

PLANETARY HEALTH WEEKLY



CURRENT NEWS ON ECOLOGICAL WELLNESS AND GLOBAL HEALTH

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January 30, 2020

Hi,

With over 50 million people affected, over 8000 infected (and one claim of over 90,000) and over 170 dead, the Wuhan coronavirus flu is certainly causing global havoc and great concern; and the news is changing by the hour and now a [global emergency has been declared](#). Even here in Toronto with two infections and another in Vancouver area Canada is also impacted though not causing much alarm; we seem to be prepared. It brings to mind though what was said after SARS some 17 years ago (with 774 dead), that we didn't know what new infection will be next, but certainly there would be one. Did we believe it then? We believe it now. This is so similar to climate change predictions, right on and happening without doubt.

This, too, is like a sustainability issue, but for the worse. Diseases seemingly also work towards sustainability, continually evolving and presenting us with new challenges, getting our attention and adding more to global stress levels: uncertainty, evacuations, quarantines, cancellations, sickness and death.

Sustainability came to mind, too, while visiting Niagara Falls the other day (see End Shots). The water keeps flowing over the giant cataract day after day after day, now for many thousands of years; even eroding backwards about 11 km over the last 12,000 years; it just keeps coming. Blessed with an amazingly enormous lake system, boasting the falls between Lakes Huron and Erie, it seems to be a poster child of sustainability. Let's hope it'll remain so.

Sustainability also came up in a great discussion a couple days ago with a close friend now working with UNICEF in Abuja, Nigeria. This discussion though totally

interrogated the concept of sustainability. Already horribly poor and afflicted, its among the highest population growth rates in the world is ready to take its population from a current 200,000,000 to more than 400,000,000 in the next 30 years, Nigeria could arguably be the poster child of unsustainability. Oh, to where are we heading?

In the stories that follow in today's ***Planetary Health Weekly*** (already #5 of 2020) you'll get some indication of this continually moving end point. As you read on below you'll find stories on:

- understanding the coronavirus flu,
- a million birds dead in a huge Pacific hot blob,
- Australian fires releasing a billion tons of carbon, adversely changing global climate patterns and choking cities,
- record setting global temperatures,
- African megacities trying to cope,
- the death of giant sequoias,
- U.S. coal plants retiring at a record rate,
- what our world would be like if Exxon had told the truth,
- a new measure and comparison of global crises,
- suicide rates dropping with a \$1 increase in minimum wage,
- the first Native American doctor,
- a new book "Silent Kingdom: a World Beneath the Waves" of underwater photography and essays; and another on "Policing Indigenous Movements" in Canada,
- the dangers of alcohol,
- screens in the classroom and more.

Please keep on reading below and check out our website anytime for all back issues.

Best, david

David Zakus, Editor and Publisher



Credit: David Zakus

NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO

JANUARY 27, 2020

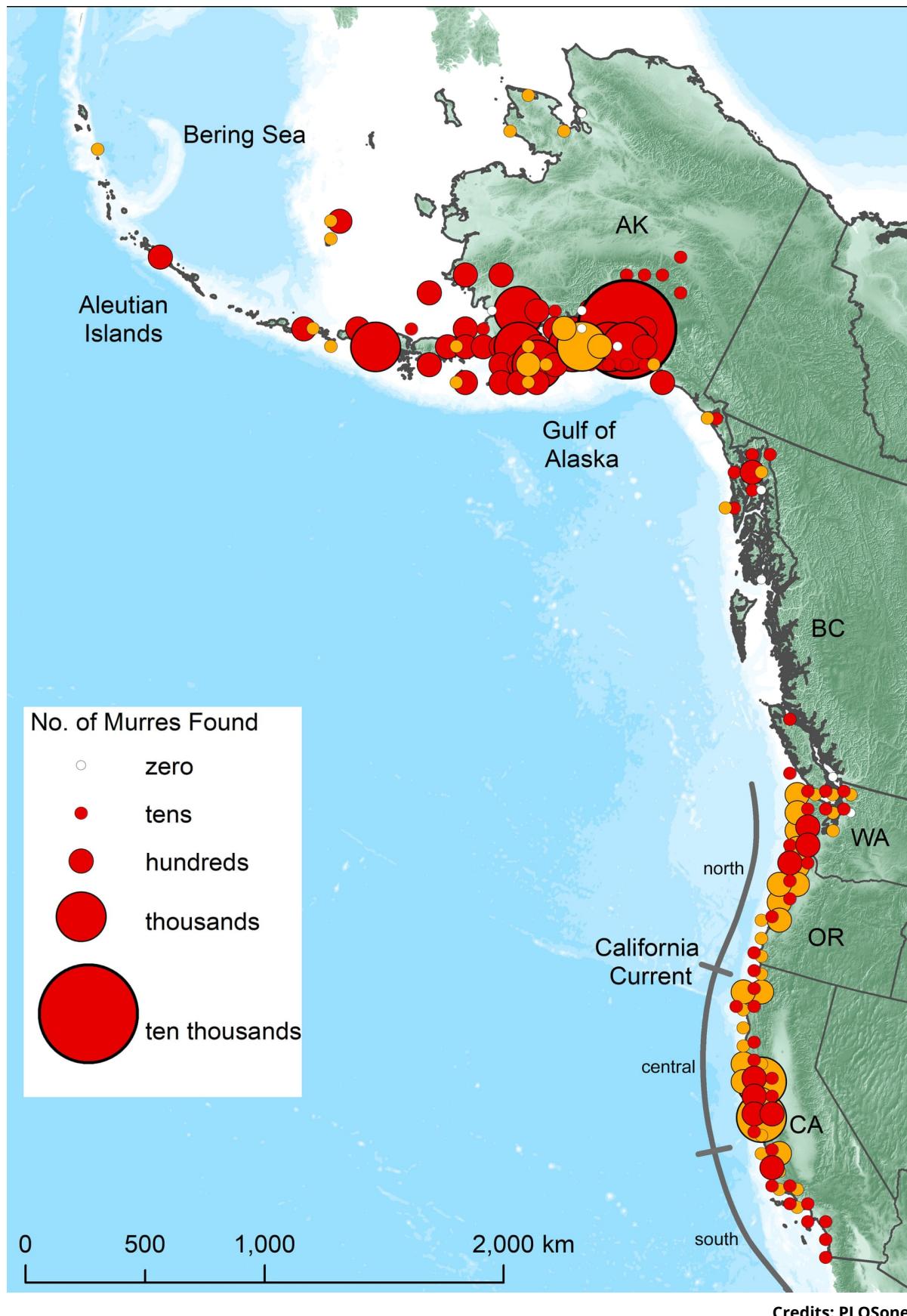
The New Coronavirus: Symptoms, Prevention, And What To Do If You Think You're Infected



Credit: Jonathan Hayward/(The Canadian Press)

If you have travelled to Wuhan, China, follow up with a health-care professional. Airports in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal — all of which have direct flights from China — have begun screening passengers. This article provides basic facts about the virus, its symptoms, prevention and what to do if you believe you are infected. [Read More at CBC.](#)

Huge 'Hot Blob' In Pacific Ocean Killed Nearly A Million Seabirds



A million seabirds died in less than a year as a result of a giant “blob” of hot ocean, according to new research. The map above highlights the west coast of North America to show the extreme mortality rates of murres. A study released by the University of Washington found the birds, called common murres, probably died of starvation between the summer of 2015 and the spring of 2016. Heat maps at the time showed a huge red blob growing, spanning more than 380,000 square miles (1m

sq km). That's nearly 1.5 times the size of Texas or four times the size of New Zealand. [Read More at The Guardian.](#)

Australian Wildfires Could Release A Billion Tons Of Carbon



Credit: Murray Staff/Royal Australian Air Force/AFP

A billion tons of emissions might not be impossible this wildfire season, but even more troubling is the possibility that it could become the norm in the future and that [climate change is indeed making wildfires worse](#). "Is this an exceptional season, or is this where we're heading in Australia, the western U.S. and some other places?" Jackson, a professor of Earth System Science at Stanford University, asked. "If these runaway fires become more normal, we're in for a very different world." [Read more at Futurism.](#)

[See also in The Inverse: Australia's Fires Could Change Global Climate Patterns For The Worse](#)

[See also in The Washington Post: In Australia, The Air Poses A Threat; People Are Rushing To Hospitals In Cities Choked By Smoke](#)

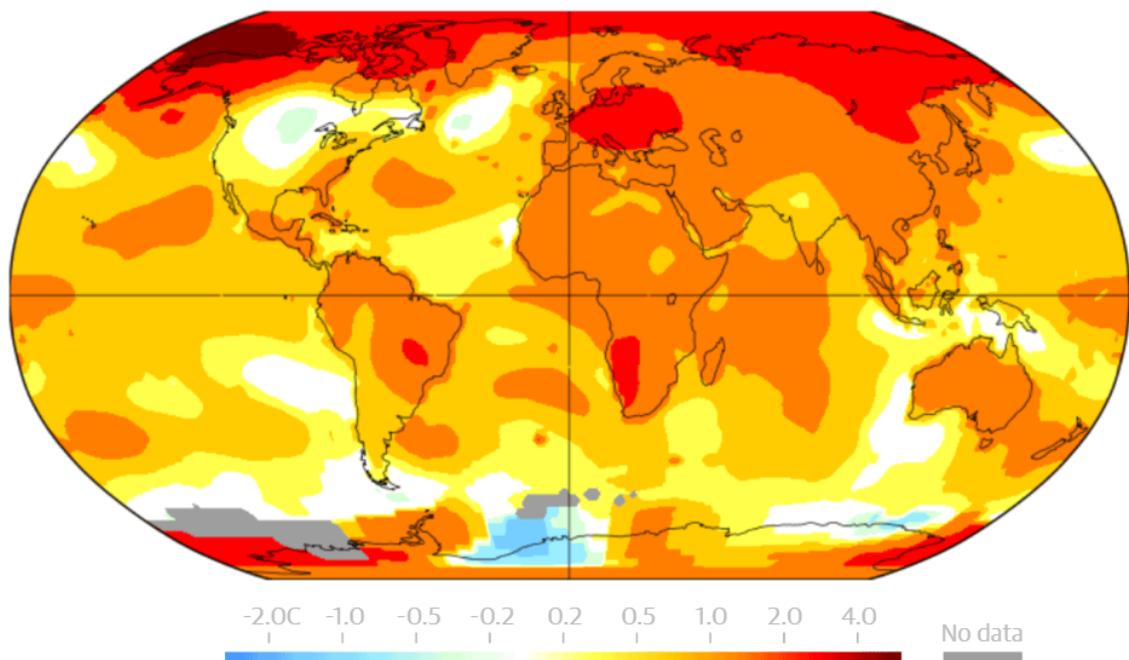
Climate Emergency: 2019 was Second Hottest Year on Record



Credit: Dean Lewins/AAP

The year 2019 was the second hottest on record for the planet's surface, according to latest research. The analyses reveal the scale of the climate crisis: both the past five years and the past decade are the hottest in 150 years. The previous hottest year was in 2016, the year that a natural [El Niño event](#) boosted temperatures. The new data are for the average global surface air temperature. More than 90% of the heat trapped by human greenhouse gas emissions is absorbed by the oceans, just as scientists revealed [2019 as the warmest yet recorded in the seas](#), calling it "dire news". "The last decade was easily the warmest decade in the record and is the first decade more than 1C above late 19th-century temperatures," said Gavin Schmidt, of NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies, which produced one of the temperature records. [Read more at the Guardian.](#)

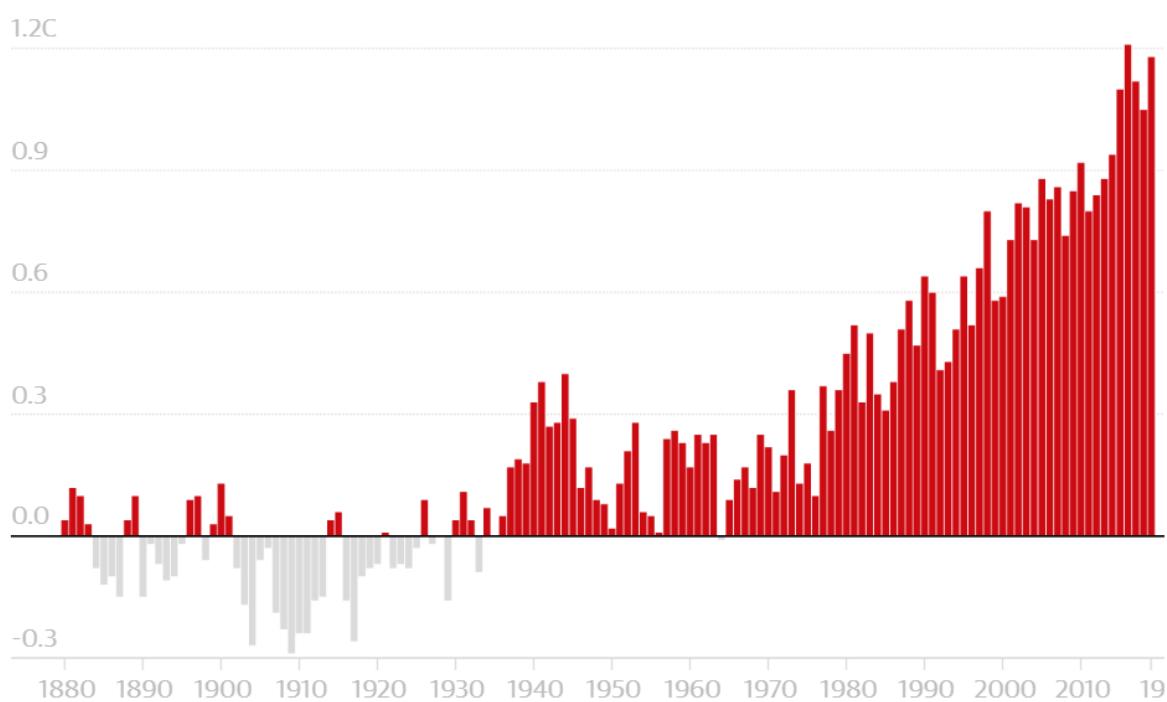
Global temperature anomalies between December 2018 and November 2019 compared with 1951-1980 average



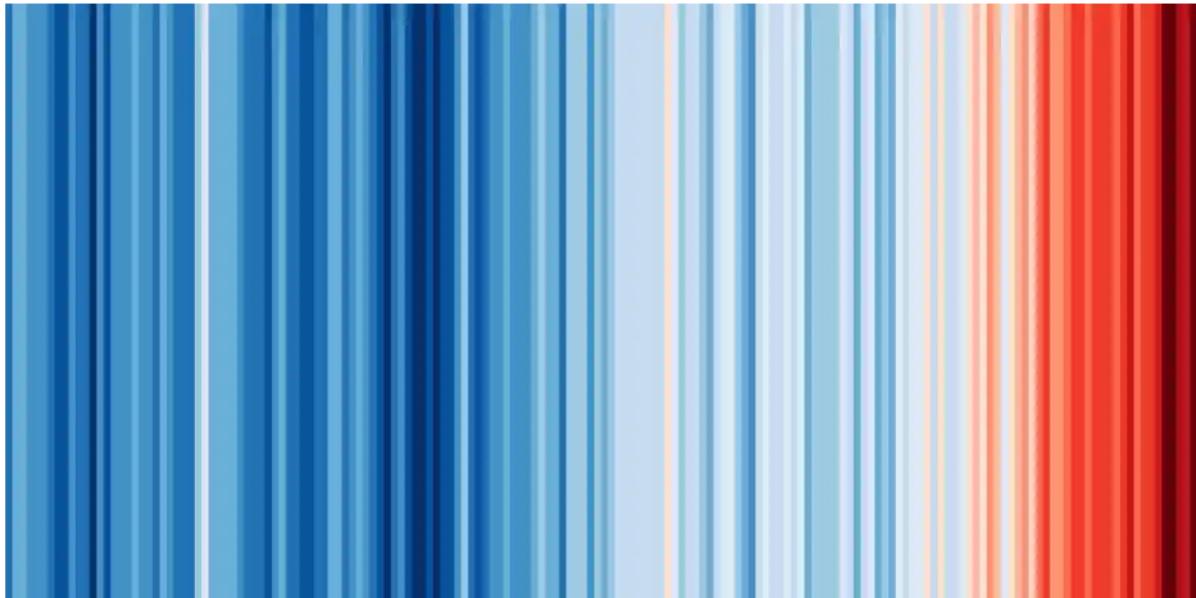
Guardian graphic. Source: Nasa/GISTEMP. Note: data not available for December 2019

The past decade was the warmest on record

Temperature relative to pre-industrial average (1850-1900)



Guardian graphic. Source: Nasa/GISTEMP



▲ 'Warming stripes' represent annual temperatures from 1850 to 2019, with darker reds representing the warmest years. Photograph: Ed Hawkins



Visual Journalism: African Megacities Adapt To A Climate Crisis



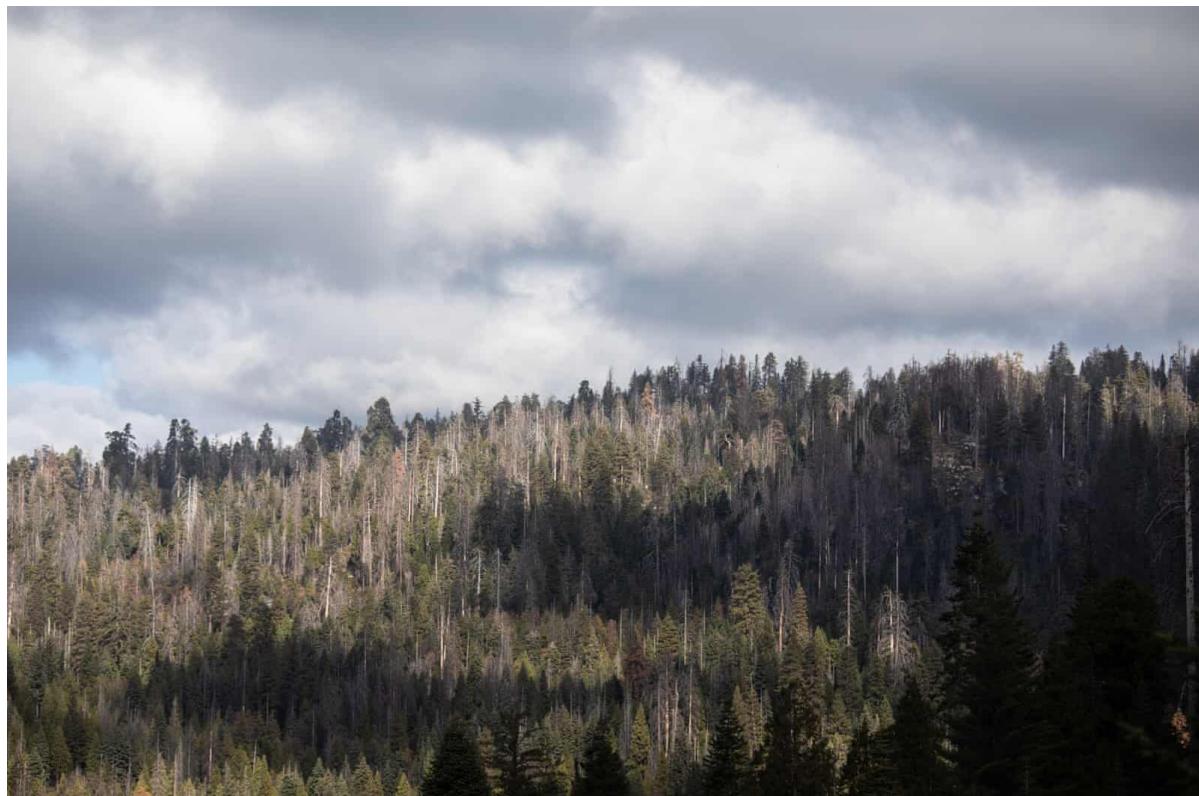
Credit: Goran Cutanoski, Kirsten Funck, Klaus Esterluß, Lars Jandl

Africa's cities are booming. But they will be hit hardest by climate change. In interviews with 30 urban Africans, including informal waste pickers and UN climate scientists, DW (Deutche Welle) looks at how four big and fast-growing cities are adapting: Lagos to scorching heatwaves, Kampala to rising waste, Cairo to potentially looming drought and Dar es Salaam to choking traffic.

Skipping class to address leaders of some of the world's most powerful cities, 22-year-old Hilda Nakabuye called on the room of mayors to stand in solidarity with young people fighting for the planet. "I am a victim of this climate crisis and I am not

ashamed to say so," said Nakabuye, a student from rural Uganda who now lives in Kampala, at a climate conference in October. Her voice cracking and eyes wet with tears, she recounted how her family had sold its land and livestock after heavy rains and fierce winds washed away crops, and drought dried up wells. "When the money was over, it was a question of survival or death." Read more at [Visual Stories](#).

'This Is Not How Sequoias Die. It's Supposed To Stand For Another 500 Years'



Credit: Mette Lampcov/The Guardian

The Giant Forest, situated within Sequoia National Park, California, is a mix of white fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, ponderosa pine and giant sequoia trees. The grey trees here are dead; in areas of the national park tree mortality of some species is 70%. "This is a tree that has lived through 2,000 years of fires, other droughts, wet years, dry years, hot years, cold years. It's been here longer than Europeans have been in this country and it's dead. And it shouldn't be dead. This is not how giant sequoias die. It's supposed to stand there for another 500 years with all its needles on it, this quirky, persistent, impressive, amazing thing, and then fall over. It's not supposed to have all of its needles fall off from the top to the bottom and then stand there like that.

Standing quietly on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada, the Californian giants can survive almost anything – fire, disease, insect attack, cold years, hot years,

drought – so the story goes. The largest living organisms on the planet can grow over 90 metres (300ft) tall. When they do die after 3,000 years or so, the oldest trees, known as monarchs, usually succumb to their own size and collapse. Their giant trunks will rest on the forest floor for another millennium. But the miraculous story of the near-indestructible giant trees that millions of Americans tell their children is no longer true. For the first time in recorded history, tiny bark beetles emboldened by the climate crisis have started to kill giant sequoia trees. [Read more at The Guardian.](#)

GOOD NEWS

Electric Cars Got Much Cleaner In 2019, As Coal Plants In the USA Were Retired At A Record Rate



Credit: Photovoltaic solar power field at Volkswagen plant in Chattanooga, Tennessee / Green Car Reports

One campaign pledge the Trump administration hasn't been able to keep, as of yet, is the [revival of the U.S. coal industry](#). U.S. coal power plants shut down at their second-fastest rate ever in 2019, according to new data from Thomson Reuters and the federal government. During 2019, 15.1 gigawatts of coal-fired electricity generation capacity was retired. That's the amount to power about 15 million U.S. homes—or

keep a great many electric vehicles charged year-round. [Read more at Green Car Reports.](#)

MORE GOOD NEWS

White Rhino Calf Born!



Credit: SEM VAN DER WAL

The Animal Care Team were aware that Emily was due to give birth sometime in December or January, and therefore have had around the clock CCTV on Emily so they could ensure they were available when she went into labour. All went smoothly as with her previous births and the calf is strong and healthy with mum doing really well too. Emily's calf took a little while to find her feet but was up and moving around within a few hours and has been feeding well. Emily is an experienced mum and so is taking it all in her stride. This big bundle of joy is Emily's 3rd calf, all of which she has had at Colchester Zoo, UK, with our male White rhino Otto. A rhino's gestation period is 16 months so we're sure that Emily is more than pleased to have successfully given birth and she can now enjoy raising her calf. [Read more at Colchester Zoo.](#)

OPINION

What Would Our World Be Like Today If Exxon Had Told The Truth? A Case Of Failed Leadership



Credit: Getty Images

It's now public knowledge that as far back as July 1977 Exxon executives knew burning fossil fuels would result in catastrophic climate change. A year later, in 1978 Exxon's senior scientist James Black updated Exxon executives that "man has a time window of five to ten years before the need for hard decisions regarding changes in energy strategies might become critical." Note Exxon's initial response was not to promote disinformation, but to promote research. In fact, the Inside Climate News investigation documented in 1982 there were people in Exxon management who wanted to use this as an opportunity to show leadership and develop technology that would benefit humanity. But then something changed. [Read More at Daily Kos.](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY

Raising the Minimum Wage Just \$1 Would Cause Suicide Rates to Drop



Credit: agsandrew/iStock, NatchaS/iStock]

A mere \$1 increase in minimum wage is linked to a 3.5% to 6% drop in the suicide rate among Americans with a high school education or less, according to a study just published in the *Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health*. The potential for a minimum wage increase to prevent suicides is most powerful, lead author John Kaufman notes, when there's a lot of unemployment. The study looks at monthly data from 1999 to 2017, for all 50 states and Washington, D.C., concerning suicide rates, the difference between the effective state and federal minimum hourly wage, changes in state minimum wages, and unemployment data. Suicide rates have been increasing in the U.S. nationally, and so much so in some places that 25 states saw suicide rates rise 30% between 1999 and 2017—and Kaufman, a doctoral student in epidemiology at Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health. [Read More at The Fast Company](#)

SPOTLIGHT ON INDIGENOUS WELLNESS

HISTORY'S FORGOTTEN PIONEER: THE FIRST NATIVE AMERICAN DOCTOR



Credit: History Nebraska

As the sun slipped past the horizon, the young girl watched with growing anxiety as an elderly woman struggled to breathe. It was 1873, and they lived on the Omaha Reservation in the northeast corner of Nebraska. The old woman's condition was worsening, but the White doctor — sent for four times — refused to come. The hours ticked by, and eventually, the woman died before the girl's eyes. As she would later describe in her journal, Susan La Flesche Picotte vowed that night to do whatever it took to become a doctor, which she did. [Read more at The Ozy.](#)



Credit: AP PHOTO/RICK RYCROFT

Quote Of The Week

"We Australians always imagined climate refugees would arrive by boat from sinking Pacific islands; now we have thousands of internally displaced persons from our own home-grown climate change disaster...These fires are freakish. Firefighters with decades of experience say they've never seen anything like it. The fires are so intense that they create their own weather systems, making their behaviour almost impossible to predict. A "fire-generated tornado" created a hot vortex that picked up a 10-tonne fire truck and flipped it over, crushing one of the crew.

"How does that even happen? Such freak incidents reveal that we don't have the concepts or experience to grasp what is happening. Those who are not fighting the fires, or providing support, watch the images mesmerized. Bushfires in previous summers have provided a spectacle to be enjoyed safely from living rooms in the cities. Not this time.

'Beneath the emotional outpouring and the political turmoil, something deeper will soon begin. We will mourn—mourn for those who have died, for the communities destroyed, for the magnificent forests lying charred and silent,

and for the uncountable birds and animals incinerated or starving to death because their habitat is gone. And we will grieve for something harder to define: the death of the future. These fires, like climate-change-induced disasters around the world, are upending our ways of thinking about the world. Somehow, we must begin to imagine a different future on a warming Earth, one that is increasingly unfriendly to human civilization.”

Clive Hamilton, an author and professor of public ethics at Charles Sturt University in Canberra. Read more of his work at [Clive Hamilton](#).

**For full story see in Sierra Club: [A Letter From Canberra](#)
[The Apocalyptic Fires In Australia Signal Another Future](#)**

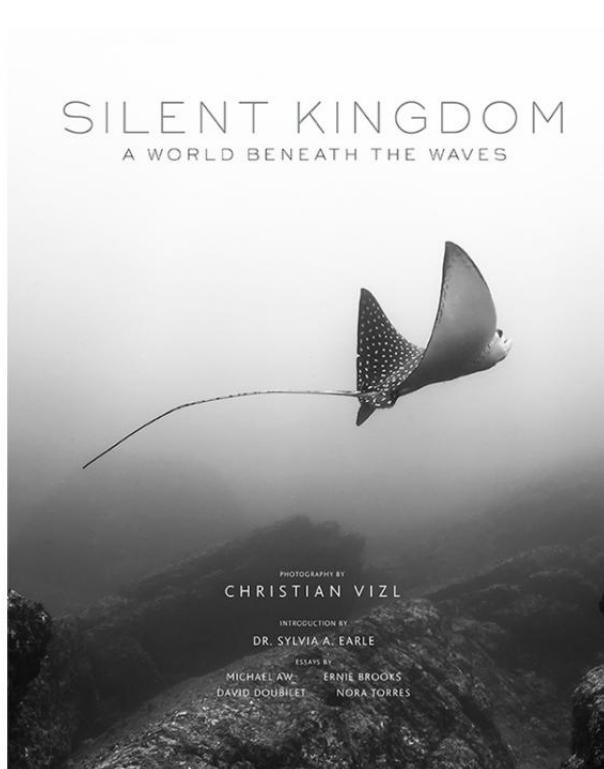
Upcoming Events

- January 30th, 31st & February 1st: [Early Years Conference 2020: Listen Together, Learn Together, Act Together](#) (Vancouver, Canada)
- February 5th: [When The Storm Uproots: The Impact Of Climate Change On Displaced Populations Around The World](#) (Montreal, Canada)
- February 7th - 8th: [International Development Week Conference: Sustainable Development In A Climate Crisis](#) (Ottawa, Canada)
- February 19th - 20th: [2nd World Congress on Primary Healthcare and Medicare Summit](#) (Paris, France)
- March 6th - 7th: [International Women's Day: Research and Revolt Conference](#) (Guelph, Ontario)
- March 21st - 24th: [Oxfam Summit And Day Of Action](#) (Ottawa, Canada)
- March 31 - April 2: [World Public Health Nutrition Congress 2020](#) (Brisbane, Australia)
- April 6th -7th, 2020: [17th World Congress on Paediatrics and Neonatology](#) (Tokyo, Japan)
- April 18th -20th, 2020: [CUGH Conference 2020: Global Health in a Time of Worldwide Political Change](#) (Washington, D.C., USA)

- April 24th - 26th, 2020: [PEGASUS IV Migration - Climate Change - Sustainable Development](#) (Waterloo, Ontario, Canada)
- April 28th - 29th: [Global Health Impact Expo + Exchange](#) (Ottawa, Canada)
- April 28th - 30th: [CPHA's Public Health 2020](#) (Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada)
- May 2nd - 4th: [RESULTS CANADA National Conference: From action to impact: working together to end extreme poverty](#) (Ottawa, Canada)
- May 21st - 23rd: [Indigenous Health Conference: Building Our Future](#) (Niagara Falls, Canada)

FYI#1 SPOTLIGHT ON MEDIA: NEW BOOK

Silent Kingdom: A World Beneath The Waves



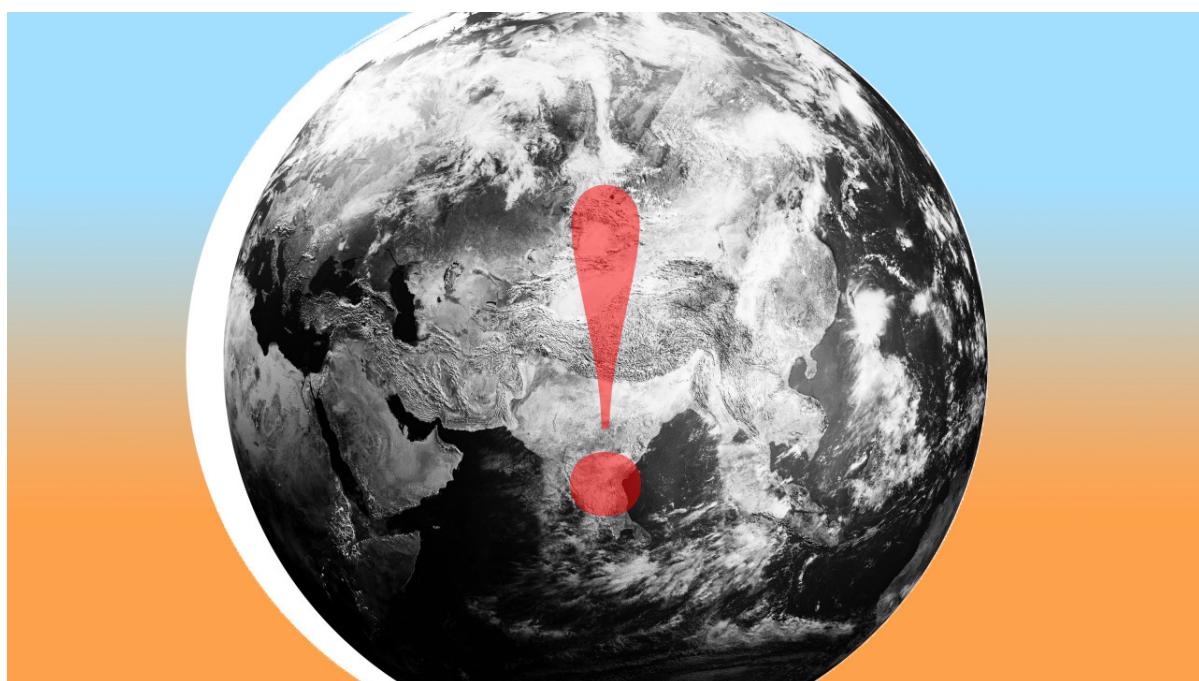
Credit: Katie O'Reilly

The ocean covers more than 70% of Earth, yet it's rare to glimpse aquatic creatures at home in their ethereal marine seascapes. Unless, that is, you've devoted your life to underwater dive photography. As a child growing up near the ocean in Mexico, internationally renowned photographer Christian Vizl became obsessed with marine explorer and conservationist Jacques Cousteau. "I would always stand at the edge of the sea and imagine what it would be like if I could walk inside and see where all the animals live," 2014's [Wildlife Photographer of the Year](#) told *Sierra*. In 1997, Vizl became a diving instructor, and by 2013 was using light, shadow, scuba gear, and wide-angle lenses to capture otherworldly footage of shimmering sharks and jellyfish, seals at play, and a range of other undersea scenes and moods. Also included are several thoughtful essays.

See more at Silent Kingdom

FYI #2

CrisisInSight (A New Comparative Tool)



CrisisInSight is the new ACAPS analysis portfolio which enables you to compare the severity of crises globally as well as the level of humanitarian access, while providing trends analysis and a forward-looking scan for risks. In order to measure the severity of a crisis, we use the **INFORM Global Crisis Severity Index (GCSI)** which brings together 31 core indicators, organized in three dimensions: impact, conditions of affected people, and complexity.

Some key finding from our latest data collection in September 2019:

- 113 crises have been identified in 67 countries of which 34 are categorized as internal displacement.
- 15 crises have shown no final score due to significant info gaps.

[Read more at ACAPS](#)

FYI #3

Insurance For Tomorrow's Emerging Markets



Credit: Volanews

90% of people in Africa have no safety net if they get sick. Turaco's changing that. Turaco's mission is to be there for their customers in their times of greatest need by providing them insurance and credit products designed to work for them. Turaco is insuring Africa's emerging markets with simplified and useful products at extremely affordable monthly premiums.

[Read more on Turaco.com](http://Turaco.com)

FYI #4

**You Might Have a Drinking Problem
—And Not Even Know It**



Credit: Stocksy

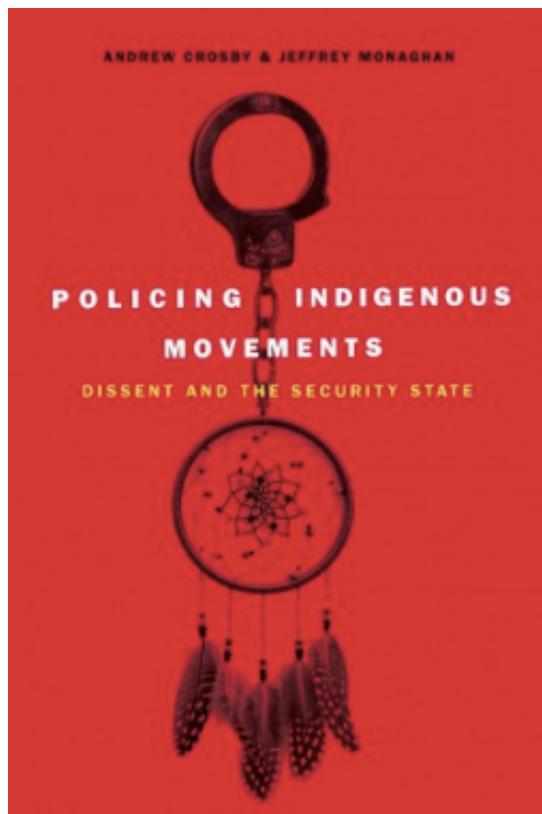
A group text message buzzes through around lunchtime on Friday with the red wine emoji and a question mark. The response is a resounding thumbs up, followed by a flurry of arranging to make it happen. One friend is having a tough time at work. Another is going through a rough patch in her relationship. As for me, it's been another busy week trying to do it all—meet writing deadlines, ferry my kids to school and activities, and spend some time with my husband. As one friend texts: "We've earned it!" Not that we need an excuse.

Alcohol is a carcinogen and, according to some studies, even having as little as one drink a day over the long term can increase your chances of getting at least eight types of cancer, including liver, colon and breast cancer. One in eight women develops breast cancer in her lifetime; studies have found that between 4-10% of all breast cancers are caused by alcohol, and when your daily average goes up by one drink, your chances of getting the disease increase by 7-10%. In Canada, between 250 and 500 women die every year due to breast cancer caused by alcohol, but according to a 2011 study from the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer, only 33% are aware of the cancer-alcohol connection.

[Read more at Chatelaine](#)

FYI #5: WINTER READING BY ANDREW CROSBY & JEFFREY MONAGHAN

Policing Indigenous Movements - Dissent And The Security State



Credit: Fernwood Publishing

In recent years, Indigenous peoples have lead a number of high profile movements fighting for social and environmental justice in Canada. From land struggles to struggles against resource extraction, pipeline development and fracking, land and water defenders have created a national discussion about these issues and successfully slowed the rate of resource extraction.

But their success has also meant an increase in the surveillance and policing of Indigenous peoples and their movements. In *Policing Indigenous Movements*, Crosby and Monaghan use the Access to Information Act to interrogate how policing and other security agencies have been monitoring, cataloguing and working to silence

Indigenous land defenders and other opponents of extractive capitalism. Through an examination of four prominent movements — the long-standing conflict involving the Algonquins of Barriere Lake, the struggle against the Northern Gateway Pipeline, the Idle No More movement and the anti-fracking protests surrounding the Elsipogtog First Nation — this important book raises critical questions regarding the expansion of the security apparatus, the normalization of police surveillance targeting social movements, the relationship between police and energy corporations, the criminalization of dissent and threats to civil liberties and collective action in an era of extractive capitalism and hyper surveillance.

In one of the most comprehensive accounts of contemporary government surveillance, the authors vividly demonstrate that it is the norms of settler colonialism that allow these movements to be classified as national security threats and the growing network of policing, governmental, and private agencies that comprise what they call the security state.

[Read more on Fernwood Publishing](#)

FYI#6: SPOTLIGHT ON EDUCATION

Screens In The Classroom: Tool Or Temptation?



Credit: Todd Heisler/The New York Times

Karen Huxtable-Jester, who teaches in the School of Behavioral and Brain Sciences at the University of Texas at Dallas, knows technology's distractible downside. Once, while observing a lecture, Professor Huxtable-Jester discovered that a group of students had been watching a movie instead of their instructor. "In years past, I was fully on board with the idea of banning technology use in my classes," she said, making exceptions for students with disabilities who needed help. Over time, though, she became more flexible: "Every now and then, I could say, 'Can we look something up?'"

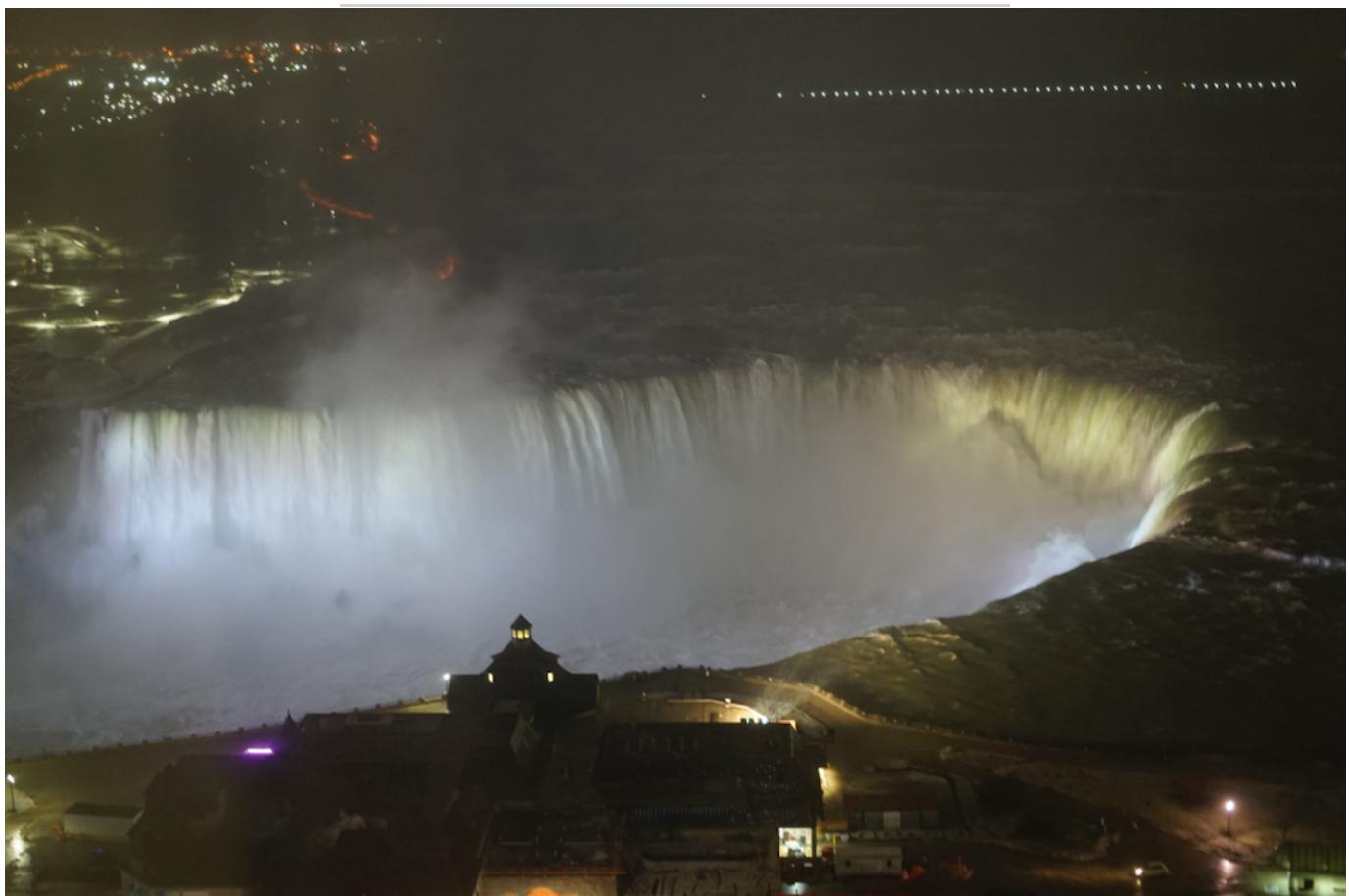
[Read more at The New York Times](#)

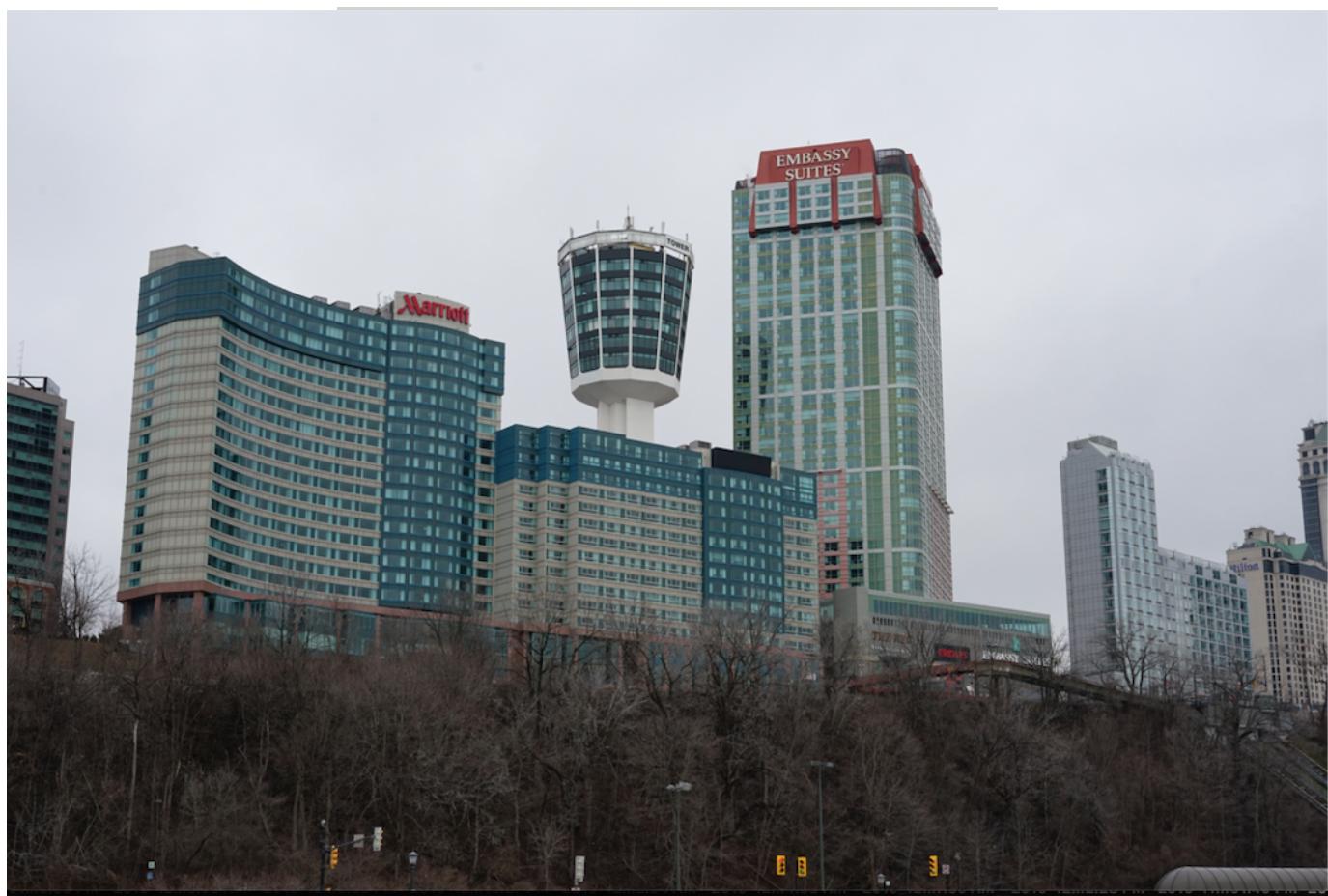
END SHOTS

A CLOUDY DAY WALK AT NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO

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