

# SUSTAINABLE RESISTANCE

AMERICA'S TRANSITION FROM COAL TO CLEAN CLEAN ENERGY IN THE AGE OF TRUMP



[Coal Plants Retired](#): 268

Coal Plants Targeted: 262

Looks like March is gone, spring is here, and the United States continues to transition away from coal and towards clean energy. The biggest news over the past month was the announced bankruptcy of FirstEnergy Solutions (FES), a major owner of Midwestern coal and nuclear plants as well as [a big supporter of Trump's energy agenda](#).

Looking back, FirstEnergy Solutions was a victim of its own hubris. The company bet against the electricity market and ignored the objections of local communities, consumer protection groups, and public health organizations by investing in coal and nuclear plants. Meanwhile, its competitors invested in cheap, clean, and safe resources like solar, wind, and energy efficiency - eating their dinner in the process. When FirstEnergy Solutions started failing, it tried everything in the book to survive, except for reversing course and investing in clean energy. It spent years demanding taxpayer bailouts for its uneconomic plants, petitioned its grid manager to create rules that would force electricity customers to pay billions of dollars a year to prop up its power plants, and even got Rick Perry to propose a bailout to FERC - [remember NOPR?](#)

Through it all, FirstEnergy Solutions' continued to invest in and advocate for its coal and nuclear resources, even as electricity customers increasingly demanded wind, solar, and energy efficiency. Now that FirstEnergy Solutions has filed for Chapter 11, Sierra Club has demanded it do everything it can to protect its workers, their benefits, and their communities during the legal process, while also meeting its environmental obligations. Coal and nuclear plants cannot compete in America's 21st century energy marketplace, and [FirstEnergy Solutions will hopefully serve as a cautionary tale to other utilities and public representatives interested in following its path](#).

- Jumping from FirstEnergy Solutions' headquarters in Akron, Ohio to the Lone Star state, Texas-based utility, CPS Energy, [announced that it will wean itself off fossil fuels and generate at least 50 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2040](#), which is part of a plan that includes the addition of 550 MW of battery storage. Unfortunately, the plan locks the utility into receiving coal power generation through at least 2042. This [plan was designed behind closed doors, underwhelming community members](#) who are in the midst of developing a city-wide Climate Action Plan.
- Flying over to California, [NRG Energy Inc. bowed to public pressure to retire three fracked gas plants in Southern California by 2019](#) in an effort to meet electricity customers' increasing demands for clean, cheap energy that does not pollute their air

and water. California regulators also favor clean energy projects to cut greenhouse gas emission in half by 2030, from 2015 levels.

- Jumping on a train to Arizona, the Grand Canyon state had an unprecedented situation where its [regulators moved to place a moratorium on its utilities building out fracked gas plants](#) and demanded the state's two largest utilities incorporate more clean energy into future plans. This shows a major shift in an ordinarily cozy relationship between utilities and regulators, and shows how clean energy in Arizona is beating fossil fuels on costs long-term. Regulators are taking notice and making sure utilities act in the best interest of their customers.
- Heading northwest, Washington state continued to show its green cred by an amazing effort to transition a former coal mine into a giant solar farm. [The Evergreen State is looking to build the state's largest solar project on the 1,000 acre site of the Centralia Mine, which shut down in 2006](#). TransAlta, which owns and operates the state's only coal-fired power plant, is looking to eliminate coal by 2030 and incorporate renewables into its portfolio. If approved, the solar project would create 300 jobs during peak construction with four permanent solar technician positions.
- Heading east, the Colstrip coal plant again made news with a second co-owner [of the plant, Avista Corp., agreeing to be financially prepared to shutter the power plant in nine years](#) as part of a settlement in its proposed merger with Canadian utility Hydro One. Colstrip's complete retirement will be a major public health and climate victory for Montana since it is one of the largest coal plants in the United States.
- Jumping down to Wyoming, Sierra Club and its allies scored a historic victory against coal mining companies when a judge ruled that U.S. officials must consider reducing mining in the nation's top coal-producing region to fight climate change. [U.S. District Judge Brian Morris ruled](#) that the Bureau of Land Management officials in charge of the Powder River Basin mining area must consider alternatives that reduce mining in the area when updating resource management plans. This will have wide ranging implications on coal mining, coal plants, and coal export terminals far into the future.
- Taking three trains, a bus, and a plane, we end up in North Carolina, where America's largest and most controversial utility, Duke Energy, informed shareholders that it will be transitioning out of the [coal business in the next 30 years](#). The announcement looks good on paper, but is largely unenforceable. Luckily, Sierra Club and its allies will be around in 30 years to keep Duke Energy to its word.

All of these updates are the building blocks of a coal free electricity grid by 2030, despite Donald Trump's rhetoric that the dirty, expensive fuel is coming back. We'll be back in May with more updates, reviews, and victories across America.

Thanks,

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