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— News From The States —

EVENING WRAP



By [Kate Queram](#)

In my experience, it is impossible to read words like “watershed” and “drinking water reservoir” and “aquifer” without instantly becoming thirsty. If this sounds familiar to you, I recommend getting a beverage before you start reading today’s newsletter — both to stave off the inevitable dry mouth, and also because you *might* want something to throw across the room once we get to the part about Congress.



The Big Takeaway

Cleaning up radioactive waste sites in St. Louis will cost at least \$406 million, more than twice the price tag cited by federal officials six years ago, according to [a federal report](#) released Tuesday by the nonpartisan U.S. Government Accountability Office. Most of the increase stemmed from additional contamination that forced the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to expand its investigation and cleanup efforts in Coldwater Creek, a tributary of the Missouri River [contaminated by radioactive waste](#) leftover from the development of the first atomic bomb during World War II, [the Missouri Independent reported](#).



Coldwater Creek, contaminated.
(Photo via the Missouri Independent)

The ballooning clean-up costs could have been avoided if the Army Corps had done a better job managing the cleanup efforts, the report said. The agency was hamstrung by its own shortcomings, including the lack of a comprehensive risk management program that could have allocated resources more efficiently, including an appropriations budget of \$182 million that hasn't been spent due to limited staffing.

“Furthermore, better risk management could help the Corps plan for uncertainties, such as the discovery of more contamination requiring cleanup, that may affect future environmental liability,” the report said.

The report was compiled in response to a request from U.S. Rep. Cori Bush (D-Mo.), who asked the GAO to investigate the Army Corps' oversight of a federal program created in the 1970s to clean up areas contaminated via weapon-related manufacturing projects during the war. The analysis evaluated 19 sites in eight states, totaling \$2.6 billion in environmental liabilities. The four largest sites, including those in St. Louis County, comprise roughly three-fourths of that amount, which officials said stemmed from their size and the complexity of the necessary

cleanup work.

“The federal government bears full responsibility for ensuring that this waste is expeditiously cleaned up and that all those harmed are made whole,” Bush said in a statement.



Clear cuts and logged swaths of the Tillamook State Forest from above.

(Photo by Jordan Gale/Oregon Capital Chronicle)

Conservationists in Oregon are sounding the alarm over state logging regulations, which they say prioritize protecting the quality of drinking water rather than the overall supply. That’s a major issue in the western United States, where [roughly 90% of people](#) rely on drinking water supplies that originate in forests and grasslands, [the Oregon Capital Chronicle reported](#).

There’s good reason for that — among all types of land, forested acreage “unequivocally” provides the cleanest, most stable water supply, according to the U.S. Forest Service. But that supply can be threatened by logging, which removes swaths of the diverse, mature trees that are needed to regulate the flow of melting snow and rain. Those trees are typically replaced with younger saplings, which suck up more water, leaving little available in hot periods when it’s most needed, said Casey Kulla, a state forests policy coordinator at the nonprofit conservation group

Oregon Wild.

“The number of trees of a certain age on the landscape, and the amount of logging that’s done in a watershed, directly affects the timing of water coming out of the stream at the bottom of the watershed,” Kulla said.



Seasonally appropriate tree photo.

(Photo by Getty Images)

The loss of old-growth trees has been particularly acute for Oregon’s coastal communities. A recent [NASA analysis](#) determined that logging had taken place on about a third of forested land in the state’s 80 coastal watersheds, encompassing around 600 square miles. All of that is permissible under Oregon’s timber laws, which protect water quality but largely ignore the quantity — mostly because there aren’t many resources to consult on the impacts of logging on hydrology and water flow in various watersheds, according to Mike Wilson, state forests division chief at the state Department of Forestry.

“That’s currently the focus of a lot of different research, and a lot of modeling work that’s going on, and I expect that will evolve in the future,” he said. “But our focus to date has always been around water quality.”

In the meantime, some communities have sought to enact their own protections by purchasing forestland adjacent to reservoirs and then managing the property locally. Others have sought to tap into a \$5 million fund established by lawmakers this year specifically to help communities purchase or improve land around their source of drinking water. Among the applicants is a water association in the eastern Oregon community of Rhododendron, which previously took out more than \$100,000 [in federal loans](#) to halt logging operations on private property in a vulnerable part of the watershed.

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State of Our Democracy

It's been a bit since we checked in on the U.S. House of Representatives, which is fine because no one in there is doing anything that a reasonable person would consider “legislating” or “governing” or “earning their taxpayer-funded salaries” or, you know, “working.” That's because the chamber cannot function until its Republican majority elects a speaker, and the Republican majority cannot function, period.

I could stop there, really — but I won't, because if I have to think about Jim Jordan, you do, too. Jordan, a MAGA-y Republican from Ohio, emerged as the GOP's latest nominee after U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.) [pulled his name from contention](#) once it was obvious that he could not wrangle enough support to win the job. ([Sound familiar?](#)) Jordan [emerged the victor](#) after a closed-door meeting on Friday, but still remained at least 50 votes short of the 217 needed to clinch the speaker's gavel. That gap [narrowed over the weekend](#), thanks to a [right-wing pressure campaign](#) that threatened to unleash the wrathful MAGA base on any Republicans

who continued to withhold their votes, but no one knew for sure whether Jordan had scraped together enough support to avoid losing a floor vote by the time House reconvened on Tuesday.



“Well, here’s hoping.”

(Photo by Joe Raedle/Getty Images)

Reader: He had not. Twenty Republicans voted against Jordan, leaving him well short of the majority needed to ascend to power/end this national nightmare so we can get on with the next one, [per our national bureau](#). That puts him on par with the [ousted Kevin McCarthy](#), who lost 19 Republican votes on his first ballot (...of 15) in January. But Jordan’s dissenters are a more complicated group than McCarthy’s band of far-right haters. As of Tuesday afternoon, holdouts included lawmakers who resent the backlash against Scalise; those who still, for some reason, support McCarthy, and a handful who face tough reelection bids in districts that also voted for President Joe Biden.

It’s not clear how Jordan, a far-right election-denying Biden-impeaching Trump-endorsed Republican, will win any of them over. But I’m sure he’s trying! Presumably, we’ll learn how those efforts went once the House reconvenes for another vote. Some Republicans thought that might happen later on Tuesday, but others implied that it wouldn’t matter either way, because they still

had no intention of voting for Jordan.

A handful of those holdouts pushed instead to grant additional powers to Rep. Patrick McHenry, a North Carolina Republican who's serving as speaker pro tempore, a largely meaningless role that allows him to hold elections for speaker and basically nothing else. Under [a resolution](#) introduced Monday by Rep. Mike Kelly (R-Pa.), McHenry would be elected to serve as speaker pro tempore through at least Nov. 17, the next deadline to fund the federal government to avert a shutdown. Approving the measure would expand McHenry's authority, allowing the House to vote on "critical legislation ... necessary to fund the government," Kelly wrote in a letter to his colleagues.

There's some support for the idea among Republicans, suggesting that many are fine with continuing the speaker battle for days or weeks or however long it takes until someone, somewhere, can come up with a non-Jordan candidate. But there's no consensus. As of Tuesday afternoon, even Kelly — the guy who proposed the idea in the first place — seemed to waver on it, telling reporters he planned to "reassess" his vote on future ballots after casting the first one for Scalise.

"We have elections for a reason," he said.

Most of us do, yes: [Critics express concerns about new Alabama voter registration database ...](#) [Alaska attorney general approves free legal defense for top officials accused of ethical lapses ...](#) [\(Georgia\) Fulton trial of Trump allies nears as lawyers prepare for tall order of picking impartial jury ...](#) [Rust gives big to his campaign for Indiana's open U.S. Senate seat, but Banks tops total donations ...](#) [Trump, under federal gag order, tells Iowans that Biden is using courts to 'illegally' attack him ...](#) [Beshear, Cameron clash on wide range of issues in Northern Kentucky debate ...](#) [Maine school board race mirrors national trend of limiting book access, 'parents rights' ...](#) [Republican, Democratic operatives on high alert for first governor's race runoff in Mississippi history ...](#) [Potential Bacon vs. Vargas rematch stirs heavy House fundraising in Nebraska ...](#) [As New Jersey prepares to vote, guns largely missing from campaign trail conversation ...](#) [Innovation Ohio report shines light on Ohio's 'missing voters' ...](#) [Does Ohio Sec. of State LaRose have no Senate campaign HQ, or is it where he's moving his state office? ...](#) [Pennsylvania students call on lawmakers to end 'archaic' closed primaries ...](#) [New voter registration lags compared to last Virginia General Assembly election](#)



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One Last Thing

A Georgia man was issued a \$1.4 million fine for driving 90 mph in a 55 mph zone, which officials with the city of Savannah said was automatically issued as a placeholder by the e-citation software used by the court system. Under state law, the actual fine is limited to \$1,000.

“We do not issue that placeholder as a threat to scare anybody into court,” Joshua Peacock, a spokesman for the city, [told the Associated Press](#).

They’re “currently working on adjusting the placeholder to avoid any confusion,” he added.

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