

Climate Leadership = Utility Scale Solar

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BY TY GORMAN, Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign Kansas

Terms like climate crisis, code red for the climate, and climate emergency have been in the news regularly over the past several months. The last seven years have been the world's hottest years on record. Wildfires, flooding, drought, heat waves, and extreme weather events are happening more frequently than climate scientists previously projected. Since 2010, Kansas has been affected by \$45 billion dollars worth of extreme weather events. Nationally, the U.S. has experienced at least \$1.975 trillion dollars in damages since 1980 according to the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a consensus of virtually all climate scientists in the world, says that by 2030 we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions about 45 percent to avoid catastrophic effects of climate change on human health, food and water security, economic stability, biodiversity, and species extinction. The energy sector is the source of around three-quarters of greenhouse gas emissions today and it is key to averting the worst effects of climate change.

Globally, we are headed in the wrong direction right now. In 2021, emissions rose 6.2% compared to 2020, in part due to a 17% increase in coal generation, the first coal use increase since 2014. Here at home, Kansas utilities have plans to dramatically increase solar generation, but still aim to continue running their coal plants until the 2040s even with rising costs. Restrictive regulations on solar in places throughout Kansas, including Johnson and Douglas counties, will hinder our utilities' transition from Wyoming coal to Kansas clean energy.

We're facing a critical decade for decarbonization if we're going to slow the climate disaster. The U.S. and China create almost half the climate change pollution in the world. The U.S. has put twice the amount of greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere as China over the past century (and is currently emitting three times more per capita). The U.S. is far behind China and almost all other rich nations who are moving forward with deployment of all available clean and efficient energy technologies between now and 2030. The U.S. is threatening the lives of the majority of species and vulnerable families around the world by refusing to make basic, cost effective changes to our infrastructure.

We must get these large projects right. That means encouraging solar farms to adopt co-benefits like planting native vegetation to create pollinator habit. A joint report from the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services & IPCC notes the, "area and resources required over the life cycle of fossil-fuel power plants are estimated to be notably larger than solar plants. Moreover, integrated solar-cropping (or grazing) systems can create double-use of land, and positive spillover effects into neighboring fields have been observed if underneath solar panels habitat for pollinators is created."

The Sierra Club supports utility scale solar as a key climate solution. We also support rooftop solar and energy efficiency and we will continue to advocate for policies that will support their growth. However, the climate crisis forces us to think differently about climate solutions and our energy future. It's urgent that we reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and support large solar development.

County leaders can and should act now to address the climate crisis by promoting large-scale solar energy development. Sierra Club has been activating members to advocate for utility scale solar in their local communities. Johnson and Douglas Counties are fine-tuning permitting standards for these facilities and what happens in eastern Kansas has implications state-wide.

At a public hearing on April 4, 2022, the Johnson County Commissioners voted overwhelmingly to send the proposed solar siting guidelines back to the Planning Commission with directions to make the proposal more flexible and less restrictive. A majority of the public speakers at the hearing supported reduction or removal of the project size and buffer restrictions proposed by the Planning Commission.

Local Sierra Club members have been engaged in advocacy for several months. Stay tuned for the next opportunity to take action in support of our efforts to keep our planet livable. ***Look for a possible special meeting of the Planning Commission on May 10, although that date is subject to change.*** Let's treat the climate crisis with the urgency it deserves by **supporting utility scale solar and removing arbitrary project size limits and buffer requirements in Johnson County.**