



*The turbines of the Block Island Wind Farm. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

# wbur

## ENVIRONMENT TEAM

### 2021

This past year was the WBUR Environment team's most ambitious yet. As the state and the country began to open up, transitioning to a new way of working amid the ongoing pandemic, our reporters dug deep. In addition to publishing landmark projects with elements on-air, online and on stage, the team established itself as the go-to source for local environmental justice issues and dominated coverage of Massachusetts' new climate law.

With your support, WBUR's environmental team produced over 200 stories in the past 14 months. WBUR has also strengthened its relationship with the NPR national environment and energy desk, with 14 WBUR features picked up for national broadcast. We're excited to share some highlights with you in the following pages.

## LOCAL IMPACT

WBUR strives to be your go-to source for local news. And as climate change becomes a growing global concern, our coastal region is a critical watch area for environmental issues of all types. The scientific community that calls the Greater Boston area home also plays an important role in the way we think and talk about environmental issues nationally; WBUR is here to report on all innovations.

- The Environment team led regional coverage of three important environmental justice stories: [the ongoing Weymouth compressor story](#), [the east Boston substation](#), and [a proposed bio-mass plant in Springfield](#).

This reporting has been shared by policymakers like senator Elizabeth Warren and Rep Ayanna Pressley, tweeted by the New York Times, and credited with halting the biomass plant when the state revoked a key permit due to public health concerns.

- In early January, the team covered the breaking news of Massachusetts' new climate law. WBUR dominated local coverage of this issue and won praise for making a complex law accessible, explaining how it would impact residents.

This coverage included [“What You Need to Know About The New Mass. Climate Law.”](#)

- The team produced a number of engaging features on novel building techniques — such as [passive housing](#) and [laminated timber](#) — that can help cut greenhouse gas emissions. Senior Correspondent Bruce Gellerman has also been following energy innovations, like cutting-edge batteries and [advances in fusion](#). These industry developments provide color and context to our community's understanding of climate change.

Impactful tweets from local officials:

 **Elizabeth Warren** ✓  
@SenWarren

The board's decision to move forward with this substation is deeply disappointing. East Boston and Chelsea are already overexposed to pollution and residents fighting for environmental justice have been ignored. This is wrong – and the fight isn't over.



In A Blow To Environmental Justice Advocates, State Regulators Approve Co...  
The unanimous vote came at the end of almost 20 hours of public meetings during which several high-profile elected officials, and more than 50 member...  
[wbur.org](#)

9:08 PM · Feb 24, 2021 · Twitter Web App

 **Maura Healey** ✓  
@MassAGO

In Massachusetts, our rules incentivize clean, renewable energy and limit dirty, polluting energy like biomass. As we face crises that disproportionately burden environmental justice communities, we shouldn't adopt new regulations to make things worse.



Mass. Has Strong Rules About Burning Wood For Electricity. In 2021, It Plans T...  
Many fear the changes will pave the way for a large biomass facility in Springfield, the "asthma capital" of the country  
[wbur.org](#)

8:10 AM · Dec 24, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone



*One scientist shines a spotlight across the water as another uses a pair of binoculars to find loon chicks on Rangeley Lake in Maine. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

## NATIONAL REACH

The environmental editor meets weekly with NPR's national environmental and energy desk, and the team's work is attracting increased national attention, including on *Here & Now*, *Science Friday*, and *Morning Edition*. WBUR Reporter Miriam Wasser, particularly, has contributed additional spots and posts to the national desk on the burgeoning offshore wind industry.

Wide-reaching national stories include:

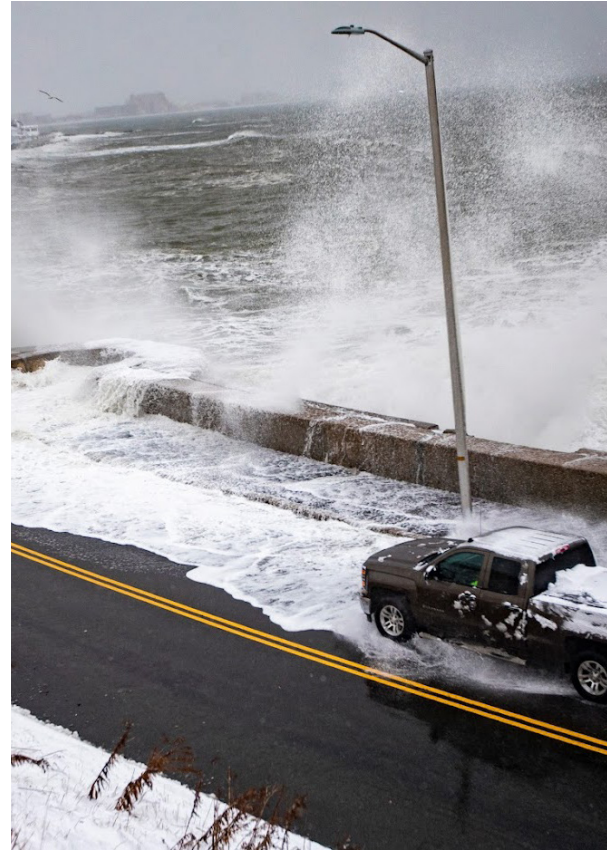
- **[Coverage of the Maine capture and Massachusetts release of 12 loon chicks, part of a six-year, \\$2.6 million effort to restore the birds to their historic range.](#)** After humans drove common loons to near extinction in Massachusetts in the late 19th century, the birds have been slow to recolonize the state. But now, with settlement money from a 2003 oil spill, a project aims to jumpstart the population by capturing loon chicks in Maine and convincing them Massachusetts is home. This story was a collaboration with Maine Public Radio and its photos ran in Audubon Magazine. It was named a 2021 Victor K. McElheny Award Finalist from the Knight Science Journalism Program at MIT.
- **[A Mini Mississippi In Massachusetts!](#)** The team dug into the work of the Alden Research Lab, which has been helping Louisiana's Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority to develop its plans for a sediment diversion, a structure designed to pull water and sand out of the Mississippi River and into Louisiana's Barataria Basin. To determine potential success, the Alden lab is running tests on a scale model of a section of the Mississippi River, built on the lab's campus just outside of Worcester. This story, close to WBUR's home, has incredible impact on the future of our country and ran nationally on *Here & Now*.
- **[Continued reporting on the decommissioning of Plymouth's nuclear power plant.](#)** As the decommissioning of Pilgrim proceeds, concern over the long-term safety of the highly radioactive waste remains. Until another storage facility is approved, Pilgrim's toxic legacy will remain in Plymouth, sealed in giant casks on a storage pad above Cape Cod Bay. Radioactive waste is a global concern and this piece aired nationally on NPR's *Science Friday*.

## LANDMARK PROJECTS

### *Boston Under Water*

In June 2021, the team produced its first landmark project since the pandemic began — a multi-part series about the perils of sea level rise in our city, called “[Boston Under Water](#).” “Boston Under Water” explores our vulnerability to sea-level rise in three critical areas — [the MBTA Blue Line](#), [the stormwater system](#) and [the Seaport](#) — and what’s being done to mitigate it.

- The series included three on-air features and nine digital stories, including one that explored Boston’s history, a “[By the Numbers](#)” post and [a quiz](#). The quiz was noted for its novelty in the influential [Neiman Labs newsletter](#).
- Editor Barbara Moran also worked with Boston Public Library’s Leventhal Map & Education Center to produce a feature story for the Boston Under Water project, “[8 Maps That Explain Boston’s Changing Shoreline](#).”



*A pickup truck heads through flood water that has crashed over the seawall in Revere during the Nor’easter. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



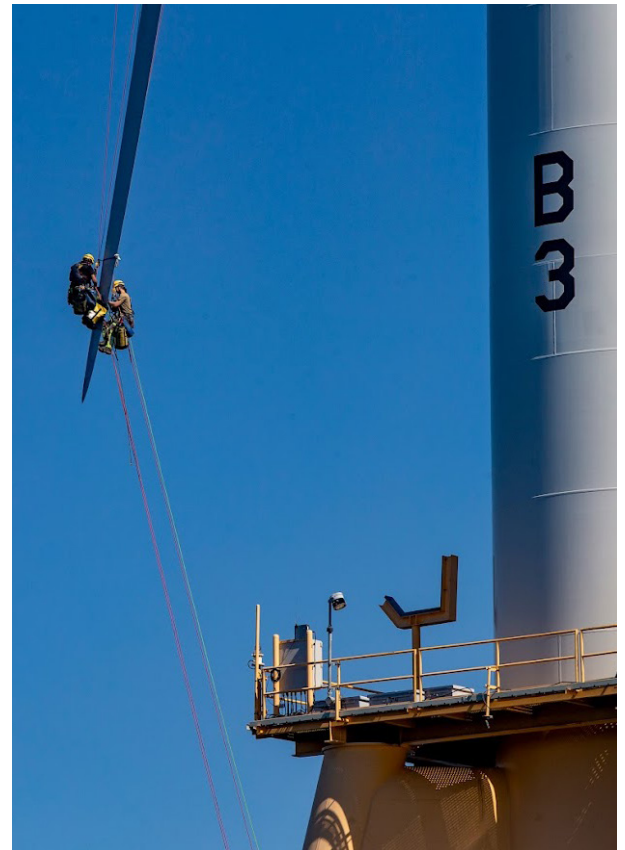
*A Blue Line train passes over a culvert next to the DCR Bennington Street Pump Station. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

## *Power Shift: The Future of Offshore Wind*

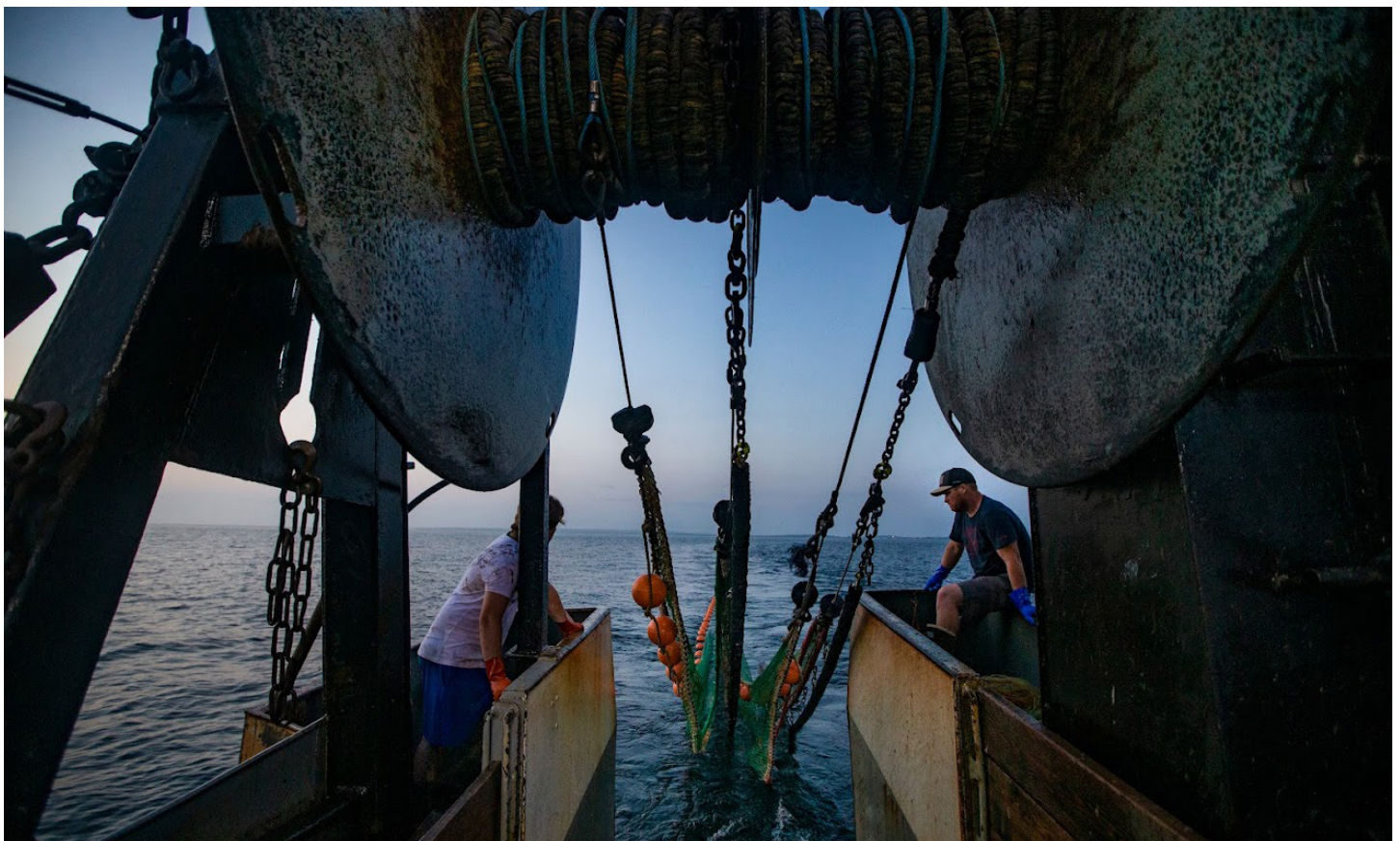
In October 2021, WBUR joined forces with E&E News, a Politico news organization focused solely on energy and the environment, for “Power Shift: The Future of Offshore Wind.” The deeply reported radio and digital stories introduced us to people already impacted by this new industry: [an iron-worker from Roxbury](#), a squid fisherman from Long Island, [Royal Dutch Shell employees planning an offshore wind project](#) and a New Bedford politician-turned-wind advocate.

Wasser and E&E News Reporter Ben Storrow also [explore big questions about energy, equity and tradeoffs](#).

The series, translated into Spanish and shared by El Planeta, includes maps, charts and photos that illustrate the size and scale of the industry and the impact it could have on marine life in the Atlantic.



*Technicians of the Block Island Wind Farm Support Team repaint a crack in the blade of one of the wind turbines. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



*Caitlin & Mairead's fishing net lines are released into the water; the fishing industry is one potentially at risk with the growth of offshore wind farms. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



*Robin Williams looks up at the pine tree she planted as a seedling in her yard in Hyde Park. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

### *Trees: Our Mental, Physical, Climate Change Antidote*

In September 2021, health reporter Martha Bebinger, who often focuses on the intersection of public health and climate change, produced a unique series. Bebinger's three-part series on the public and personal health benefits of trees included custom illustrations and [a video](#). [Dozens of people wrote in to share photos and stories of their favorite trees](#), and Bebinger folded their experiences into her reporting. WBUR hopes to continue to engage our community more deeply; this was an important new project and step forward.

### **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Throughout the pandemic, WBUR's Environment team continued to participate in events, including:

- A November 2021 conversation at Boston University called [“The Climate Crisis & The Need for Global, Bold Action”](#)
- [A discussion with environmental justice advocate Catherine Flowers](#) at the BU School of Public health
- [A discussion about the youth climate movement](#) with Sunrise Movement founder Varshini Prakash
- [A virtual CitySpace discussion with environmental writers](#) Helen MacDonald and Elizabeth Kolbert
- [A panel discussion at CitySpace on cities and sea-level rise](#) with experts from New Orleans, the Bay Area, and Boston
- [A panel discussion at CitySpace on what Biden's election means](#) for environmental action in Massachusetts
- Panels at the Center For Coastal Studies on whale ecology and ocean debris

## WITH THE NEWSROOM

To educate the newsroom on emerging environmental issues, the Environment team has hosted speakers for exclusive conversations. These popular brown bag sessions have included BU climate scientist Wally Fulweiler for a “Climate 101” talk, experts from Climate Central to discuss the connection between extreme weather and climate change, and Energy Justice advocate Shalanda Baker, now with the Biden administration.

It has become increasingly clear that climate change is a story that crosses all beats — including health, politics, business and the arts.

- In the summer of 2020, Bebinger covered [the growing necessity of air conditioning as summer temps rise in Boston](#). City governments are beginning to make accommodations for this need, as WBUR noted in the article. The health of our communities depend on it.
- Climate change was an important topic in the Boston mayoral race this fall and [WBUR reported on all candidate proposals](#).
- [In November, reporter Simón Ríos covered the rising flood insurance rates and their impact on residents in Lawrence, Massachusetts](#). The federal government is transitioning to a new rating system to reflect flood risks, one that takes climate change and rising waters into account. One of the unintended consequences, experts say, is low-income communities like Lawrence seeing massive premium increases.

The environmental desk also welcomed a Boston University fellow during 2021, the second to join the team. We hope to have another join us in 2022.

## LOOKING AHEAD

The WBUR Environment team looks forward to some exciting changes in the coming year. Editor Moran will be moving to a correspondent role to focus on science reporting. Her beat will tackle climate science and solutions — how technology and ecology can help offset the worst effects of climate change. She will also oversee the team’s newsletter strategy and expects to roll out WBUR’s first environmental newsletter course, focused on food and climate, in May 2022.

With this transition, WBUR newsroom leadership is elevating the open position to Assistant Managing Editor. This new role will have a greater focus on big-picture strategic decisions within the newsroom, working to establish organizational goals. We are conducting a nation-wide search for this important role and hope to fill the position in early 2022.

Moran has also recently consulted with colleagues in the iLab, WBUR’s podcast team, on an upcoming climate change project. *Great Job Everyone* (a working title) will be a “choose your own adventure” style podcast that puts the power of tackling climate change into the hands of its listening audience, through voting on choices that will impact their community, state, country, and planet. So much of climate change coverage is about what might happen in the future; this show will ask scientists, economists, policy experts, and government officials to imagine that future, together. Stay tuned for more updates on this front!

## THANK YOU

Your generosity has fueled the growth of environmental journalism throughout New England. WBUR is committed to sharing environmental initiatives and innovations and investigating environmental injustices. We're working to inform the public and create widespread awareness about the critical environmental issues that we face. Thank you for partnering with us in this effort.



*The loon chick adapts to the water of its new home in Fall River, Massachusetts. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*