TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy
May 16, 2017

What Do You Do When the Failsafe Fails?

Way up in the Arctic Circle, on the Norwegian island of Svalbard (not to be confused with SWLABR) lies a vault designed to safeguard our staple foods from catastrophic crop die-off. Tucked into the side of a mountain, the Global Seed Vault holds over 500 million seeds representing nearly a million different crop types. The cache is a failsafe to help reestablish humanity's food supply in the aftermath of nuclear fallout, pandemic crop disease, or massive crop failure resulting from climate change. In fact, the threat of global warming was one of the primary motivations for the Norwegian government to build the vault in the first place. That makes it a little bit ironic (don't ya think?) that the vault's designers did not consider the impact warming temperatures could have on the vault itself.

It was reported last week that a combination of warm weather and heavy rain in October 2016, caused water intrusion at the entrance of the vault. Building the vault in permafrost (as in *permanent* frost) was a cost-effective way to maintain the sub-zero temperatures needed to keep the seeds viable. But, record high temperatures across the planet have contributed to unprecedented thawing in the arctic. Some of that meltwater (combined with rain) made its way into the tunnel that leads to the vault. The good news is that the seeds are fine, and would be even under far more drastic scenarios. Still, people need to be able to get to the seeds, and the Norwegian government is taking steps to prevent further flooding to the entrance tunnel. For now, this is a cautionary reminder that warming temperatures will require us to reconsider assumptions of 'permanence' in a rapidly changing world.

Plan Your Trip to Tropical…Nashville?

Things are heating up in the southeastern United States, and it's only going to get worse according to a new study from researchers at Georgia State University. The findings, published earlier this week, project increases in air temperatures and humidity across the southeast as climate change pushes tropical zones further north. That means states like Georgia, Tennessee, and North Carolina will start to feel a lot more like south Florida.

Folks who have sweat through muggy summers in places like Atlanta, Memphis, or Raleigh are surely shocked to hear

The **Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy** is a program of the Tulane University Law School.

The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and stewardship of water.

Coming up:

Freshwater Bayou Marsh Restoration
Pecan Island, LA
May 26, 27, 2017
St. Bernard Coastal Panel
Meraux, LA
June 1, 2017
One Water Summit
New Orleans, LA
June 27-29, 2017

Water jobs:

Water Law & Policy Fellow
UC Berkeley School of Law
Berkeley, CA
Senior Manager (State Policy)
Ceres
Boston, MA
Vice President & Executive Director
Audubon Society
New Orleans, LA
Water Scarcity & Markets Strategy Director
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that things could get even stickier. Many cities in the southeast already struggle with heatwaves that disproportionately affect vulnerable populations like the elderly and the poor. More frequent and intense heatwaves threaten to make power bills less affordable and stress public health problems in these areas. Changing weather patterns require changes in urban planning and individual behavior. Cities like Atlanta have begun experimenting with 'green' roofs that improve insulation and keep heat out during the summer. They also have used the Beltline project to install more greenspace, rather than concrete, across the city. In North Carolina, a 2001 initiative encourages individuals to 'raise up' and cool each other off by spinning their shirts around their heads (just like a helicopter). However it's done, people are going to need more help cooling off, and soon.

Stick to the Plan

Louisiana's 2017 Coastal Master Plan cleared another hurdle to adoption last week. The Senate overwhelmingly voted in favor of approving the plan with a vote of 33-1 (Sen. Jonathan Perry of Kaplan cast the lone negative vote). The Master Plan now heads to the House Transportation and Natural Resources committees before a similar up-or-down vote (no amendments) in front of the full House of Representatives.

The Master Plan and is a collection of projects and programs designed to stem the tide of land loss in the state and provide some stability to a coastline that has lost almost 2,000 square miles since 1932. Sen. Norby Chabert of Houma exhorted his colleagues to support the Master Plan, stating that it will be "one of the most important endeavors undertaken by the State of Louisiana." Other Senators pointed out that the State's efforts thus far have put it in the vanguard of governments tackling issues around climate change and sea level rise. "We're being copied around the world and looked at around the world," said Sen. Dan Morrish "as the go-to people for water resources, human resources and storm protection."

Going, Going, GOMESA

President Trump released his proposed budget for 2018 yesterday, a document that calls for deep cuts to (among other things) the State Department, the EPA, and the DOE. It also proposes a complete repeal of the 2006 Gulf of Mexico Energy Security Act (GOMESA), a law that gives states a share of oil and gas revenue from federal lease sites in the Gulf. The revenue sharing system, developed on the heels of Hurricane Katrina, was conceived as a way to help states like Louisiana offset the environmental burden of acting as the landside conduit for much of the nation's offshore energy production. Trump's budget would redirect the revenue to the general budget to help pay for proposed tax cuts and infrastructure projects.

GOMESA revenue makes up a big chunk of the money Louisiana plans to spend on projects in the Coastal master Plan. While some lease tracts are already sending revenue to state coffers, the bulk of the revenue is set to begin flowing to states by next year. Louisiana expects to receive up to $140 million annually (and another $30 million for coastal-zone parishes) to fund the state's coastal restoration activities. GOMESA is one of only a few recurring sources of revenue for the Coastal Master Plan. By our estimate, GOMESA makes up about 30% of all identified funding for the Coastal Master Plan. Congress rebuffed similar efforts by the Obama administration to redirect offshore oil and gas revenue in 2016 and 2015. The Trump administration's proposal will likely meet heavy resistance from Gulf-state legislators whose states are counting on GOMESA revenue for essential coastal projects.