SCI-TECH

"O Jerusalem, mountains surround her, and God surrounds His people, from now and for all time."
YERUSHALAYIM MIAMI BOYS CHOIR

Yale brings diverse outlooks to panels at Climate Week NYC

BY ARIA LYNN-SKOV AND ALISSA SUNDRANI
STAFF AND CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

NEW YORK — Nearly 800 people, from New Haven and around the world, attended Yale's events for Climate Week NYC on Tuesday.

Held at the Yale Club of New York City, the day's events included over a dozen panels hosted by Yale Planetary Solutions, a University initiative that works on climate and sustainability issues. The events were free and open to the public, and with registration full, many hopeful attendees were turned away at the door.

This was the University's third year participating in Climate Week, which this year was set to include over 1,000 events across New York City from Sept. 20 to Sept. 27.

"I was most excited that we had a panel with people with such diverse perspectives," said Brianna Castro, a professor at the Yale School of the Environment who spoke on a panel about the intersections of migration law and climate policy.

Yale President Maurie McInnis attended Climate Week in 2024 and 2025, but was unable to attend this year because of a scheduling conflict, she wrote in a Tuesday email to the News.

Climate Week NYC "encapsulates higher education's role in tackling today's toughest challenges," McInnis wrote, adding she is "so glad that Yale is continuing to have a presence there, and that many of my colleagues have been able to attend."

"I'm looking forward to connecting with my colleagues to discuss what was covered at this year's gathering," McInnis wrote.

Castro noted that her panel included an Indigenous leader from Ecuador, the director of climate action at the International Organization for Migration and an immigrant advocate with a nonprofit background.

"You don't often get a panel with these different voices in the room, and we're all thinking about climate migration in very different corners of the world," Castro said. "But we share an agenda, and we share opinions on what we think is needed to support people in the changing climate."

Yale representatives at the event also included students and administrators who traveled from New Haven to attend and participate in panel discussions.

Joshua Wortzel, an assistant psychiatry professor and the founder of the Heat Mind Lab, spoke on a panel about the impact of global warming on depression and suicide.

He wanted the opportunity to speak with different people with concerns about the impact of climate on mental health and how to create policy change, he said.

Wortzel recognized that funding and policy change won't immediately happen at Climate Week events. His goals were about people meeting to "continue the conversation" and combine skillsets to "do something larger," he said.

Julia Frey ENV '27 said that Climate Week was "heavily promoted" at the School of the Environment and that she was excited to attend panels that aligned with her interests in renewable energy policy.

Monika Kumar ENV '05, who works with artisans in India to make sustainable textiles, said having a space for people working in sustainability to "come and get a boost of inspiration and an update of what is happening" is helpful.

Not all attendees were Yale affiliates.

University of Chicago sophomore Julia Marden said she was going to different events throughout the city this week, "figuring out and asking what the big issues that are currently being addressed are."

"There is a big diversity in the people speaking," she said. "That's not something that I think is always presented very easily.

Attendees hailing from all parts of the world, including China, India, Indonesia, South Africa and Russia, brought global perspectives to discussions throughout the day and exchanged phone numbers and promises to keep in touch.

The final event before the closing reception was an off-the-record conversation with Louisiana Senator Bill Cassidy, climate advocate Laur Hesse Fisher and Kenneth Gillingham, School of the Environment senior associate dean of academic affairs.

The first Climate Week NYC was held in 2009.



ALISSA SUNDRANI / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
Hundreds of people attended Tuesday's events hosted by Yale Planetary Solutions at the Yale Club of New York City. After attending for two years, University President Maurie McInnis skipped the events this year, citing scheduling conflicts.

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Faculty denounce reported changes to Endangered Species Act

BY KRISTIN CHUANG AND MOHID KHAN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTERS

Yale environmental science professors criticized the Trump administration's reported move to narrow the scope of the Endangered Species Act.

Under the language outlined in an internal memo obtained by The New York Times last week, only the intentional killing of a listed species — known as illegal "take" — would be considered illegal under federal law, the Times reported. Previously, accidental deaths caused by indirect factors, such as destruction of habitat, were deemed illegal under the act.

"It's a step in the wrong direction," Susan Clark, a professor emeritus of wildlife ecology and policy sciences, said. "We are totally dependent on nature for everything. Often, that's not appreciated. To not protect nature and species is very short-sighted and in the long run we are harming ourselves."

For Yale researchers who study conservation policy and endangered species, the proposed changes are the latest in a string of rollbacks that could have dire environmental impacts.

The new interpretation would require a court to prove intent in the killing of a species.

"It is very difficult to prove intent," Clark said, adding that the reported change "makes no sense."

David Skelly, director of the Peabody Museum and a professor at the Yale School of the Environment, said the memo is difficult to square with the Interior Department's stated goals for the Endangered Species Act.

According to Skelly, the Endangered Species Act was intended to temporarily protect a species until their population could recover. He said that the majority of endangered species deaths happen through indirect causes. Thus, this change would significantly limit the act's effectiveness in reducing deaths.

"Any scientist who has worked on these issues would tell you that harm absolutely includes anything that affects the habitat, the food resources, the homes for the species you're trying to protect," Skelly said.

Oswald Schmitz, a professor at the School of the Environment, said he agrees with the purpose of the proposed change, and that conservation policy needs to be updated for the modern scientific landscape. He said he is in favor of finding new ways to use land while maintaining a mutualistic relationship with the endangered species inhabiting it.

He added, however, that he thinks this change is not the best way to achieve that. Rather, he said, the move would open the door to more exploitation of the law by companies.

According to Schmitz, federal policy has long faced the challenge of balancing conservation with human activity on land. The reported change to the Endangered Species Act's core protection reflects a reversal in strong United States federal conservation efforts since the act's signing in 1973, he said.

"It's like a pendulum. We've always had strict protections. Now the pendulum is swinging for exploitation," he said.

Skelly situated the memo within a wider context of upheaval for federal science and environmental policy, especially given the current scientific funding "apocalypse."

He added that the memo's effect on work in the field will depend heavily on how state governments respond.

Although the Endangered Species Act is a federal law that applies to federal land, states still have power to determine their own policies on state land.

"One of the things to look out for in coming months is how state-level agencies and governments react to this, and whether they either go along with it or try to tighten up their own oversight in ways that could counter some of these effects," Skelly said.

The memo obtained by the Times cites a 1995 Supreme Court dissent by Justice Antonin Scalia.



PAUL-ALEXANDER LEJAS
Faculty warned that a recent memo detailing plans to weaken the protections of the key animal protection act will have widespread effects. One said the pendulum of federal conservation policy is "swinging for exploitation."

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Yale study finds key lupus medication may protect the heart

BY KATE CASTRO
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

Lupus is often called an invisible illness: the fatigue, joint pain and organ damage don't always show on the outside, and neither does the elevated heart disease risk that follows many patients for life.

A Yale study first published last month suggests that hydroxychloroquine, a medication considered the backbone of lupus treatment, may quietly lower that risk with proper intake.

"Patients who had better hydroxychloroquine levels in the therapeutic range, as well as a consistent pattern of taking medicine over a period of time, tended to have the lowest progression in cardiovascular disease risk," Shivani Garg, an associate professor of rheumatology at the Yale School of Medicine, told the News.

That benefit, however, diminishes when patients are inconsistent with medication intake and have low hydroxychloroquine levels in their blood, the study found.

Lupus is an autoimmune disease that causes widespread inflammation, with symptoms that vary person to person. The condition begins in early adulthood and predominantly affects women.

Hydroxychloroquine, often known by the brand name Plaquenil, is considered one of the safest and most reliable lupus medications. It modulates an overactive immune system rather than shutting it down like a classic immunosuppressant.

Garg and her team tracked hydroxychloroquine exposure over one year using two measures: blood tests, which captured recent drug levels, and prescription refill records, which captured longer term patterns of use.

"It is very similar to other blood tests that our patients undergo," Garg said. "From the same prick they undergo for, say, lupus monitoring blood test — which would be a cell count, a kidney function test and lupus antibodies — we will draw a small tube of blood and we run it in clinical labs."

Sue Kilmer, who was diagnosed with lupus in her seventies, has been taking hydroxychloroquine for over a decade. "From my standpoint, hydroxychloroquine has been, you know, a godsend because I think I still have some effect of lupus, but the worst of it has been held at bay," Kilmer said.

Kilmer said she was intrigued to learn from Garg's work that hydroxychloroquine blood levels can also be measured, as she has never had hers tested in her decade on the drug.

Extended use of hydroxychloroquine also carries a rare risk of toxicity to the heart. These reported cardiac effects of the drug are rare and can be hard to separate from the cardiac effects of lupus itself. Garg said she wants conversations about cardiac toxicity to stay balanced so patients are not frightened away from a drug they may need for years.

"Long term optimizing the dose of hydroxychloroquine is important as the medication can be cardiotoxic leading to heart failure depending on time on the medication and dose," Margaret Furman, a cardiologist and assistant professor at the Yale School of Medicine, wrote in an email. "Measuring levels of hydroxychloroquine will allow a balance between reducing cardiovascular risk and lowering incidence of cardiotoxicity hopefully."

Currently, dosage is weight based, but several lupus experts including Garg's team are challenging that. Body weight may be an incomplete proxy for dosing because the drug is cleared by the kidneys, and up to 60 percent of lupus patients have some level of impairment in those organs.

Garg said she sees blood level monitoring as one step toward more precise lupus treatment. While some researchers argue that large randomized trials are still needed to define exactly how best to use blood level-guided dosing, others believe that the existing evidence is strong enough to begin using levels now as an additional data point in clinical care, if it is interpreted cautiously and in context rather than relied on as a single cutoff.

Rheumatologist Vaidehi Chowdhary, an associate professor of medicine at the Yale School of Medicine, said she has already put the findings into practice by routinely checking blood levels of her patients.

Chowdhary agreed the shift in lupus treatment may involve a more personal approach, informed by patient-specific blood level testing and patterns of intake.

"I think the first step is recognition of this increased risk and screen, screen, screen," Chowdhary said. "We're not talking about starting new medication. These are simply things that we can just do with our already existing information."

Garg noted a limitation of the study: because participants in the study were relatively young, the scores denoting their risk of cardiovascular disease are not directly comparable to those of older or healthy populations, though the findings may nudge lupus care toward more personalized dosing.

However, for a disease with no cure, it may be that the path forward lies less in a single breakthrough than in using the tools already at hand.

"There is no holy grail," Garg said. "But we learn, we adapt and then we refine and optimize and take it with caveats in place."

An estimated million and a half Americans live with a form of lupus.

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