

SEVEN DAYS

The news in brief

POLICY

Carp invasion

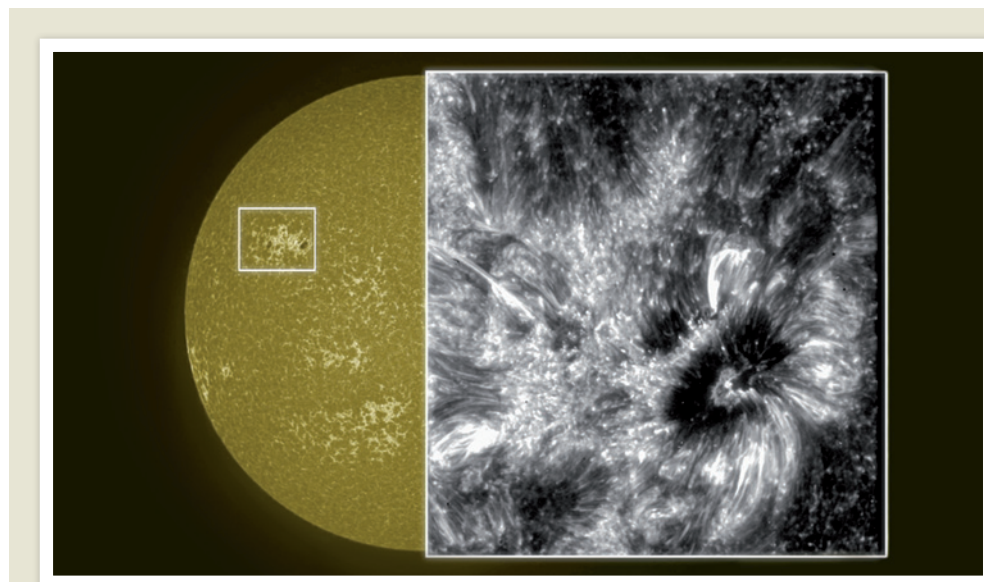
Adding electrified barriers and developing high-power water guns are part of a US plan announced on 24 July to prevent invasive Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes. The carp, now abundant in the connecting Mississippi River, are crowding out fish native to the region such as the gizzard shad (*Dorosoma cepedianum*). The powerful jumpers have also injured humans and damaged boats. So far, the government has spent more than US\$200 million to keep the carp out of the Great Lakes.

Publishing block

A court order is preventing the publication of work that identified security weaknesses in software used to immobilize cars, it emerged last week. Researchers at the University of Birmingham, UK, and Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands, were due to present the findings this month at the USENIX Security Symposium in Washington DC. But they have pulled out after Volkswagen's parent company obtained an interim injunction from the British High Court on 25 June. On 29 July, Radboud said it found the ban "incomprehensible" but would respect the ruling; Birmingham also said it would defer publication of the paper.

Drug import block

On 23 July, a US appeals court ruled that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) cannot allow imports of an unapproved drug used as an anaesthetic for the execution of prisoners. The drug, sodium thiopental, is no longer available from authorized US manufacturers, forcing state officials to order the drug from sources abroad (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/ds64d9>; 2011).



NASA/SDO/IRIS

Sun-scope opens its eyes

NASA has revealed the first images from its latest solar observatory, the Interface Region Imaging Spectrograph (IRIS). The instrument was launched into orbit in June (see *Nature* **498**, 279–280; 2013) to watch the flow of matter and energy in the Sun's chromosphere, a 1,700-kilometre-thick region between its

surface, known as the photosphere, and its outer atmosphere, called the corona. It takes much higher-resolution pictures than those captured by NASA's Solar Dynamic Observatory (pictured, yellow sphere), with features as small as 240 kilometres across made visible (pictured, black and white).

The FDA had argued that it has the discretion to allow the import of unapproved drugs, noting that it also uses this discretion to alleviate shortages of other drugs.

Wetlands suit

A state board that oversees flood-protection efforts in Louisiana is suing some 100 energy companies, alleging that pipelines and access canals have damaged coastal wetlands. The Southeast Louisiana Flood Protection Authority–East filed the lawsuit on 24 July, arguing that the wetlands serve as a buffer zone that provides vital protection against flooding. On 23 July, a natural-gas well being drilled by the Walter Oil & Gas Corporation of Houston, Texas, exploded

in the Gulf of Mexico off the Louisiana coast.

BUSINESS

Open clinical data

The pharmaceutical industry signalled its willingness last week to open vast stores of clinical-research data to scientists. In a statement on 24 July, the European Federation of Pharmaceutical Industries and Associations and the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America — two of the world's leading trade bodies — said that they would "dramatically increase" the amount of information released by companies, including patient-level data and detailed clinical-study reports. Some campaigners

for greater openness in clinical trials said that the statement did not go far enough. See go.nature.com/83ww6h for more.

Pharma buyout

Health-care supplier Perrigo will buy Elan, a pharmaceutical company based in Dublin, for US\$8.6 billion, Perrigo announced on 29 July. Elan is best known for developing the multiple-sclerosis drug Tysabri (natalizumab), but spun off its research and development arm last year. It placed itself on the market after fending off a hostile takeover attempt earlier this year. Perrigo, which is based in Allegan, Michigan, and specializes in selling over-the-counter drugs, will receive a tax break for relocating its base to Ireland.

PEOPLE

Scripps head

Margaret Leinen will take the helm of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography at the University of California, San Diego (UCSD), the university announced on 25 July. She will replace former director Tony Haymet on 1 October. Leinen, an oceanographer and president-elect of the American Geophysical Union, ran the geosciences directorate at the US National Science Foundation for seven years, and most recently led the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute in Fort Pierce, Florida. She says that her priorities as director will include strengthening academic partnerships between Scripps and the rest of UCSD in the face of tightening budgets.

Sexologist dies

Pioneering sex researcher Virginia Johnson (**pictured**) died last week aged 88, news outlets reported on 25 July. Johnson and her long-time collaborator William Masters were known for their landmark studies of the human sexual response, including filming changes inside the vagina during female arousal and orgasm. On the basis of observations that the vagina conforms to the penis, Johnson and Masters posited that



penis size should not be a prime determinant of female satisfaction (see *Nature* <http://doi.org/m92>; 2013).

NASA top scientist

Planetary geologist Ellen Stofan will be NASA's next chief scientist, the agency announced on 29 July. An honorary professor at University College London and vice-president of Proxemy Research in Laytonsville, Maryland, Stofan held various senior positions at NASA from 1991 to 2000. Replacing Waleed Abdalati as the agency's lead adviser on science programmes, Stofan will have to deal with severe budget cuts that have been proposed for the planetary sciences division.

EFSA resignation

The European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) announced the resignation of its executive

director on 24 July. Catherine Geslain-Lanéelle, who has led the agency since 2006, will take up a new post on 1 September as France's director general for agricultural, agri-food and territorial policies at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry. Under her leadership, the EFSA introduced tougher conflict-of-interest policies for staff and outside experts. In January, the agency also announced a transparency initiative to make the data underlying its risk assessments publicly available.

RESEARCH

Big data satellite

Alphasat, the most massive telecommunications satellite ever built in Europe, was launched on 25 July. Operated jointly by the European Space Agency and satellite company Inmarsat, the 6.6-tonne spacecraft will test an experimental device to relay messages between satellites using laser beams, which could vastly increase the rate at which data are communicated. The satellite will primarily communicate with Earth using radio waves in the commonly used L band of the electromagnetic spectrum, but it also carries an experiment for broadcasting in the less-crowded, high-frequency Q-V band. See go.nature.com/wje1 for more.

COMING UP

4-9 AUGUST

The Ecological Society of America discusses managing sustainable ecosystems and data-intensive research at its annual meeting in Minneapolis.

www.esa.org/minneapolis

Stem-cell network

The California Institute for Regenerative Medicine (CIRM), based in San Francisco, approved plans on 25 July for a US\$70 million network of clinics to test stem-cell therapies. The 'Alpha Clinics' network will consist of up to five sites and a coordinating centre and will focus on therapies that involve transplanting or infusing stem cells. CIRM says that the network could help researchers to resolve technical and regulatory issues involved in early cellular therapy trials and educate patients who might otherwise turn to untested and risky treatments.

Cigarette appeal

Flavour additives and cigarette packaging may influence smoking habits, according to two reports released last week. In a preliminary scientific evaluation, the US Food and Drug Administration said on 23 July that cigarettes containing menthol may pose a greater public-health risk than non-mentholated cigarettes, probably by increasing the take-up of smoking and reducing success in quitting. On 22 July, researchers in Australia reported that plain packaging for cigarettes is associated with lower smoking appeal and a greater urgency to quit (M. A. Wakefield *et al.* *BMJ Open* 3, e003175; 2013).

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TREND WATCH

Worldwide investment in the US biotechnology industry rose in the second quarter of this year, according to a report from PricewaterhouseCoopers and the US National Venture Capital Association. Venture capitalists pumped US\$1.3 billion into the sector, an increase of 68% over the same period last year. Meanwhile, investment in medical devices declined by 20%, and overall venture-capital investment across industries fell by 9% relative to the second quarter of 2012.

BIOTECH BUCKS DOWNWARD TREND

Venture-capital funding for US biotechnology firms has remained steady, although overall investment is on a gradual decline.

