



Week ending Friday, April 30, 2021

Lightning Capital

Florida, especially around the Tampa Bay Area, has long been renowned as the capital of lightning strikes in the United States. But researchers from the Finland-based environmental monitoring company Vaisala say that Oklahoma has narrowly surpassed the Sunshine State for that distinction. Its research found there were 83.4 lightning events per square kilometer in Oklahoma between 2016 and 2020 compared with 82.8 in Florida. But Vaisala meteorologist Chris Vagasky says with statistics that close, it's hard to say that one state has truly overtaken the other.

Earthquakes

A temblor in eastern India's Assam state cracked walls and floors, but there were no reports of injuries or fatalities.

- A moderate tremor caused scattered damage on Indonesia's Flores Island.

- Earth movements were also felt in south-central Alaska, northern New Hampshire and the Sierra Nevada resort of Lake Tahoe.

Melting Hazards

Boulders and rocks long frozen in place high across the world's mountainous regions are now tumbling downslope due to the glacial melt brought on by global heating. A tragic example occurred in February when rock and ice broke loose from a Himalayan peak, killed more than 200 people and destroyed a hydroelectric dam. Researchers in Switzerland have begun releasing "test rocks" from high in the Alps to better understand the dangers posed to humans and the landscape by the growing phenomenon. "Where a rock will land, how it will bounce, how high it will jump ... we can answer all that," said physicist Andrin Caviezel, one of the scientists involved in the experiments.

Lion Famine

A protracted drought and unbridled livestock grazing, which have parched parts of Namibia, are also causing desert-adapted lions to perish or appear emaciated near human settlements in the southwest African nation. There was an outcry after images of an emaciated lioness, too weak to get up next to a goat enclosure on a communal farm, appeared on social media. Philip Stander of Desert Lion Conservation told The Namibian daily that the hyper-arid conditions have caused several of the big cats to either die from starvation or be euthanized by the environment ministry.

Tropical Cyclones

Tropical Storm Jobo spared Tanzania the flooding and wind damage that were predicted before the cyclone weakened prior to making landfall just south of the capital, Dar es Salaam. Only two other cyclones have struck the coast of Tanzania in modern times. The Zanzibar Cyclone roared ashore in 1872, and Cyclone Lindi killed 34 people in 1952.

Former Category-5 Typhoon Surigae lost force over the open waters of the western Pacific after

skirting the eastern Philippines.

Polar Drift

Earth's axis is being shifted by the human activities causing the current climate emergency and the redistribution of water resources through the pumping of groundwater for irrigation. An international team of researchers says the shift started in the 1990s when global heating began to melt glaciers, sending much of the runoff into the oceans. Earth's axis naturally drifts a little bit each year due to changes in winds, ocean currents and atmospheric pressures. But the redistribution of water from land to the oceans accelerated the drift between 1995 and 2020 by about 17 times. Vincent Humphrey of the University of Zurich says the drift is tiny and imperceptible to humans.

Japanese Eruption

A strong blast from southwestern Japan's Sakurajima volcano spewed ash high above Kagoshima prefecture.

Clouds of superheated debris also cascaded down the mountain but did not threaten any populated areas.

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