



California Climate

How the politics of climate change are shaping the future of California



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California’s newest wind farm is old enough to order at the bar

By **WES VENTEICHER** and **ALEX NIEVES** | 02/28/2024 09:00 PM EST

A FLIGHTY WIND: The developers of a new wind farm in the Santa Barbara County hills did something a lot of people thought was impossible, a local official said today: They finished an industrial-scale renewable project on California’s pristine and heavily regulated coast.

“Projects like this are really important as a counterfactual to change that narrative, to show that it’s possible to permit and operate in coastal counties,” county supervisor and former Assemblymember **Das Williams** said at a press conference today.

But if the projects continue to take as long as the 27-turbine Strauss Wind Energy Project, which began in 2001 and started up in December, California’s clean energy goals are in trouble.

The project, brought online by international developer BayWa r.e., is harvesting nearly 100 megawatts of renewable energy when California needs it most — in the morning before the sun comes up and in the evening after it sets and solar power drops off.

To keep up with its goals, California needs the equivalent of 70 more Strausses in the next 10 years, according to a California Public Utilities Commission plan published last week.

California was a pioneer in wind energy with Tehachapi Wind, one of the first large-scale projects to start construction four decades ago. But, stymied by local opposition, dense permitting rules, environmental protections and transmission shortages, it has fallen behind other states. Iowa has twice California's wind; Texas six times as much.

Alex Jackson, director of American Clean Power-California, which represents BayWa and other developers, said the Strauss project was “good news,” but illustrates the challenges ahead.

“The lesson coming out of this is it can't take decades for the projects to get off the finish line,” he said.

The state's grid operator has lots of wind in its pipeline — about 13.5 gigawatts from 36 projects, according to data it keeps online — but some have been in the queue for 20 years.

Because it takes so long to build in California, developers have been looking elsewhere, like New Mexico and the Mexico side of the Baja peninsula. They can sell into California from there more easily than they can from the northeast corner of the state, which has promise too but needs more transmission.

Buzzy offshore wind projects are also gaining steam from the state's target of 4.5 gigawatts by 2035, but they face their own opposition over marine impacts.

On land, developers are all watching what happens with a project in Shasta County. Fountain Wind, twice the size of Strauss and located on private land, was shot down by county supervisors in the deeply conservative area.

Texas-based developer ConnectGen is trying to override the local opposition using a new permitting process lawmakers approved two years ago that gives the California Energy Commission authority to approve or reject it.

“If that can't be permitted, it's going to really chill investment in California wind,” said California Wind Energy Association director **Nancy Rader**.

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WE DON'T WANT YOUR EVs: Republicans are doubling down on their attacks against California's push to phase out gas cars.

A quartet of federal lawmakers — Sens. **Shelley Moore Capito** (R-W.Va.) and **Markwayne Mullin** (R-Okla.) and Reps. **Cathy McMorris Rodgers** (R-Wash.) and **John Joyce** (R-Pa.) — urged EPA Administrator **Michael Regan** in a Tuesday letter to reject a waiver request that would let the state set stricter emissions standards.

The group called California's proposal to ban the sale on new internal combustion engines by 2035 “radical” and “legally suspect,” arguing that it would nationally limit auto sales to electric vehicles, “which most Americans and Californians do not want and cannot afford.”

A group of state attorneys general, led by Ohio, sued EPA in May 2022 to block its approval of California's Clean Air Act waivers. That case is being decided in the DC Court of Appeals. — **AN**

FORKLIFT FREAKOUT: Also under fire: the California Air Resources Board's proposed rules for zero-emissions forklifts.

The Western Propane Gas Association argued in a report today that CARB has underestimated the reach of its rule, contending that it would make 220,000 forklifts obsolete, rather than the 95,000 that agency staff estimated. (Propane is one of the fuels commonly used in internal combustion engine forklifts.)

The group said replacing forklifts, building out charging infrastructure and maintaining or replacing batteries could cost up to \$27 billion — three times CARB's estimate. (CARB also estimates an eventual net savings of \$10.2 billion from reduced fuel and health care costs.)

They're asking that CARB instead phase out older, less-efficient gas models and adopt stricter air pollution standards for newer ones.

"It's critical that CARB take a hard look at the real-world impact of its proposal and work with small businesses throughout the state who have proposed a cheaper, more feasible, and more effective way to meet the state's air quality goals," **Colin Sueyres**, president and CEO of the WPGA, said in a statement.

CARB spokesperson **Lys Mendez** said in a statement that zero-emission technology is already popular in the forklift industry and that the rule is projected to reduce NOx emissions two tons per day by 2031. — **AN**

SOLAR ARRAY: Yellow-clad rooftop solar advocates crowded the Capitol's west steps this afternoon in a show of support for legislation to bolster the resource in California. Democratic Assemblymembers **Al Muratsuchi**, **Tasha Boerner** and **Marc Berman** attended along with Republican Assemblymembers **Jim Gallagher** and **Greg Wallis**. — **WV**

AV UNCERTAINTY: Autonomous vehicles could be a boon for older California residents, but they're not ready to embrace them just yet.

A new Morning Consult poll sponsored by Velocity Partners, a D.C. based public affairs firm, found that while more than 60 percent of Los Angeles residents interviewed said they're not interested in AVs or comfortable riding in them, a majority do think they'll benefit the city in the future. The respondents — all adults 50 and older — cited the potential for AVs to help them maintain their independence and provide alternative transportation to family caregivers.

The survey comes as Waymo is looking to expand its operations to Southern California, amid opposition from state lawmakers and local officials. The California Public Utilities Commission recently extended its review of that application until at least mid-June. — **AN**

- A candidate in CA-16 argues climate is **getting short shrift** in the campaigns.
 - The SEC is set to vote next week on its watered-down corporate **emissions disclosure rule**.
 - A California startup just raised \$23 million to test **electric truck trailers**.
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