

Trump axes NASA climate research program

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The Trump administration has continued its attack on climate science, quietly defunding a NASA research program aimed at monitoring greenhouse gas emissions.

The Carbon Monitoring System, or CMS, has provided funding since 2010 for a series of projects to help researchers develop a more comprehensive understanding of the sources and sinks of greenhouse gases internationally and to verify the effectiveness of efforts to reduce carbon pollution. Congress declined to explicitly fund the program in the March budget deal, allowing the Trump administration to cancel it unilaterally.

The rescission of the CMS program comes amid a broader effort by the Trump administration to curtail climate change research. Trump's budget plans have repeatedly targeted NASA's earth science program, proposing hundreds of millions in cuts to the nearly \$2 billion effort. Several satellites were to be canceled, including the Orbiting Carbon Observatory 3, the Climate Absolute Radiance and Refractory Observatory, and the Deep Space Climate Observatory, among others.

These projects, which are critical to advance an understanding of how the earth responds to global change, have survived thus far in budgets enacted by Congress, but remain on the hit list for the fiscal year 2019 budget.

It is not only at NASA where the Trump administration's attack on science is moving forward. At the Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Interior, the dismantling of climate-related science is even further along. EPA removed climate from the portfolio of its Office of Research and Development. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke has taken steps to curtail the agency's ability to assess climate change in its land management practices and has reassigned climate scientists to other work.

These steps to curtail scientific research are closely linked to changes in environmental policy. Under the cynical principle of "you can't regulate what you don't measure," EPA has moved to weaken methane reporting requirements for the oil and gas industry. The federal government has also proposed drastic changes to its accounting of the benefits of reducing carbon dioxide emissions for use in rulemaking. EPA is in the process of rolling back Obama-era climate rules for the country's two largest contributors of carbon pollution, power plants and cars.

The connection between the regulatory rollbacks and attacks on climate science is embodied throughout the government by a host of political appointees with close ties to the energy industry who downplay or outright deny the scientific consensus on climate change. NASA's new chief, Jim Bridenstine, was confirmed by the Senate last month despite having no scientific credentials. While Bridenstine moderated his stance during confirmation hearings, he has previously parroted discredited arguments of climate deniers and called funding climate change research a "gross misallocation" of resources.

Bridenstine is a former congressman from Oklahoma where, like his fellow Oklahoman, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt, he developed close ties with the drilling interests that dominate state politics. Rounding out a cabinet of climate change deniers and drilling cheerleaders are Interior's Zinke and Secretary of Energy Rick Perry.

NASA's ending of the CMS program is relevant in particular to the Paris climate accord, from which Trump initiated the US withdrawal last year. The agreement required each national government to set targets for reducing greenhouse gases. Tools developed via CMS can help assess whether these targets are achieved.

Kelly Sims Gallagher, director of the Tufts

University Center for International Environment and Resource Policy, told *Science* magazine, “If you cannot measure emissions reductions, you cannot be confident that countries are adhering to the agreement.”

The value of CMS is not limited to verifying national commitments. One of the most important functions of the program is to further an understanding of carbon fluxes and other processes in remote areas of the globe. Ongoing projects include assessments of forests in Mozambique and Indonesia, fires in the interior of Alaska, and the water cycle in the shrublands of Mexico.

At just \$10 million in annual funding, the cost of the program is a mere rounding error compared to the increases in military spending passed in the recent bipartisan budget deal.



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