

In This Passionate Anti-Fracking Town, Civil Disobedience Just Became Protected Civic Duty

Published on Wednesday, May 04, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

For one community attempting to stop fracking wastewater injection wells, civil disobedience just became a sanctioned civic right.

The community is Grant Township, Pa., which, in November 2015, had fought off the Pennsylvania General Energy Company (PGE) and the Pennsylvania Independent Oil and Gas Association (PIOGA), assertion that fossil fuel companies had a 'right' to inject wastewater by [adopting](#) the country's first municipal charter establishing a local bill of rights codifying environmental and democratic rights.

"I will do whatever it takes to provide our residents with the tools and protections they need to nonviolently resist aggressions like those being proposed by PGE." –Stacy Long, Grant Township Supervisor

But facing ongoing litigation with PGE, the township has taken another creative approach to protect itself by passing a new ordinance on Tuesday that protects those taking direct action to uphold the charter from arrest. According to a press release from Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund (CELDF), which has helped the township craft its charter and wage its legal battle:

If a court does not uphold the people's right to stop corporate activities threatening the well-being of the community, the ordinance codifies that, "any natural person

may then enforce the rights and prohibitions of the charter through direct action.” Further, the ordinance states that any nonviolent direct action to enforce their Charter is protected, “prohibit[ing] any private or public actor from bringing criminal charges or filing any civil or other criminal action against those participating in nonviolent direct action.”

“We’re tired of being told by corporations and our so-called environmental regulatory agencies that we can’t stop this injection well!” stated Grant Township Supervisor Stacy Long. “We’re being threatened by a corporation with a history of permit violations, and that corporation wants to dump toxic frack wastewater into our Township.”

Long continued, “I live here, and I was also elected to protect the health and safety of this Township. I will do whatever it takes to provide our residents with the tools and protections they need to nonviolently resist aggressions like those being proposed by PGE.”

Among those expressing support for the ordinance is noted climate activist Tim DeChristopher, who said, “I’m encouraged to see an entire community and its elected officials asserting their rights to defend their community from the assaults of the fossil fuel industry.”

He took to Twitter to praise the move as well, [calling](#) it “one of the boldest moves to stop the natural gas industry’s attacks on our communities, climate and democracy.”

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Turning Point in Climate Fight as AGs Unite to Target Exxon Crimes

Published on Tuesday, March 29, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

In a move many are hailing as a “turning point” in the climate fight, 20 state Attorneys General on Tuesday launched an unprecedented, multi-state effort to investigate and prosecute the “high-funded and morally vacant forces” that have stymied attempts to combat global warming—starting with holding [ExxonMobil](#) and [other](#) industry giants accountable for fraud and suppression of key climate science.

“This is about facts, and science, and transparency,” said Massachusetts Attorney General Maura Healey, who spoke at a press conference alongside New York Attorney General Eric Schneiderman, former Vice President Al Gore and seven other Attorneys General.

“Fossil fuel companies that deceived investors and consumers about the dangers of climate change should be, must be held accountable,” Healey continued, saying there is a “troubling disconnect between what Exxon knew, what industry folks knew, and the company and industry chose to share with investors and the American public.”

The coalition of Attorneys General from 16 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands was convened by Schneiderman, who in November [announced](#) a state investigation into Exxon after reporting [revealed](#) that the oil giant had for decades known and suppressed evidence about the dangers that fossil fuels posed to the environment, and then purposely disseminated false information in order to boost its profits.

“It is troubling that, as the polar caps melt, there are

companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?"
-U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker

California has also [launched](#) an investigation and on Tuesday Healey and U.S. Virgin Islands Attorney General Claude Earl Walker confirmed their states have as well. Schneiderman said that additional states were pursuing similar action and that the purpose of the coalition is to work together in this "common interest."

"The scope of the problem we are facing, the size of the corporate entities and alliances and trade associations [working against science and public interest] is massive and it requires a multi-state effort," Schneiderman said.

AG Walker said that Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are already "experiencing the effects of global warming," from coral bleaching and the proliferation of seaweed, to ever-more powerful hurricanes.

"It is troubling that, as the polar caps melt, there are companies that are looking at that as an opportunity to go and drill, to go and get more oil. How selfish can you be?" Walker asked. "Your product is destroying this Earth, and you want to do what? Destroy the planet further," he added, saying they have "documents" showing just that.

"We will not stop until we get to bottom of this and make it clear we have to do something transformational," he added. "We cannot continue to rely on fossil fuels."

Environmental groups that have spearheaded the call for accountability and investigations into what Exxon knew heralded the announcements and the new AG climate coalition.

"This creates a huge sense of momentum. Exxon may have been able to brush aside a few isolated inquiries, but with more states jumping on board, these investigations are sure to

generate some serious waves,” said May Boeve, executive director of 350.org, which on Tuesday launched the website ExxonKnew.org to share information about the investigations and petition the U.S. Department of Justice and state Attorneys General to “hold Exxon accountable.”

“The Exxon revelations may turn out to be the largest corporate scandal in history,” Boeve continued. “Everyone is impacted by climate change, which means everyone has a stake in these investigations. A trial of ExxonMobil and the fossil fuel industry would be even bigger than the cases against Big Tobacco.”

As Katherine Sawyer, senior international organizer for watchdog group Corporate Accountability International, explained in an emailed statement following the press conference:

In the '90s, investigations by attorneys general were the beginning of the end for Big Tobacco as we knew it and ushered in a series of lawsuits that shuttered its front groups, forced the release of internal documents, and held it liable to pay the high cost of its impacts on society. Just as a similar coalition did with Big Tobacco, this powerful coalition of state Attorneys General are leading the way in holding Exxon and the rest of the fossil fuel industry accountable for their decades of deception and protecting climate policy from their profit-driven interference.

“Big Polluters have done everything in their power to deny climate change, it is time for our justice system to take back the climate debate,” [declared](#) Annie Leonard, Greenpeace USA executive director, who said the AGs’ announcement was “a clear demonstration of climate leadership.”

The coalition includes Attorneys General from California, Connecticut, District Of Columbia, Illinois, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Mexico, New York,

Oregon, Rhode Island, Virginia, Vermont, Washington state, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Appearing alongside members of that group, former Vice President Al Gore, whose 2006 documentary film *An Inconvenient Truth* is credited with spurring public debate about climate change, said, "I really believe that years from now this convening ...may well be looked back upon as a major turning point in the effort to hold to account those commercial interests...who have been deceiving the American people about the dangers of climate change."

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Organic Farmers Score New Victory in 'David and Goliath' GMO Fight

Published on Tuesday, January 05, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Nadia Prupis, staff writer](#)

Organic farmers are racking up [new victories](#) in the fight against 'franken-food', as a growing number of counties line up to bar genetically engineered (GE) crop cultivation throughout the country.

A federal judge in Jackson County, Oregon recently upheld a consent decree that designates the region a "GE-free zone," a ruling which officially protects the decree from appeal, granting new protections to farmers, consumers, and the environment.

That means organic and traditional farms in Jackson County

will be protected from chemicals produced by Monsanto, Syngenta, DuPont, and other biotech giants. The ruling follows the passage of other [similar ordinances](#) in at least eight U.S. counties, including in Hawaii, California, and Washington, along with another Oregon county. As the *Washington Post* pointed out on Monday, more bans are on the horizon, with Costilla County in Colorado pushing for its own GE-free zones.

“GE-Free Zones like Jackson County are important to the future of our food because they allow farmers to grow traditional and organic crops without risk of transgenic contamination,” said George Kimbrell, senior attorney with the Center for Food Safety (CFS), a consumer advocacy group which served as legal counsel to the farmers.

The judge’s ruling, which came in late December, [approved](#) the decree that was issued in response to a case brought by two GE farmers last February. With the financial support of the biotechnology lobby, the farmers challenged a 2014 ordinance that prohibited GE crop cultivation, seeking to overturn the ban on the grounds that it violated Oregon law.

However, Federal Judge Mark D. Clarke came down on the side of organic and traditional farmers, ruling that the ban was allowed under the state’s Right to Farm Act.

“U.S. farmers and consumers have a right to say no to Monsanto’s damaging and pesticide-driven business model,” Kimbrell said in December.

Elise Hingley, executive director of the Our Family Farms Coalition (OFFC), also said, “After years of fighting, farmers like myself can finally go to bed at night knowing our crops will be protected from GE-contamination.”

Under the terms of the decree, the GE farmers will be able to keep their limited crop of alfalfa in the ground for the remainder of its useful life. However, they will not be able to plant additional crops, and must enact safeguards against

cross-contamination, which means Jackson County is on its way to being “a GE-free sanctuary,” CFS said in a statement.

As Kimbrell told the *Post* on Monday, “Until we have those restrictions on a federal level, until we have liability on the patent holder for contamination, then we need these zones in order to have any alternative to the current dominant paradigm of the GE crop systems.”

Jackson County’s case “is important in that it makes clear that farmers growing traditional crops have the right to adopt local laws to protect their crops against GE contamination,” said attorney Lia Comerford with the Earthrise Law Center. “This has always been a David and Goliath battle and we are very pleased Jackson County’s ban on GE crops will stand.”

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‘Unlawful Pollution’: Volkswagen Charged With Crimes Against Climate

Published on Monday, January 04, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Lauren McCauley, staff writer](#)

The U.S. Department of Justice on Monday filed [suit](#) against Volkswagen, charging that the German auto-maker deliberately rigged cars to cheat emissions tests resulting in potentially millions of tons of greenhouse gas emissions and untold damage to the atmosphere.

The civil suit, filed on behalf of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, alleges that nearly 600,000 diesel engine

vehicles had illegal defeat devices installed that impair their emission control systems and cause emissions to exceed EPA's standards. Further, the complaint states that Volkswagen violated the Clean Air Act by bringing to U.S. market vehicles that were designed differently than the company had stated in applications for certification to EPA and the California Air Resources Board (CARB).

"With today's filing, we take an important step to protect public health by seeking to hold Volkswagen accountable for any unlawful air pollution, setting us on a path to resolution," [said](#) Cynthia Giles, assistant administrator for enforcement and compliance assurance at EPA.

Environmental groups have estimated that the cheating scandal caused at least 32.2 million tons of extra carbon pollution into the atmosphere, equal to roughly 6.8 million cars.

"What Volkswagen did wasn't just consumer fraud, it was a crime against our climate and against future generations relying on us for a livable planet," Peter Galvin, director of programs at the Center of Biological Diversity, [said](#) after the scandal first [erupted](#) in September when the EPA sent a Notice of Violation of the Clean Air Act to the manufacturer and its subsidiaries.

CBD had previously calculated that Volkswagen should owe as much as \$25 billion in fines for damages to climate and air quality. In a statement on Monday, Galvin said he was "heartened" by the development and urged the DOJ to pursue the full estimated compensation for the emissions cheating.

In addition to its environmental impact, pollution by nitrogen oxides (or NO_x) has been linked to grave health problems, namely asthma and other serious respiratory illnesses—with children, the elderly, and people with pre-existing respiratory disease particularly at risk. What's more, recent studies have shown that the direct health effects of NO_x are

worse than previously understood, and may also include damage to lung tissue and premature death.

Monday's suit seeks injunctive relief and the assessment of civil penalties. According to the EPA, it does not preclude the government from seeking other "legal remedies." Though Giles noted that "recall discussions with the company have not produced an acceptable way forward."

"Car manufacturers that fail to properly certify their cars and that defeat emission control systems breach the public trust, endanger public health and disadvantage competitors," said assistant attorney general John C. Cruden for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division. "The United States will pursue all appropriate remedies against Volkswagen to redress the violations of our nation's clean air laws alleged in the complaint."

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Media Coverage of Oregon Militia Standoff Raises Eyebrows – and Ire

Published on Sunday, January 03, 2016 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Deirdre Fulton, staff writer](#)

After members of a rightwing militia—many armed with assault rifles—seized the headquarters of a federal wildlife refuge in Oregon on Saturday afternoon, observers questioned the corporate media's treatment of the event, pointing to a double standard in coverage compared to other recent protests.

The Oregonian [reported](#) Saturday that Ammon Bundy, the son of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, who was the leader of a notorious standoff over cattle grazing rights last year, had “joined with hard-core militiamen Saturday to take over the headquarters of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, vowing to occupy the remote federal outpost 30 miles southeast of Burns for years.”

The occupation—protesting the prosecution of two Oregon ranchers, Dwight Hammond Jr. and Steven Hammond, who are to report to prison on Monday for arson—followed a march through the town of Burns.

According to *The Oregonian*:

In phone interviews from inside the occupied building Saturday night, Ammon Bundy and his brother, Ryan Bundy, said they are not looking to hurt anyone. But they would not rule out violence if police tried to remove them, they said.

“The facility has been the tool to do all the tyranny that has been placed upon the Hammonds,” Ammon Bundy said.

But despite the extreme nature of the demonstration, both media and law enforcement response appears muted, according to critics on social media and beyond.

Did I miss the call for the national guard in Oregon? I recall them in Ferguson and Baltimore. [#OregonUnderAttack](#)

– rolandsmartin (@rolandsmartin) [January 3, 2016](#)

*An armed group of people taking over a federal building is called what? **TERRORISM**. Unless you're white, apparently. [#OregonUnderAttack](#)*

– Black Lives MPLS (@BlackLivesMpls) [January 3, 2016](#)

*Thanks for posting. Imagine if they were black or Muslim? No National Guard, really? [#hypocrisy](#) [#OregonUnderAttack](#)
<https://t.co/rRQclyzE4G>*

– Tito Jackson (@titojackson) [January 3, 2016](#)

*Any other group and we'd be freaking out right? Domestic terrorism is real & often rooted in ultra-right wing soil.
[#OregonUnderAttack](#)*

– Emily C. Heath (@emilycheath) [January 3, 2016](#)

Language used in [#OregonUnderAttack](#) coverage is outrageous. Undeniable double standard when armed white terrorists act, compared to PoC

– Consented (@consenteduk) [January 3, 2016](#)

<https://twitter.com/TariqToure/status/683515467252772866>

This isn't the first time the Bundys have seemingly benefited from such a double standard.

In November 2015, watchdog site Media Matters [pointed out that](#) while Fox's coverage of campus protests against racial discrimination was—at best—dismissive, its reporting “looked drastically different when those protesting have aligned with the network's conservative agenda.”

Media Matters' Olivia Kittel wrote:

Recall when Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy [faced off](#) with the federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) over his refusal to pay grazing fees for his cattle's use of public lands in April 2014; he threatened violence and incited protests – which included armed militia supporters – to resist BLM

efforts to collect on his debt. Fox News rocketed Bundy to conservative folk-hero [status](#), [lauding](#) the rancher with the network's support even as numerous [media reports](#) described Bundy supporters pointing guns at federal law enforcement. BLM was even forced to suspend its operations when protesters – some of them armed – marched toward where BLM had impounded Bundy's cattle. Fox personalities [praised](#) Bundy supporters as “good, hardworking Americans,” “law-abiding American citizens,” and “patriotic Americans,” and one Fox host, Clayton Morris, sanitized the interactions between Bundy supporters and law enforcement, claiming, “Suddenly people are there protesting peacefully, arguing against government intervention here ... and all of these police and folks roll in with guns and sniper rifles pointing at them.”

Critics highlighted the hypocrisy on Twitter with the hashtag #OregonUnderAttack:

<https://twitter.com/hashtag/OregonUnderAttack>

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Reasons to Celebrate: Key Progressive Gains in 2015

Published on Thursday, December 31, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

As the year draws to a close, it's worth noting a handful of progressive gains that people-power made possible:

Feelin' the Bern

Despite the [lack of coverage](#) in corporate media about the Vermont Independent and his presidential bit, Sen. [Bernie](#)

[Sanders](#) and his call for a political revolution have resonated nationwide.

Sanders, who's put a spotlight on economic inequality, has also [slammed](#) the U.S. incarceration rate as an "international embarrassment," [called for](#) free higher education [lambasted](#) Wall street as "out of control," and [advocated](#) for a single-payer healthcare system, has been speaking to [record-breaking crowds](#).

He now [holds the record](#) for highest number of contributions for a White House bid, breaking the record held by President Barack Obama in 2011, and a Quinnipiac University poll this month found that, if the 2016 U.S. presidential election were held today, Sanders [would win](#) by a landslide over GOP frontrunner Donald Trump.

Black Lives Matter

The [Black Lives Matter](#) movement has put a spotlight this year on the rampant racial injustice plaguing the nation.

It's been able to [shift](#) public opinions on racism, and as Campaign for America's Future Terrance Heath writes, its because of the movement we know the names Michael Brown. Eric Garner. Laquan McDonald. Sandra Bland. Walter Scott. Rekia Boyd. Tamir Rice.

It's the movement of the year, commentator Sonali Kolhatkar [declared](#). "What the past two years have shown us is that killings of African-Americans by police is continuing to happen, continuing to be recorded, continuing to be protested and continuing to be condoned by a justice system hellbent on absolving the killers of black folk. It has also shown us that the movement that this injustice has spawned is shrewd, adapts quickly and is here to stay," she writes.

Hello, Corbyn

When anti-war, anti-austerity socialist [Jeremy Corbyn](#) was [elected](#) leader of the British Labour party in September, Salman Shaheen of Britain's progressive Left Unity party said, "British politics will never be the same."

Corbyn's victory, Shaheen said, "shatters the main parties' consensus on austerity, war and many other issues. This victory is part of a new kind of politics that is rising across Europe, as people reclaim hope and mass movements grow for real alternatives."

In November, as British Prime Minister David Cameron stated his desire to escalate the UK's military campaign against the Islamic State (ISIS) in both Iraq and Syria, Corbyn [said](#) that it is "vital" to learn from history and "not to be drawn into responses that feed a cycle of violence." World governments, he said, "must not keep making the same mistakes" in their fight against terrorism.

Ahead of his election, Corbyn also said that his party [would](#) "apologiz[e] to the British people for taking them into the Iraq war on the basis of deception and to the Iraqi people for the suffering we have helped cause."

Bye-bye, Harper

Canadians brought an end to nearly a decade of rule by right-wing Prime Minister Stephen Harper this fall when they elected Justin Trudeau of the Liberal Party.

In his victory speech, Trudeau called the win a repudiation of "negative, divisive politics" in favor of "a positive vision that brings Canadians together."

Days after the election, progressive commentators Seth Klein and Shannon Daub [wrote](#) that "it feels like a month's worth of catharsis, in the form of profound relief that after almost ten years of policies harmful to the environment, public services, social cohesion and democracy, the mean man and his bullies are gone."

Author Shawn Katz [wrote](#) that Trudeau's swearing in "unleash[ed] the rush of a collective catharsis as the weight of a traumatic decade lifted like a sombre fog."

Trudeau, who earlier this month [offered](#) a personal welcome to a group of Syrian refugees arriving in Toronto, [garnered](#) praise for appointing a diverse cabinet but has also been [pushed](#) by campaigners to "walk your talk on climate change" and reject corporate-friendly trade pacts.

(Photo: Rainforest Action Network/flickr/cc)Keystone XL Pipeline

After years of people-powered organizing, the Obama administration [rejected](#) the [Keystone XL](#) tar sands pipeline.

As *Common Dreams* previously [reported](#),

Through years of unprecedented campaigning, ordinary people in the United States and Canada turned what could have been an unremarkable rubber stamping of yet another fossil fuel pipeline into an internationally-watched fight to stop climate change. Since 2011, communities across the United States have staged over 750 direct actions and protests across the country—from mass sit-ins at the White House to a tens-of-thousands-strong march on the National Mall. Farmers, workers, students, Indigenous peoples, and communities on the frontlines of oil refineries and extreme weather put their bodies and relationships on the line—risking arrest, talking to their neighbors, and taking to the streets.

Highlighting the achievement, climate group 350.org writes: "When we started fighting this thing, they said it was a done deal. It was a long, hard fight, but it was worth it. Let that be a lesson to all the pipeline builders, coal financiers, and frackers of the world: Don't bet against the climate movement. We're playing for keeps."

Minimum Wage

Among the progressive issues that [won](#) on local ballots this fall, November 4th, voters approved every initiative to raise the minimum wage in the five states where they appeared.

The year also saw decisions to have phased-in minimum wage hikes in Los Angeles, Seattle, Oakland, and San Francisco.

And the *Huffington Post* points to a recent analysis showing that [workers in 14 states](#) will see the minimum wage go up.

Contributor Erik Sherman wrote previously at *Forbes*: “With 28 states now supporting minimum wages higher than the federal level, pressure on Congress will increase, while states with lower figures could find themselves economically uncompetitive for workers and, therefore, businesses.”

Marriage Equality

The U.S. Supreme Court [issued](#) a historic ruling this year that same-sex marriage is legal in all 50 states.

The decision in the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case, the ACLU noted, was 50 years in the making.

The ruling marked “a transformative triumph decades in the making, a momentous victory for freedom, equality, inclusion, and above all, love,” said Evan Wolfson, president of Freedom to Marry.

Failure of Global Elite’s Austerity

(Photo: RonF via The Weekly Bull/flickr/cc)An anti-austerity coalition took power in November in Portugal, while in the recent election in Spain, the conservative People’s Party lost significant ground to the anti-austerity Podemos party led by Pablo Iglesias. The results, some observers [said](#), matter not just to Spain to the whole of Europe as well.

The *New York Times* reported that “A backlash against austerity has helped crack the club of parties that had a lock on politics, and ushered in a new generation of challengers.”

And in Greece, Mark Weisbrot, co-director of the Center for Economic and Policy Research, noted, voters “rejected austerity in January and again overwhelmingly in June in a nationwide referendum, only to get it rammed down their throats by the European authorities. But Greece’s economy is less than 2 percent of the eurozone, and its new leaders from the leftist Syriza party – although they vociferously opposed austerity – made it clear that they would never leave the euro, no matter how much they were punished.”

In that country, still in the grips of “financial terrorism by the European authorities,” as Weisbrot put it, Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras and former finance minister, Yanis Varoufakis, both cheered the outcome in Spain, with Varoufakis calling it “a small step that may turn into a large faultline shattering the eurozone’s crisis-denial and austere contempt for democracy.” Tsipras for his part, tweeted: “austerity has now been defeated politically in Spain, as well.”

The UK’s Corbyn went to Portugal following their election, and [said](#), “We’re building an anti-austerity coalition across Europe.”

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Climate Change Driving ‘Profound’ Shift in Arctic Ecosystem

Published on Tuesday, December 15, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#)
by [Sarah Lazare, staff writer](#)

The 2015 report card compiled by the National Oceanic and

Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and released Tuesday comes to a disturbing conclusion: record highs in air temperatures, and lows in peak ice, reveal that—for the marine ecosystem—climate change is already “profound.”

“Changes in sea ice alone are having profound effects on the marine ecosystem (fishes, walruses, primary production) and sea surface temperatures,” reads a [statement](#) from the federal agency, whose findings were produced by 72 scientists from 11 countries.

The findings were grim. Measurements of sea ice—and the end and beginning of the winter period—found a shorter window of freezing, and a dramatic shift in the ecosystem overall.

Maximum sea ice extent in February was “15 days earlier than average and the lowest value on record” since 1979, NOAA warns. “Minimum ice extent in September was the 4th lowest on record. Sea ice continues to be younger and thinner: in February and March 2015 there was twice as much first-year ice as there was 30 years ago.”

Loss of sea ice, and climbing temperatures in the Barents Sea, off the coast of Norway and Russia, are causing “a poleward shift in fish communities,” according to the agency. These changes are impacting wildlife, as well as Indigenous communities that rely on them for their survival.

“The Arctic is warming twice as fast as other parts of the planet, which has ramifications for global security, climate, commerce, and trade,” [said](#) NOAA Chief Scientist Dr. Rick Spinrad at a press conference on Tuesday in San Francisco.

NOAA summarized its findings in the following video:

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Pope Francis: To Address 'Grave Environmental Crisis,' Build Social Justice

Published on Wednesday, November 25, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

Pope Francis warned on Wednesday that the world is facing a “grave environmental crisis” and spoke of the intersection between social justice and the protection of nature.

The pontiff’s [comments](#), made in the Kenyan capital at the start of his first visit to the continent, come just days ahead of the [UN climate summit in Paris](#), where global delegates will hammer out an agreement to curb climate change.

“The grave environmental crisis facing our world demands an ever greater sensitivity to the relationship between human beings and nature,” Francis said at the State House in Nairobi, where he spoke to President Uhuru Kenyatta and political leaders.

“We have a responsibility to pass on the beauty of nature in its integrity to future generations, and an obligation to exercise a just stewardship of the gifts we have received.

“In effect, there is a clear link between the protection of nature and the building of a just and equitable social order. There can be no renewal of our relationship with nature, without a renewal of humanity itself,” he said, referencing his [widely heralded encyclical](#).

“To the extent that our societies experience divisions, whether ethnic, religious or economic, all men and women of

good will are called to work for reconciliation and peace, forgiveness and healing. In the work of building a sound democratic order, strengthening cohesion and integration, tolerance and respect for others, the pursuit of the common good must be a primary goal," he said.

In addition to his stop in Kenya, Pope Francis' African trip will also include a stop in Uganda, but, the *Washington Post* [reports](#),

the focal point of his Africa trip appears to be the Central African Republic, where a war between Christians and Muslims has claimed more than 5,000 lives since 2013. The fighting there remains intense, and some security experts are surprised that Francis's visit has not been canceled. It is the first time a pope has traveled to an active conflict zone.

There, Francis is scheduled to meet with Muslims at the central Koudougou mosque in Bangui, the capital. Driving through the city, he is likely to see some of the thousands who have been displaced by the most recent spasm of violence.

Underscoring Francis' statement in his encyclical that there is "an urgent need to develop policies" to slash carbon emissions, the UN weather agency on Wednesday [delivered](#) "bad news for the planet"—2015 is on track to be the hottest year on record, and 2011-2015 has been the warmest five-year period on record.

Also on Wednesday, international aid group Oxfam [expressed](#) the inverse of the Pope's remarks, warning in a report that "Left unchecked, climate change could reverse decades of development in the world's poorest countries."

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Calling Edward Snowden an ‘International Human Rights Defender,’ EU Resolution Calls for His Protection

Published on Thursday, October 29, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

The European Parliament [passed](#) a resolution Thursday urging its nations to afford NSA whistleblower [Edward Snowden](#) protection.

Passed by a 285 to 281 vote, the resolution calls on EU member states to “drop any criminal charges against Edward Snowden, grant him protection and consequently prevent extradition or rendition by third parties, in recognition of his status as whistle-blower and international human rights defender.”

Snowden, who’s been residing in Russia since 2013, responded to the resolution on Twitter by calling it a “game-changer”:

While the resolution is not binding, Wolfgang Kaleck, Snowden’s lawyer in Berlin, told the [Daily Dot](#) in an email, “It is an overdue step and we urge the member States to act now to implement the resolution.”

U.S.-based digital rights group [Fight for the Future](#) welcomed the news as well. Evan Greer, the organization’s campaign director, said, “We hope that this resolution leads to a binding agreement in the EU that allows Edward Snowden to move to whichever EU country he wants, and we hope he gets an epic party thrown in his honor when he arrives.”

“The battle over mass government surveillance is a decisive moment in the history of humanity, and it’s hard to think of anyone who has done more than Edward Snowden to educate the public about the grave risks that runaway spying programs pose to our basic human rights, the future of the Internet, and freedom of expression,” he added.

The World Wide Web Foundation, which advocates for an open Internet and was founded by Web inventor Tim Berners-Lee, called it a “landmark resolution.” It added in a statement, “We call on national leaders to publicly commit to respecting the will of the European people and offering Snowden asylum.”

Berners-Lee [said](#) in a Reddit Ask Me Anything session last year that Snowden “should be protected, and we should have ways of protecting people like him. Because we can try to design perfect systems of government, and they will never be perfect, and when they fail, then the whistleblower may be all that saves society.”

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Rallying with Pope, Climate Justice Campaigners Hail ‘Shovel-Ready Solution’

Published on Thursday, September 24, 2015 by [Common Dreams](#) by [Andrea Germanos, staff writer](#)

An hour after Pope Francis [spoke](#) to Congress and issued “a call for a courageous and responsible effort [...] to avert the most serious effects of the environmental deterioration caused by human activity,” a rally on the National Mall highlighted a

“shovel-ready solution” to the climate crisis.

Speaking at the Moral Action on Climate Justice demonstration Thursday, Larry Kopald, co-founder and president of organization [The Carbon Underground](#), [said](#) it’s “a solution that will put carbon back in the ground, a solution that will feed us better, make us healthier, create jobs, and even boost our economy.”

“What is this magic solution?” he asked. “You’re standing on it [...] It’s the soil.”

Kopald and his organization are not alone in calling for soil to be seen as part of a climate solution, with organizations including the [Center for Food Safety](#), [Organic Consumers Association](#), the [Rodale Institute](#), and Vandana Shiva’s [Navdanya](#) also touting the approach. Regenerative agriculture’s ability to heal soil [was also the focus](#) of the Regenerative International Conference in Costa Rica this June, as well as the Soil Not Oil International Conference [held earlier this month](#) in Richmond, California.

Kopald explained the problem with the dominant method of food production, saying, “Industrial agriculture techniques have destroyed most of the soil. Seventy percent of the soil on earth is dead or dying, and all of that carbon that should be in the soil is now stuck in the atmosphere causing climate change.”

But healthy soil fed through [agroecological](#) methods can be an effective carbon sink, he explained.

“Here’s the good news: If we restore that soil, we can bring that carbon back. We can fix the climate. There are a billion acres of land in the U.S. alone used to grow food,” he said. “If we restore those acres, if we restore that soil, we we bring down 3 billion tons of carbon back from the atmosphere [...] every single year.”

The current system in which “subsidies [are given to] to farmers using chemicals destroying our soil and causing climate change,” needs to stop, Kopald continued, with the subsidies instead going “to farmers who are willing to restore our soil, and feed us better food, and help reverse climate change.”

“We need to tell President Obama and the next man or the next woman who lives in the White House that we’ve got to stop focusing on the problem and start focusing on the solution,” he said, urging rally attenders to send a message to lawmakers to “fix the soil, fix the climate.”

The event, which organizers stated on their [website](#) invited people to “join thousands of people of all creeds, colors and faiths, on the National Mall in asking our world leaders to #FollowFrancis to take bold action for climate justice,” also included speeches by the Moral Monday movement leader Rev. William Barber, Greenpeace International executive director Kumi Naidoo, and the musician Moby.

Twitter users captured parts of the event with the hashtag #FollowFrancis:

[#FollowFrancis Tweets](#)

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