

FUNDING

California cuts

Universities in California are bracing themselves for more financial pain. The University of California and California State University had each faced a US\$500-million cut in state funds, forcing drastic measures such as the planned closure of a world-renowned library at the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (see *Nature* **471**, 18; 2011). But on 26 June, California lawmakers approved a budget that would cut a further \$150 million from each system. Hikes in tuition fees are likely, and faculty at the University of California say the cuts are compromising its ability to retain and recruit top staff.

European research

The European Commission has proposed that spending for research and innovation should increase to €80.2 billion (US\$116 billion) in the European Union's next seven-year budget, covering 2014–20. That would be a large rise on the current €55 billion (for 2007–13). Research was the only major area to expand in the €1.03-trillion budget proposal announced on 29 June. It will now face scrutiny from Europe's parliament and member states. See page 14 for more.

RESEARCH

Industry ties

Three psychiatrists at Harvard Medical School in Boston, Massachusetts, will face sanctions for not declaring their acceptance of huge payments from drug companies between 2000 and 2007. Joseph Biederman, Thomas Spencer and Timothy Wilens were identified by US senator Charles Grassley (Republican, Iowa) in a 2008



NASA

Los Alamos lab escapes huge wildfire

New Mexico's largest-ever wildfire stopped short of the Los Alamos National Laboratory — but only just. The Las Conchas fire (pictured from the International Space Station on 27 June) scorched through some 50,000 hectares of land, and encroached on the southwest and

western borders of the nuclear-weapons facility. Fire crews put out one small blaze on the grounds of the lab, which shut down for more than a week. But by 3 July, director Charles McMillan said that the lab had “escaped serious damage”. The facility was set to reopen on 6 July.

probe into pharma payments. They later disclosed that they had received a combined total of at least US\$4.2 million from drug companies. On 1 July, they told colleagues that Harvard Medical School and Massachusetts General Hospital were banning them from paid industry-sponsored activities for one year, and that they would be monitored for another two years. See go.nature.com/9syihf for more.

Mystery maladies

A US research programme for diagnosing unknown diseases is so overwhelmed with demand that it has stopped accepting new cases, effective from 1 July. In the Undiagnosed Diseases Program, launched in 2008 by the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), expert physicians from across

the NIH try to diagnose mysterious illnesses (see *Nature* **460**, 1071–1075; 2009). The programme's website noted that there is a “substantial backlog” of applications, but officials hope to resume accepting applications in two to three months. Around half of patients seen so far have been shown to have neurodegenerative diseases.

Global plant traits

An international collaboration of plant scientists has published details of its first pass at constructing the world's largest repository of plant traits. The database, named TRY, currently holds almost 3 million entries for 69,000 plant species, and combines contributions from 93 smaller databases (www.try-db.org). It lists 52

groups of traits, including observable biochemical and morphological features such as a leaf's type, size, chemical composition and photosynthetic pathway — all of which, it is hoped, will help to generate reliable predictions of how vegetation boundaries and ecosystem properties shift with climate and land-use changes (J. Kattge *et al.* *Glob. Change Biol.* doi:10.1111/j.1365-2486.2011.02451.x; 2011).

POLICY

Free climate data

The University of East Anglia in Norwich, UK, has been ordered to disclose climate data that it has resisted releasing under freedom-of-information requests. The university had argued that it did not have permission

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from all the agencies and organizations that provided the data, which consist of weather readings used to track and calculate climate change around the globe. But the United Kingdom's Information Commissioner's Office has overruled the university, a year and a half after it found that the university's handling of previous similar requests breached UK law. See go.nature.com/cdjflo for more.

French reshuffle

France has a new minister for science and higher education, Laurent Wauquiez, following the promotion of the previous incumbent, Valérie Pécresse, in a cabinet reshuffle. Pécresse's legacy includes reducing state control over French universities. See go.nature.com/8s6mua for more.

Endangered owl

The US Fish and Wildlife Service, which implements the Endangered Species Act, has released a plan to save the northern spotted owl (*Strix occidentalis caurina*, pictured). The species is iconic among conservationists because its 1990 listing as 'endangered' resulted in bans on logging in the forests of the US Pacific Northwest, sparking bitter battles between environmentalists and the logging industry. This week, the agency also confirmed that



long-time staffer Dan Ashe would become its new head, and announced a status review for two bat species: the eastern small-footed bat (*Myotis leibii*) and the northern long-eared bat (*Myotis septentrionalis*). Populations of both species have been hit by the fungal disease white-nose syndrome. See go.nature.com/ipyfmh for more.

Forensics plea

Just as many forensic scientists have warned, the UK government was too hasty when deciding to close down the state-owned Forensic Science Service, a parliamentary committee found in a report published on 1 July. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee said that the government had overlooked the impact of its December decision on forensic science research and development, and on the nation's criminal

justice system. The report recommends that the closure, planned for March 2012, should be postponed to allow the government time to draw up a forensic-science strategy that includes a national research budget. See go.nature.com/fhjiol for more.

Fracking bans

France has become the first country to ban the practice of hydraulic fracturing, or 'fracking', in which high-pressure fluids are pumped into shale formations to fracture the rock and force out natural gas. The technique has been accused of releasing methane into well water and of polluting groundwater with toxic chemicals. The French parliament vote, on 30 June, came a day after New Jersey's state legislature also voted to ban fracking — the first US state to do so.

Serengeti road

Tanzania has reduced the scope of its plans to build a highway through a northern section of the Serengeti National Park. Researchers had feared that an asphalt highway could destroy the park's ecosystem by interrupting migration routes (see *Nature* 467, 272–273; 2010). They had argued for an alternative route, farther south and outside the park's boundaries. Tanzania's

COMING UP

8 JULY

NASA's space shuttle *Atlantis* launches from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida for its last flight — the final mission of the shuttle fleet (see Editorial, page 6).

go.nature.com/1rszjt

10–12 JULY

In Shenzhen, China, the genomics institute BGI hosts a conference to discuss progress in its project to sequence the genomes of 1,000 plants and animals.

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tourism minister Ezekiel Maige said that there would still be a new road through the park — in which an iconic wildebeest migration takes place every year — but it would not be paved.

BUSINESS

Avastin aversion

The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) will probably not reverse its December decision to withdraw approval of the drug Avastin (bevacizumab) for the treatment of advanced breast cancer. Genentech, the drug's maker (owned by Swiss pharmaceutical giant Roche), had challenged that verdict. But on 29 June, an FDA advisory committee voted unanimously that the drug's risks outweighed its benefits. If the FDA commissioner agrees, finalizing the withdrawal, insurers may stop paying for the drug's use against breast cancer. By contrast, the European Medicines Agency declared in December that Avastin's use in advanced breast cancer was "a valuable treatment option".

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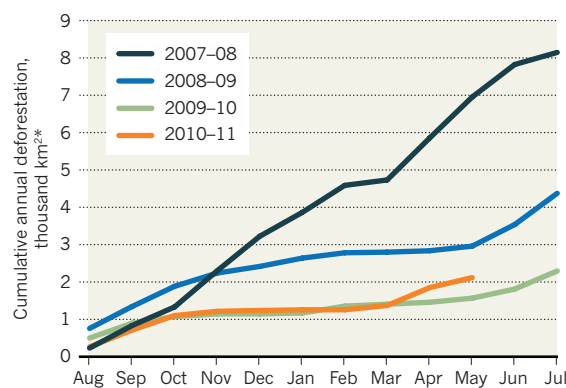
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TREND WATCH

Deforestation in the Amazon rainforest has been declining since 2004, but satellite data from Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) in São José dos Campos, released on 30 June, confirm a trend-busting jump in forest clearing in recent months (see chart). The surge may be related to anticipated changes in legislation that might ease restrictions on clearance. These 'Forest Code' reforms are currently being debated in Congress. See go.nature.com/c51xiC for more.

DEFORESTATION RISES IN BRAZIL

After years of encouraging decline, deforestation in the Brazilian Amazon has leapt up this season.



*As recorded month-to-month by coarse-resolution LANDSAT satellite data