity](#) we can make sure these ecosystems remain healthy and ensure the long term survival of these forests.

We also work with local communities around conservation areas to create land use plans and determine how to best preserve forest, create forest reserves and [build sustainable livelihoods](#). JGI has also been working with a [REDD+](#) grant in Tanzania which allows heavy CO₂ polluters to offset their emissions by paying governments and villagers in developing countries not to cut down their forests, along with our [forest monitoring project](#) which is run by local citizens. These endeavors alongside our youth environmental compassionate leadership program [Roots & Shoots](#) in nearly 100 countries and our public outreach using Dr. Goodall's voice (follow [Dr. Goodall](#) and [the Jane Goodall Institute](#) on Facebook, [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#)) and our networks to increase awareness and grow a community of people inspired by hope to act, are ways in which we are addressing climate change and interconnected issues facing people animals and the environment, every day. Through a combination of individual action, our programs, and propelling movements demonstrating to policymakers that we will not accept apathy, we can change our behavior and better protect the balance of life on earth.

We Are Hope in Action

As the United States steps away from its commitments under the Paris Agreement and cedes its leadership role to other countries, we renew Dr. Goodall's call for individual action. We see the power of individual action every day as people connect with one another and begin to drive real change. We see the power of this action as corporations make climate-responsible decisions that are both demanded by their customers and by their bottom lines. We see the power of you. Please join us to make our own climate agreements, to take action to make the world a better place for people, animals and the environment. Together, we will prevail.

— The Jane Goodall Institute and Dr. Jane Goodall



Climate change, left unchecked, will continue to diminish the natural world — impoverishing ecosystems, diminishing habitats, extinguishing species, and depriving humanity of the wild beauty that can fill us with wonder and joy. Photo by Rhett A. Butler

Back in 1897, the Indiana State Legislature was on the verge of declaring that, contrary to mathematical proof, the circle really could be squared (and, incidentally, the value of pi really was exactly 3.2), when solid arguments by a Purdue mathematics professor caused legislators to reconsider.

The physics of global warming is as scientifically irrefutable as the mathematical properties of the number pi. The world must warm as the burning of fossil fuels causes atmospheric CO₂ levels to rise.

Warming will only cease when people take action to reduce CO₂; no legislation, no executive policy and no political theory that does not lead to CO₂ reductions can be effectual, for the laws of physics cannot be gainsaid. Scientists throughout the U.S. must repeat this message in every conceivable forum:

Climate change is not a hoax and those who believe it to be one need to reconsider, for inaction today endangers the next generation, both in America and around the world.

– **Bill Menke, Professor of Earth and Environmental Sciences, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and the Earth Institute at Columbia University**



This decision affects every living being and therefore requires an action from each of us. The long list of concerns, from animal extinction to sea level reaching cities has been widely exposed here and by countless credible sources.

Nonetheless, a stubborn man decided to overlook all of them — despite efforts from respected leaders to change his mind. To go beyond arguments, I believe the following actions should be taken by each of us:

- **Complain:** Be part of social movements, post in social networks and talk about it. Companies and Governments will take actions to capitalize social discomfort.
- **Reduce emissions:** Emissions come from all of us. By avoiding consuming from companies with high carbon footprints and directly adopting eco-friendly habits, such as walking and biking, we can make a direct impact.
- **Contribute to Environmentally Responsible Institutions:** By donating money and being part of [the solution] we help create a channel to oppose at a higher level.

An unfortunate situation like this, caused by an unconscious man — who happens to be the president of a country that emits 15% of the world's CO2 — can only be reverted with the actions of all of us. This is not only an effort to change a reckless decision, but also an opportunity to show that no man is above facts, and the desire of people and a community of countries looking for a better world.

– **Juan Pablo Campos, Staff Research Associate, Columbia Water Center**



Donald Trump decided to pull the U.S. out of the Paris Climate Agreement.

This is the wrong decision for America and the planet on many levels. First, it is scientifically ill-motivated, as the facts are clear; there is no alternate truth. The decision is also economically reckless, as the impacts of the changing climate have hit the U.S. hard already, and the current administration decided not to prepare the nation for it, at all costs.

The decision is politically a disaster, as it isolates the U.S. like no other move the current administration has done so far, putting the United States on a level with Nicaragua and Syria, the only two other countries not being part of the Paris Climate Agreement.

It is unclear what impact this step is going to have on the U.S. and the U.S. sciences and academia, but it is clear that it weakens and reduces America. However, as climate scientists, we will continue to do everything possible and in our power to improve our understanding of how the changing climate impacts the U.S. in order to better prepare the nation, as it is our scientific mission and our patriotic duty.

– **Joerg M Schaefer, Lamont Research Professor, Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, Adj. Professor, Dept. Earth and Env. Sciences, Columbia University, NY**



Deliberately oblivious to science and reality, the US administration has shown the very worst leadership behavior short of igniting a nuclear holocaust.

More than 25 years ago I told the head of UNEP "If you don't take care of climate change you can forget about biodiversity".

The biological toll of this decision will be devastating, but can be countered with good measures around the world and in the United States at the level of states and cities.

– **Thomas E. Lovejoy, George Mason University**

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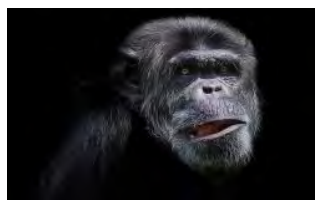
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