

Wind Power and Clean Energy Policy Perspectives

***Governor Inslee's Words
Undermine State Energy Strategy & EFSEC Process***



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While attending a United Nations climate conference in Egypt in November 2022, Governor Inslee was quoted as saying governments will have to overcome “nimbyism,” including in Washington, to achieve clean-energy goals. He went on to say **regulatory reforms are needed to prevent local opponents from delaying projects**. “We’ve got to make decisions, and this will be controversial,” he said. “We have to confront it. We have to succeed.” See https://www.capitalpress.com/climate_changed/on-world-stage-inslee-decries-nimbyism-in-washington/article_d7fdc7b6-644e-11ed-b537-3b8086574b54.html

First, it’s important to note Governor Inslee’s words are the polar opposite of what was promised in the Washington 2021 State Energy Strategy (SES) which states “public and community participation is important to ensure energy policy is **informed by local knowledge, meets local needs** and is **viewed as legitimate by the local community**”. Additionally, “...communities and **community members must have a seat at the table** in designing programs and **selecting projects**.” See “Equity” document, page 24, Section 3 titled “Ensure Public Participation and Inclusion of Historically Marginalized Voices” available at: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/growing-the-economy/energy/2021-state-energy-strategy/>

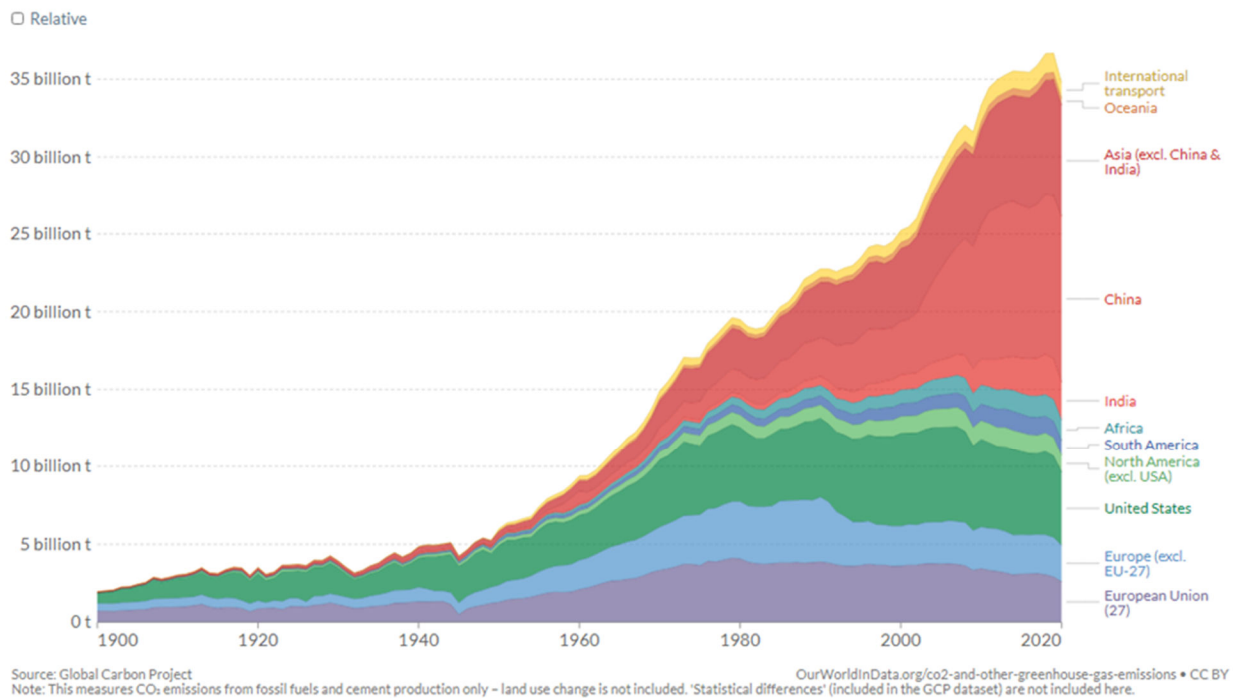
So, despite what has been promised in the SES, based on Governor Inslee’s words, majority local opposition to expansive wind farms will never be “legitimate” and merely represents a hurdle that must be cleared as rapidly as possible. And as justification for steam rolling local interests, the Governor invokes a panicked state energy strategy that proclaims Washington’s actions will contribute to “avoiding the worst impacts of climate change” while providing no context of where Washington stands in terms of U.S. or global CO2 emissions or a logical argument as to how “rethinking virtually every aspect of energy use in Washington” will meaningfully mitigate a global problem.

Back in July of 2020, Benton PUD made some waves in the region by taking a position opposing further development of wind power in the pacific northwest. We didn’t just say no to wind, we said yes to new nuclear and lobbied for a more rational transition away from coal-fired electricity than currently allowed by Washington’s 100% clean electricity legislation. Our recommended approach called for preserving existing hydropower while using cleaner burning natural gas as a dependable replacement for coal on our way to a nuclear future. While new nuclear is gaining momentum, it has a long way to go. And at this point it’s clear a reasonable use of new natural gas is off the table and that draconian anti hydrocarbon policies are going to be implemented in Washington and Oregon with no evidence our actions (either directly or as a “model” for others) will result in even a fraction of measurable difference in net global greenhouse gas concentrations. That is unless you believe our example will convince poor people to stay poor. Or that somehow Washington’s clean energy model with nearly 60% of electricity

provided by hydropower can be exported to other states or countries anytime soon. Keep in mind hydropower represented only 6.3% of U.S. electricity generation in 2021.

It continues to be deeply frustrating to be lectured by state of Washington officials and political leaders to follow the science when it is so easy to see through a dispassionate review of readily available data like the chart below that future carbon dioxide concentrations in the global atmosphere will be largely determined by developing nations who are digging themselves out of abject poverty through the development of coal and natural gas energy resources.

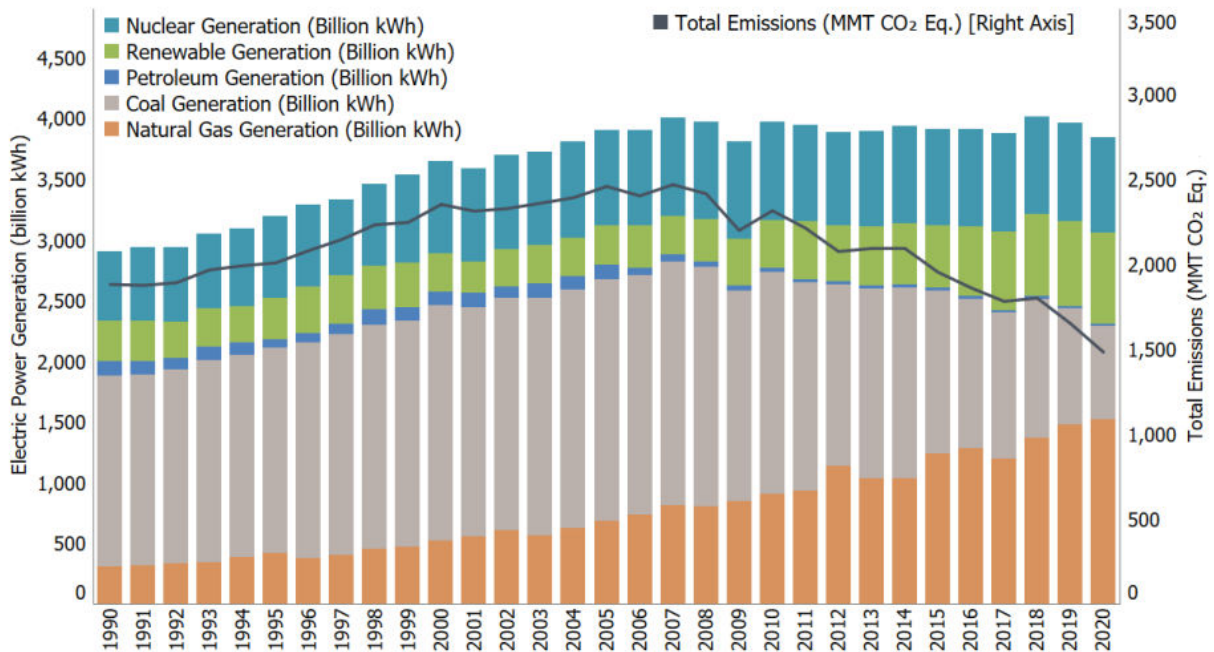
Annual CO₂ emissions from fossil fuels, by world region



As for U.S. total annual CO₂ emissions, they have been dropping for 15 years thanks mostly to fuel switching in the electricity sector from coal to natural gas with total sector wide emissions dropping to less than 6 gigatons annually and electricity emissions dropping from 2.5 gigatons in 2007 to around 1.5 gigatons (1,500 MMT) in 2020 as shown in the graph below. On the other end of the spectrum are countries like China with a 12 gigaton per year annual emissions rate and climbing. And if you assert all states and countries need to chip in and do our part, there is still the questions of how much and how fast? Particularly when you consider around **80% of total global and U.S energy is currently sourced from fossil fuels**. And that it has taken more than 100 years to get to this level and how impractical and potentially catastrophic it would be to rapidly reduce fossil fuel use on a widespread basis.


Furthermore, even the most ardent supporters of highly uncertain computer models as predictors of future climate are forced to admit if the U.S. eliminated 100% of CO2 emissions today it would result in a fractional impact on future global temperatures based on current trends and possible future scenarios.

Figure ES-7: Electric Power Generation and Emissions



Washington state contributes less than 0.1 gigatons (100 MMT) of total greenhouse gas emissions annually across all sectors today with 0.016 gigatons (16 MMT) or less coming from the electricity sector which is already 70% non-CO2 emitting. So, when Governor Inslee says, “we have to succeed”, **we think it is reasonable to ask for a more comprehensive definition of success that is not 100% based on Washington state CO2 emission reductions in a vacuum defined by the state border.** Success must be linked to the global problem you insist will be mitigated by our actions. And **it seems reasonable to include limits on land-use informed by a sober and comprehensive assessment of what Washington’s natural and rural landscapes will look like in the next ten to twenty years** if your clean energy policy dominated by preferences for the most material and land-use intensive technologies in existence today (wind and solar farms) plays out.

From our perspective **Governor Inslee and Washington State officials have not developed or offered a compelling and convincing argument to justify the sacrifice of vast natural landscape including those near populated areas like the Tri-Cities.** And clearly, Governor Inslee’s expressed bias undermines the legitimacy of the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) process being used by wind and solar



farm developers to bypass local planning authorities. In fact, taking the governor at his word, **EFSEC is just what the state wants in place to implement “regulatory reforms...needed to prevent local opponents from delaying projects”**. And for those who are not aware, EFSEC became an independent state agency on June 30, 2022, after the state legislature passed a bill authorizing the change “as an important step to achieve Governor Inslee’s carbon neutral goals by 2045”. Additionally, it’s important to point out the EFSEC council body consists of a governor-appointed Chair and State agency representatives from the Department of Commerce, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Natural Resources (Commissioner of Public Lands), and the Utilities and Transportation Commission. **Optional membership on the Council is extended to local governments,** the Department of Agriculture, Department of Health, Department of Transportation, and the Military Department on a project-by-project basis.

And so, the question Benton PUD posed in our July 2020 report remains. What urgent “dirty energy” problem are we attempting to solve through the aggressive timelines and technology restrictions of Washington’s 100% clean electricity legislation that is worth sacrificing vast amounts of our natural landscapes and risking blackouts that jeopardize the health, safety, and wellbeing of northwest electricity customers? This question is particularly important in the Tri-Cities area where six consumer-owned utilities provide 90% to 95% carbon-free electricity to their customers already.

If Governor Inslee is going to insist citizens in eastern Washington must accept the ecological disruption and sacrifice of our beloved rural lifestyles to forests of industrial wind turbines, he needs to have more than 100% clean electricity bragging rights as justification.