



The US's New Commitments to the Paris Agreement Must Be Achievable and Ambitious

This month, the Biden administration will announce a new nationally determined contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement—the amount the US will pledge to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. The Sierra Club is calling on the Biden administration to commit to slashing greenhouse gas emissions at least 50 percent below 2005 levels by 2030, a target that begins to reflect the urgency of this moment.

We must act rapidly to get ourselves on the path to averting the worst impacts of climate change, warned the 2018 report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. It is far from sufficient to set carbon-reduction goals for 2050; we must aim to reduce emissions steeply by 2030.

While necessarily ambitious, the goal of cutting carbon emissions at least 50 percent by 2030 is also achievable. That's clear from models created by energy analysts at advocacy groups and think tanks. Beyond that, the

Sierra Club has observed that determined advocacy can win emissions reductions even beyond what analysts anticipated—while creating secure, family-sustaining jobs, and reducing pollution in communities of color and low-income communities.

Some of our most significant climate progress was made during the Trump administration, which blocked and undermined efforts to avert the climate crisis. Under an administration that acknowledges the urgency of the climate crisis, our advocacy can do even more to cut

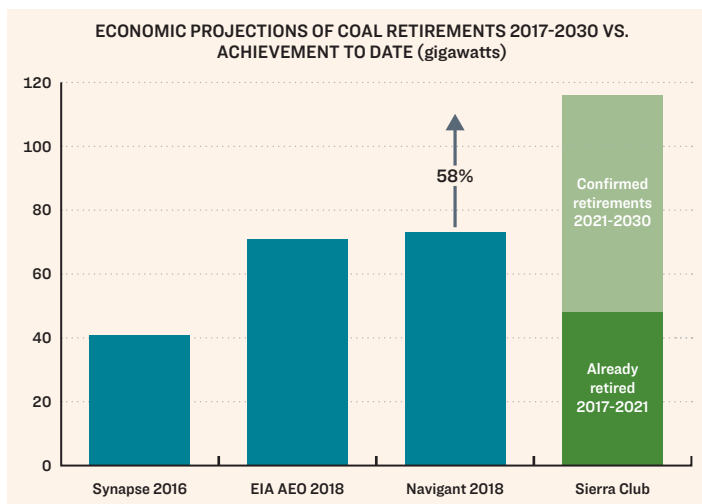
emissions and create a more just and sustainable world. Here's a sector-by-sector look at how our advocacy is helping the country get on the path toward reducing emissions at least 50 percent by 2030, offering proof that we can transition to a 100 percent clean energy economy that works for all of us.

Coal

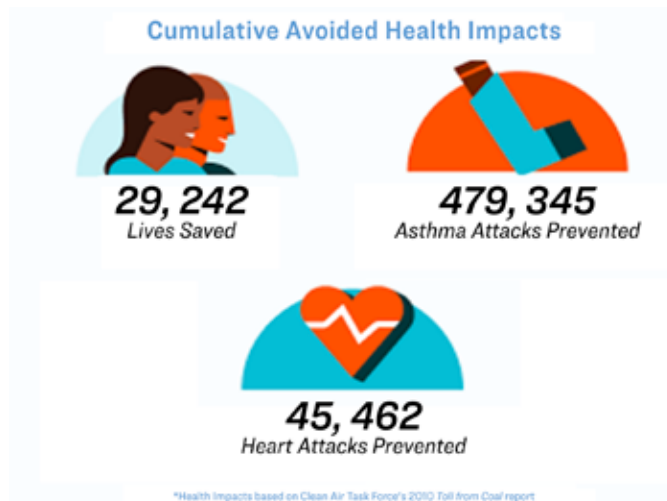
When the Beyond Coal campaign was launched in 2010, the US had more than 500 coal-fired power plants, with 200 more slated to be built. Only a tiny proportion of our energy came from clean, renewable sources. Today, there are fewer than 200 coal plants without a retirement date, and the last new coal plant proposed for the US has been canceled. In April 2020, power generation from wind and solar surpassed coal for the first time in history.

The shift away from coal was driven in part by the increasingly favorable economics of clean energy alternatives. But we've seen firsthand that economics alone is not sufficient to drive change. Regulators and utilities will only act if their feet are held to the fire. Without years of dedicated advocacy from the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal campaign and its many partners, uneconomic and highly polluting coal plants would have continued to operate for years, because utilities can simply force households and small businesses to bear the extra cost.

Together, we pushed far more gigawatts of coal to be retired than consulting groups and government agencies predicted. We've already outperformed their highest projections by 58 percent because of the efforts of grassroots advocacy groups working in these coal plant communities. Economic models predicted that at most 73 gigawatts of coal would retire between 2017 and 2030. Our advocacy has already helped retire or secure retirements for 115 gigawatts of coal, and it's only 2021.



The transition away from coal has come with substantial public health benefits, especially for the low-income communities and communities of color that are most likely to live near coal-fired power plants. Retiring coal plants has reduced air pollution enough to prevent about 45,000 heart attacks and 479,000 asthma attacks, and save about 29,000 lives.



Carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions from the coal fleet have been cut in half since the Beyond Coal campaign began in 2010. But coal plants still emitted nearly 1 billion metric tons of CO₂ in 2019, and continue to pollute the air and water of nearby communities. To protect our communities from climate disasters and further exposure to pollution, we need to phase out coal entirely by 2030. We can get there faster with a federal commitment to ensuring our grid is 100 percent carbon-pollution free by 2035—a commitment that embraces the momentum built by the activists who have done so much to move us beyond coal.

Moving Beyond Dirty Fuels

Methane, the primary component of fracked gas, is a powerful climate pollutant that leaks into the atmosphere when gas is extracted, processed, transmitted, and distributed. There, it traps an average of 87 times more heat than carbon dioxide over a 20-year period. The less methane we send into the atmosphere the better our odds of limiting climate disaster. Building out any new fracked gas infrastructure would lock in emissions for decades to come, with devastating consequences for our communities and the climate.

In the early 2010s, fracking was ascendant. But today, the business press is asking **if the gas industry has peaked**. That's due in large part to dedicated advocacy from the Sierra Club and a powerful coalition of activists, Indigenous water protectors, and landowners. We've

been working to stop the expansion of fracked gas into the power sector, buildings, and exports, and ultimately to phase it out entirely.

We've made it nearly impossible to build new gas pipelines, forcing projects like the 600-mile, \$8 billion Atlantic Coast Pipeline to be canceled. From [Oregon](#) to [Texas](#), we've foiled plans for new gas export terminals. Meanwhile, our divestment campaigns are cutting off the financing the industry needs to expand.

**Since the start of 2020
DIRTY GAS PLANT
CAPACITY DEFEATED**



**From delayed
LIQUEFIED NATURAL GAS
(LNG) FACILITIES**



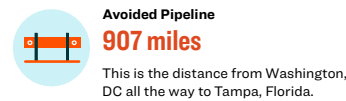
Equivalent to the annual emissions from 56 million cars.



**From delayed or defeated
PIPELINES**



(MMT CO2e) per year.
Equivalent to the annual emissions from 30 million cars.



This is the distance from Washington, DC all the way to Tampa, Florida.



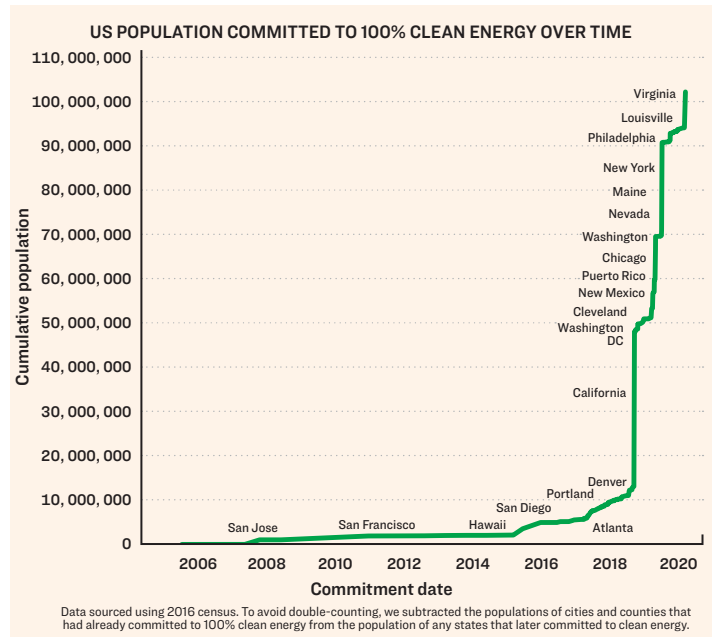
* Avoided emissions are the emissions that the extraction, processing and transportation, and use of the gas would create (i.e., full gas cycle emissions of the gas the pipelines would transport). Includes methane and carbon emissions. Source: EPA GHG Equivalencies Calculator.

These efforts are complemented by a rapidly growing movement to get gas out of buildings. In 2019, Berkeley, California, became the first city in the US to ban gas hookups in new construction. Since then, more than 42 cities across California have followed. Nearly 5 million people in California now live in a place that has passed a zero-emission building code, and the movement is spreading beyond California to the East Coast. Our work is not only helping to keep planet-warming gases out of the atmosphere, but also to improve indoor air quality and reduce rates of asthma.

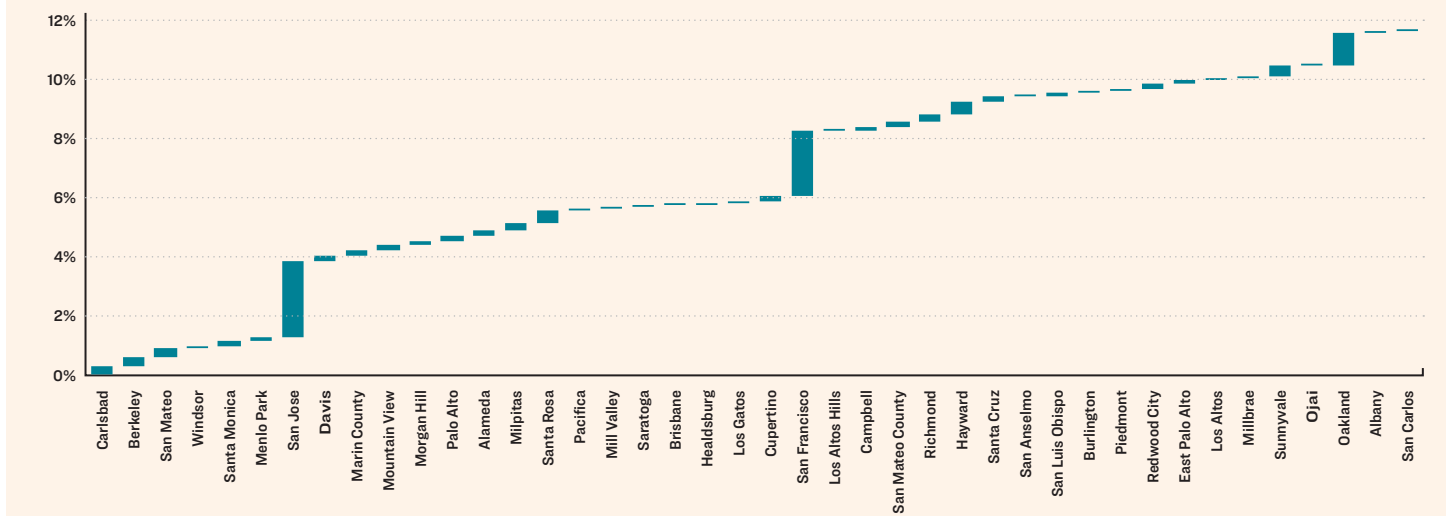
Fracked gas has no place in a clean energy future. Continuing our dependence on it will only keep us on the path toward climate catastrophe. To transition beyond fracked gas, we'll need the powerful advocacy our activists have already shown they're capable of—and strong leadership from the Biden administration.

Clean Energy

In 2016, only 1 to 2 percent of the US population lived in places that had committed to run on 100 percent clean energy. Only a small band of activists even dared to demand that their city or town transition to 100 percent clean energy. Today, that figure has soared to 31 percent, thanks to an ever-growing coalition of faith leaders, students, environmental advocates, and many others. Over 100 million people in 173 cities, 14 counties, 8 states, Washington, DC, and Puerto Rico now live in places committed to 100 percent clean energy.



PERCENTAGE OF CALIFORNIA'S POPULATION LIVING IN A PLACE WITH A ZERO-EMISSION BUILDING CODE





Left in their natural state, our lands keep an immense amount of climate pollution out of the atmosphere. If we protected 30 percent of our lands by 2030, they could sequester the equivalent of an additional 216 million metric tons of CO₂ every year. If we hope to meet the greenhouse gas reductions necessary to stop the climate crisis, we need to keep our remaining land intact.

Fueled by an increased awareness of the many benefits of protecting our wild places, Sierra Club members have called on their representatives to preserve the green spaces near them. Our many local campaigns coalesced into a sweeping public lands package called the Protecting America's Wilderness and Public Lands Act (PAW+), which would protect nearly 3 million additional acres of land across the West. It recently passed the House of Representatives.

PAW+ could serve as a model for how to reach the goal of protecting 30 percent of our wild places by 2030, and 50 percent by 2050: Use local, grassroots campaigns to protect our lands and waters as the basis for omnibus legislation that enlists nature in the fight against climate change.

Conclusion

The stakes of the climate crisis couldn't be higher. It puts our homes, our communities, our health, our economy, and our wild places at risk. As the US rejoins the Paris Agreement, we must set emissions-reductions targets that begin to meet the urgency of this moment. We are calling on President Biden to be a climate leader and set an ambitious yet achievable nationally defined contribution under the Paris Agreement: reducing emissions at least 50 percent below 2005 levels by 2030.

Sierra Club members and supporters poured thousands of hours into working for climate action in every major sector, and won real progress. Now, it's time for the Biden administration to follow through on its promises to treat climate change like the existential crisis it is. Only by setting, and meeting, a goal of cutting carbon emissions at least by half by 2030 will the world start to have a fighting chance of averting the worst impacts of the climate crisis.

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