

Earthweek: Diary of a Changing World

Week ending Friday, August 14, 2020

By Steve Newman

Arctic Losses

Arctic Canada's last fully intact ice shelf lost more than 40% of its entire area on Ellesmere Island during just two days in late July, shocking officials.

A chunk measuring about 100 square miles, larger than the island of Manhattan, broke off between July 30 and July 31.

"Above-normal air temperatures, offshore winds and open water in front of the ice shelf are all part of the recipe for ice shelf breakup," the Canadian Ice Service announced on Twitter.

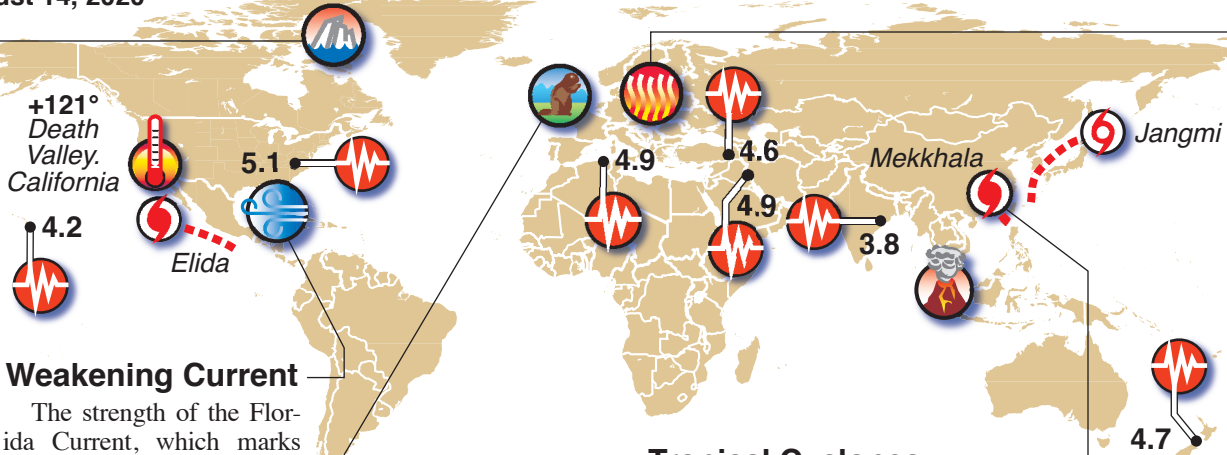
The intense heat around the North Pole this summer has also melted sea ice around the Arctic Ocean to its lowest extent on record.

Earthquakes

North Carolina's most powerful temblor since 1916 damaged more than 100 buildings as it rattled the eastern U.S.

A strong quake caused some buildings to collapse in northeastern Algeria.

Earth movements were also felt in southeastern Turkey, western Iran, eastern India, central New Zealand and Hawaii.



Weakening Current

The strength of the Florida Current, which marks the beginning of the Gulf Stream, has weakened in force to the lowest level of the past 110 years, according to new research.

The current flows between Florida and Cuba before becoming the Gulf Stream near the Bahamas.

While precise measurements of the current go back to only the early 1980s, scientists say they were able to determine its past strength by how it affected coastal sea levels in the region.

The study confirms earlier findings that show the Atlantic Meridional Overturning Circulation is slowing down due to climate change.

That complex of currents wields a key warming influence across the Atlantic to much of northern Europe.

Squatters' Rights

The growing number of beavers that have been making England's River Otter their home since they began returning a few years ago have been told by officials that they can stay.

It's the first time a mammal extinct in England has been given government backing to be reintroduced.

Environment minister Rebecca Pow said that going forward, the dam-builders will be considered a "public good" and that farmers and landowners would be paid to have them on their land.

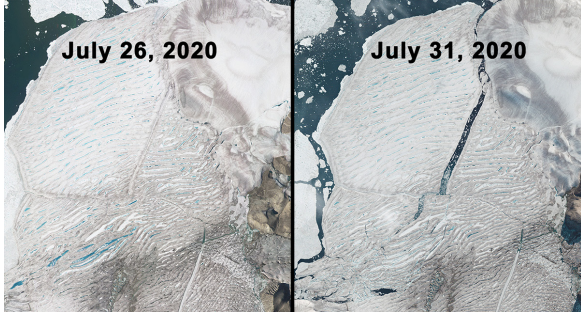
There are now 15 beaver families living in the waterway, building complex homes known as lodges.

Tropical Cyclones

Typhoon Mekkhala buffeted China's Fujian Province after strengthening to Category-1 force while moving ashore from the South China Sea.

Flash floods triggered by passing Tropical Storm Jangmi left at least 42 people dead and 7,000 people displaced in South Korea.

Hurricane Elida churned the Pacific well off the coast of Mexico.



The massive ice shelf collapse on Arctic Canada's Ellesmere Island also destroyed the Northern Hemisphere's only known epishelf lake, a body of fresh water that is dammed by an ice shelf and floats atop ocean water. Image: Planet Labs Inc.

Name That Heat

A leading expert in heat-related deaths is calling on officials to begin naming the increased number of heat waves to draw attention to the deepening climate crisis.

"People do not understand this risk and we need to change that," said Kathy Baughman McLeod, director of the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center.

The proposal is backed by the Extreme Heat Resilience Alliance, a new coalition of dozens of mayors in major cities and insurance officials, as well as health, global heating and policy experts worldwide.

The coalition says assigning heat waves names like hurricanes, along with their level of risk, could demonstrate the scale of the threat that climate change poses.

Sumatran Eruption

Crops and villages surrounding Indonesia's Sinabung volcano were blanketed by thick ash after the of debris more than 16,000 feet above Sumatra.