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# Climate Coach

Down-to-earth advice for life on our changing planet.



By [Michael J. Coren](#)

Welcome. This week, an “impossible” heat wave in France and flamingos are back. But first, the all-natural way to fix the Reflecting Pool.





The Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool has predictably turned green again. No matter who is in office, no matter how much hydrogen peroxide is added, the shallow, sunbaked, nutrient-rich pool will remain an ideal home for the tiny green denizens of D.C.

Fixing the Reflecting Pool requires admitting the original mistake of the U.S. government, which built an algae farm on a former marsh.



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Most politicians' preferred response has been chemical warfare. The real answer lies in returning to our capital's roots: Bring back the swamp.

Healthy, mature wetlands are often far cleaner and clearer than they appear. The tea-brown tint is tannin leached from fallen leaves, not muck. A balanced ecosystem of microbes and plants deprives algae of the nutrients they need to bloom.

So when I wanted to know what it would take to return the Reflecting Pool to its Edenic state, I didn't consult swimming pool contractors. I called algae scientists, engineers and natural pool designers.

A well-designed system of running water, gravel, microbes and wetland plants, they told me, could deliver crystal-clear water free of visible algae. It would slash the need for chemicals, electricity and maintenance in the troubled basin. We could even make it swimmable (*though not recommended*).

The technology is as old as life, and as modern as the thousands of natural pools and swimming ponds successfully installed around the world from Minnesota to Germany.

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The national Reflecting Pool debacle has captured Americans' attention because it distills so much about our the nation's dysfunction: grandiose ambitions; minimal planning, overpriced quick fixes; and catastrophic outcomes followed by deflection or denial of responsibility by those in charge. Rehabilitating the pool to reflect the Potomac Mudflats' original glory would help rejuvenate, in some small way, the country's faith in itself.

This will not happen by the nation's 250th birthday. The Interior Department declined to answer questions about whether it would consider a more natural approach.

But an administration brave enough to do so could make the Reflecting Pool a turning point for the U.S. government's posture toward the natural world. We can enlist nature as an ally rather than fight it to the death in a war we can't win.

What could be more patriotic than a system designed by America's best engineers and ecologists, yet inspired and managed by the original inhabitants of America's capital — its microbes, plants and wildlife?

Forget draining the swamp. Restore it. [Here's how.](#)

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*Do you have a wetland your backyard? Send me your stories and pictures to [climatecoach@washpost.com](mailto:climatecoach@washpost.com). I read all your emails.*

[Click here to read the column](#)



## Field Sample



A survey dive at a white abalone outplant site in waters off the Southern California coast in April, 2026 (Johnathan Casey, Aquarium of the Pacific)

One of the world's rarest sea snails has been found alive in the wild.

The white abalone (*Haliotis sorenseni*) was decimated by overharvesting in the 1970s and landed on the endangered species list in 2001.

Today's populations are too far apart to spawn and rebuild on their own, so a coalition of nonprofits and government agencies is breeding rearing and releasing them back into the wild. The Aquarium of the Pacific said it has helped reintroduce more than 20,000 captive-bred white abalone onto subtidal reefs off the Southern California coast.



White abalone (Aquarium of the Pacific)

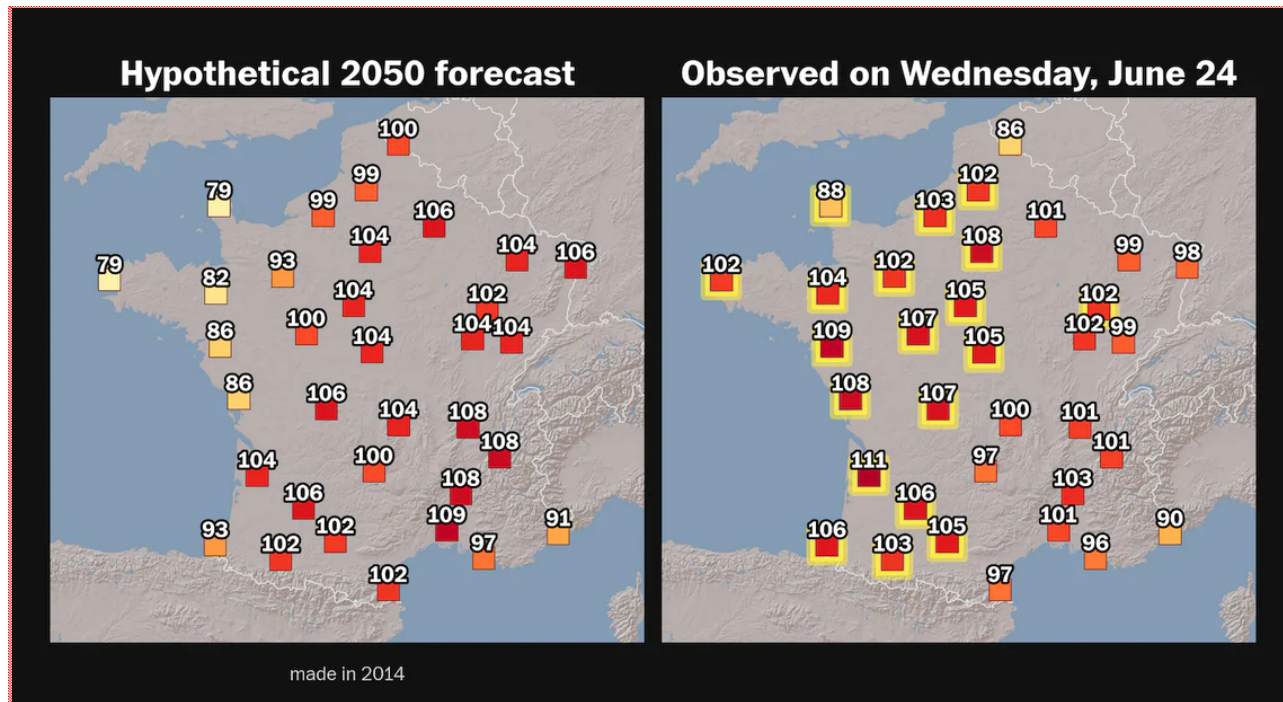
Their efforts were rewarded when scientific divers confirmed the first white abalone in the Channel Islands National Marine Sanctuary in five years. The Aquarium's next release of a new generation of marine snails in the wild is this September.

[Read more about the future of abalone.](#)



## Learning Curve

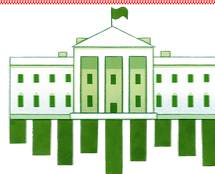
The heat in France last week was worse than a dire scenario imagined for 2050. The temperatures blew past a 2014 prediction of what a weather report from the year 2050 might look like.



The 2050 forecast was part of a global campaign by the World Meteorological Organization for weather presenters to imagine weather reports from that year.

Temperatures in France last week exceeded those in Phoenix and were just two degrees Fahrenheit shy of Death Valley, California. By 2100, unbroken heat waves could last up to two months, said the national weather agency Météo-France.

[Read more](#) about the future of Europe's extreme heat.



## Snapshot

Flamingos are returning to Venice in record numbers.

Called "fenicotteri" in Italian, the birds represent an ecological success as damaged wetlands threatened by

climate change and development are restored. Greater flamingos, which also nest in Spain and France, were once rare sightings around Venice, the AP reported.



But a record 24,000 or so wintering flamingos have returned to the Venetian Lagoon, which covers 550 square-kilometers or more than 200 square-miles, making it one of the species' most important wintering spots.

Watch the flamingos take flight.



## The Second Degree

Last week, I wrote about how the standard advice about rooftop solar panels — own, don't lease — is changing as new subscription models hit the market.

Many of you still said buying was a great deal.

"If you can afford to make the investment, it's a no-brainer in DC to purchase solar panels ... even without the tax credit," wrote one reader. "I am happy with my panels. My electric bill is much less." Jerry of Santa Rosa, California, bought the biggest array he could in 2016 — and then added more recently (with batteries) after purchasing an electric car and heat pump, nearly eliminating his utility bills.

Others had advice on how to save. One reader cut the cost of their solar system in half merely by shopping around. Another installed a 5,000-watt system with batteries using second-hand panels for under \$4,500, roughly half the average cost.



## On the Climate Front

### From The Post:

Court rules against Trump administration on air pollution limits

Internal memo orders staff not to reveal deaths in National Parks.

See where dangerous heat will envelop the Midwest and East this week

### From elsewhere:

How oil execs shaped a landmark climate study at Princeton University (ProPublica)

Consumer Reports, Yuka tested popular foods: 1 in 4 exceeded “safe” additive levels (Consumer Reports)

Asia’s ‘dangerous’ humid heatwaves push human body to its limits (South China Morning Post)



Can we talk to trees — and will they talk back?

Lindsay Branham, an environmental psychologist who studied this question for her PhD at the University of Cambridge, says yes. We just need to call on our “eighth

sense” interoception.

This sense — our ability to sense and interpret internal signals within our body — is a way to discover and strengthen a bond with nature that our daily awareness doesn’t quite capture, she argues in her new book Heartwood: The Wisdom and Healing Kinship of Trees.

It reminded me of Mark Twain’s quote: “It is just like man’s vanity and impertinence to call an animal dumb because it is dumb to his dull perceptions.”

So I’m busy relearning the language of trees. I’ll let you know what they say.

*What are you reading? [climatecoach@washpost.com](mailto:climatecoach@washpost.com)*



Lindsay Branham, in conversation.

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See you next Tuesday,

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