



# TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy

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## Going [In For The Sill](#)

Faced with another year of low Mississippi River levels, the [Army Corps is constructing an underwater sill to prevent saltwater intrusion](#) from the Gulf of Mexico into public drinking water intake sources. There have already been issues at [Plaquemines Parish's Boothville](#) water plant which led the governor to declare a state of emergency. Normally, there's enough freshwater roaring down the River that the Gulf stays in its own lane. However, when flows drop, the heavier saltwater starts to creep up along the bed of the Mississippi River. After all, that [dredged channel](#) is well below sea level. The 1,500-foot-wide underwater dam [will be built near Myrtle Grove](#), close to where [last year's sill was constructed](#) before it eroded away as freshwater levels in the river returned to normal (for a while). This is the fifth time the Corps has had to build a protective sill to block Gulf intrusion. But to put it in perspective, the other years were 1988, 1999, 2012, and then 2022.

Salt isn't the only thing that may be lurking in the pipes. [Odds are about one in two that there's PFAS](#) in your drinking water. A [new USGS study](#) detected the forever chemicals in about 45% of faucets nationwide. It's not breaking news that PFAS in drinking water is a big problem. But this most recent report tested both [private and public drinking water sources](#), and the results were similar between both, highlighting the need for private well users to test water quality. And if you live near a PFAS manufacturer, [you may want to check on your pets](#). Same goes for that [kale](#) salad you bought on [your last health kick](#).

## The Records Start Coming and [They Don't Stop Coming](#)

The average global temperature on [Monday was the hottest ever recorded](#). \*checks notes\* Wait. [Tuesday was the hottest day on record](#). There's no official declaration for the hottest day ever, but it nonetheless sparks unpleasant [thoughts](#), especially considering [this past June was the hottest ever recorded](#). It's a [heat wave](#) that doesn't seem to crest. In addition to broad public health concerns, the new heat norms raise alarm for labor laws and worker protections. Which makes this new [Texas law banning water breaks](#) even more concerning.

[Temperatures in the North Atlantic](#) also reached record warms which is starting to [mix with the Arctic Ocean](#), threatening sea ice and aquatic biodiversity. The marine heat wave also coincides with the [arrival of El Nino](#), which comes with many widespread concerns, but the weather phenomenon typically [brings with it a less active Atlantic hurricane season](#). That might not be the case this time. [Hurricane forecasters have upped predictions](#) for the 2023 season with an addition of three storms.

## A Sea of Trouble Brewing in the Pacific

On Tuesday, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [approved Japan's plan to release nuclear wastewater](#) into the Pacific Ocean. You may be asking, "Japan is doing what??" but it's unfortunately just the latest in the wake of a [tragedy from over a decade ago](#). Back in 2011, a 9.0 earthquake struck off the eastern coast of Japan, causing a tsunami that [led to catastrophe at Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant](#). The ensuing nuclear meltdown caused

the contamination of roughly 1.3 million tons of water that was used to cool the reactor's rods. That water is still sitting in giant tanks at the former power plant. Limited storage capacity and growing concerns over on-site contamination [prompted the Japanese government to take action](#). It plans to release the water into the ocean over several decades. It will be treated to remove radioactive contamination, with one exception. [Tritium](#) is still present but will be diluted to remain below international health standards, but not everyone is convinced it's safe. While the [UN-backed IAEA conducted a two-year review](#) that found the plan to be consistent with international safety standards, it has unsurprisingly [sparked opposition at home](#) and [from neighboring countries](#). Despite all the controversy, releases could begin as early as next month.

## Keeping [Georgia On Our Minds](#)

Climate change really drives home the wise old saying "expect the unexpected." Which isn't coming easy to places that identify so closely with certain staple foods, like the Peach State, for instance. Only 10% of this year's Georgia [peaches](#) survived through the [warm winter and spring freezes](#), but local farmers say even that is a generous estimate, with some saying only 2% of their harvest made it through. Last week, the [USDA declared a natural disaster](#) in several counties over the crop losses. This year's unpredictable weather has also brought widespread [drought conditions across the Midwest](#). It's affecting [roughly two-thirds of the country's corn and soybean](#) crops. As supply drops, grain prices rise, which puts strains on other sectors of agriculture, especially for [cattle and other livestock](#). And given that measures are already underway to address low Mississippi River levels, it seems like we may be in for a repeat of [last year's troubles](#).

All this gives us a good reason to bring up the [Farm Bill](#). Don't let it's name [fool you](#), the legislation touches on everything from nutrient pollution to school food programs to crop insurance. It also deals with increasingly important wetland conservation programs (but we'll spare you from [another Sackett discussion](#) today). The current version of the bill, which must be reauthorized every 5 years, is set to expire this September. [Congress is off to a tough start](#) working on new version, which [will be critical for the future sustainability of agriculture](#) natural resource management in the United States. So, if any of these things impact you (spoiler – it impacts everyone!) be [on the watch](#) for how this bill plays out.

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### Coming Up:

[14<sup>th</sup> Louisiana Water Conference, Baton Rouge, LA, August 2-3](#)

Tulane Environmental Law Summit, New Orleans, February 23 & 24, 2024 (save the date!)

### Water jobs:

[Senior Campaign Coordinator](#); National Wildlife Federation; New Orleans, LA

[Deputy Director](#); Bayou City Waterkeeper; Houston, TX

[Senior Fellow \(Water Security\)-Global Food Security Program](#); Center for Strategic & International Studies; Washington, DC



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 legal stewardship of water.

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