

“Montana can’t stake its future on coal.” (Billings Gazette editorial 1/20/16) Other reasons why that’s true:

- **Costs:** Midwestern wind power contracts are being signed for 2.5 cents/kWh. Palo Alto, CA will buy solar generated power for 3.7 cents/kWh. In Nevada, the price is 3.87 cents/kWh for NV Energy, Warren Buffet’s company, and in Texas, under 4 cents/kWh for Austin Energy, a municipal utility. **Thus, transitioning to clean electricity while complying with America’s Clean Power Plan is saving consumers’ money.**
- At around 5.8 cents/kWh or 6.455 cents/kWh for power from Colstrip, coal cannot compete.
- Xcel Energy in Colorado says a new wind “forecasting system already saved its customers more than \$41 million in avoided fuel costs” because **there is no fuel cost component in wind power.**
- **Jobs:** To avoid loss of 25,000 agricultural jobs that the Farmers Union recently predicted, we must reduce greenhouse gases. Add to that climate-change-job-losses evolving in the skiing, fishing, and tourism industries, and it totals a lot more jobs lost than the 7,000 which fossil fuel supporters predict. Job loss from a phase out of coal would be largely offset by the 7,670 jobs and \$453 million in economic activity that a 2003 Perryman Group/Apollo Alliance study predicted Montana could create by embracing renewable energy.
- I-180 provides retraining for 437 in-state workers projected to be affected by partial phase out of coal generation serving Montana. It enhances their unemployment benefits and guarantees pension security. The legislature should provide similar benefits for workers affected by phase out of coal-generated power Montana exports.
- In 2015, the Administration awarded \$14.5 million for 36 projects to assist 12 states and tribes hurt by reduced coal use. Montana should apply for that “Partnerships for Opportunity and Workforce and Economic Revitalization (POWER) Initiative” funding.
- **What others are doing:** 21 states already require more green electrons in their generation mix than Montana. Montana requires investor-owned utilities (IOUs) to provide 15% of eligible renewable energy to its customers (excluding pre-2005 hydroelectric resources). There is no mandatory requirement for rural electric cooperatives.
- California, Oregon, and New York have committed to 50% clean energy, Denver to 80%, to name a few places rejecting fuel-generated power. The Gazette pointed out that **if Montana is to continue exporting power, we will have to give others the power product they want.**
- Over 33 years, I-180 gradually raises the requirement to 80% clean power by 2050 for IOUs. I-180 requires a mail ballot vote of REA members every four years to see if the REA will comply.
- The US now has 70 Gigawatts of wind electric generation -- equaling enough to satisfy the entire electricity needed in 5 states, Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado and Wyoming. That will be almost 100 GW within 3 years as the tax credit for wind turbines is phased-out.
- By comparison, Montana has 2.3 GW of coal-fired generation.
- **Renewable Power Reliability not a problem:** Wind doesn’t always blow and the sun doesn’t always shine. However, coal plants can’t be scaled back easily. And together wind and sun generation minimize the intermittency problem because they produce power at different times. Power supply is now and will be “regulated” to match demand by natural gas and hydro resources. So, more renewables doesn’t mean unreliability.
- Wind turbines generate 48.1% of Denmark’s domestic electricity supply and recently produced 140% of its needs allowing for power exports to Denmark’s neighbors.
- In 2015, California’s PG&E supplied 29.5% of its electricity from renewables, partly because it connects more than 215,000 customers with rooftop solar to the grid.
- **Climate change getting worse:** 2015 was the hottest year on record surpassing 2014, 2010, 2005, and 1998 as previous record breaking or record tying years.
- Continued coal overuse is causing drought, unusual flooding, and early snow melt affecting crop, ski and fishing seasons. CO2 reduces ocean pH, destroying a delicate balance needed for survival of life there.
- There is a 10% decline in wheat, corn and rice yields for every 1°C rise in temperature. Therefore, we can expect crop yields in Montana to decrease.
- The 5th Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Report: 809 scientists reviewing 9200 scientific publications -- conclusion: human-caused global warming confirmed! 18 US scientific organizations agree.