

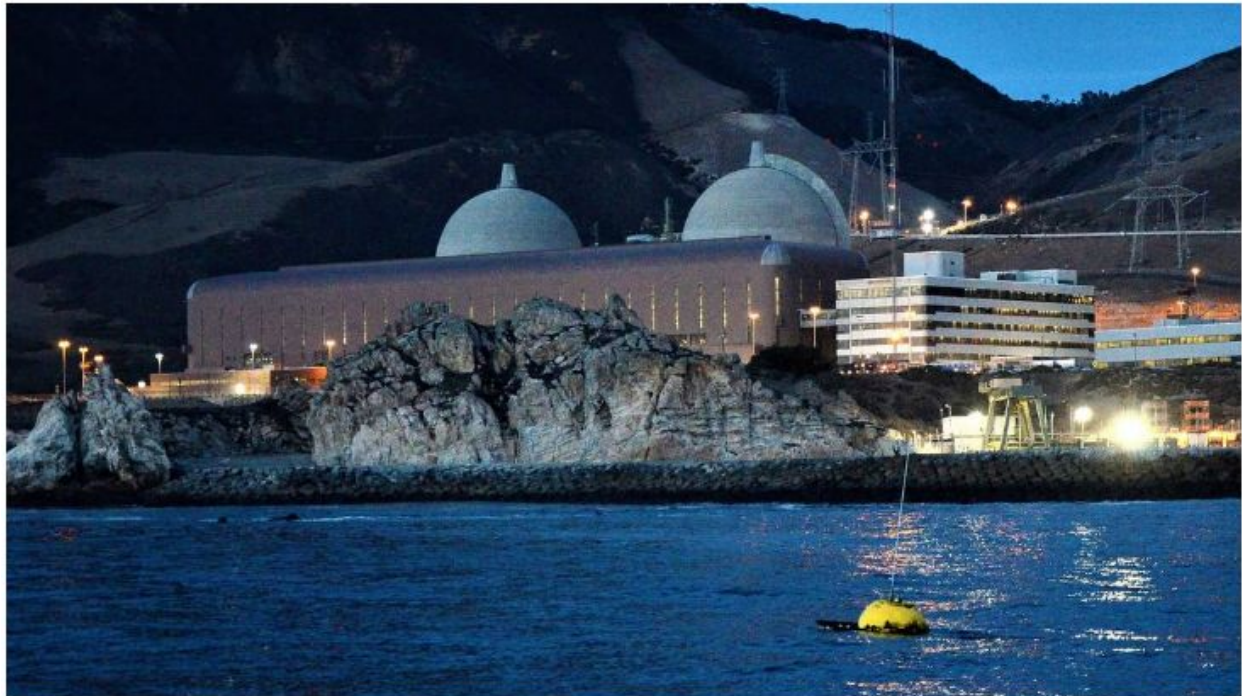
# Is California on track to meet clean energy goals without Diablo Canyon? It's doubtful

BY GENE NELSON

UPDATED AUGUST 19, 2021 02:01 PM

<https://www.sanluisobispo.com/opinion/readers-opinion/article253469439.html>

This OpEd appeared in the Sunday, August 22, 2021 print edition on pages 7B and 8B.



The Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant is scheduled to shut down starting in 2024. JOHN LINDSEY

Economics is given short shrift in The SLO Tribune's editorial, [“Ready or not, Diablo Canyon is closing — and California will just have to adjust.”](#)

Diablo Canyon is the region's largest private sector employer. If the plant were to be relicensed for another 20 years, it would pump over \$20 billion into our region's economy.

Also, keeping Diablo Canyon open will help California meet its ambitious clean energy goals.

The safe plant's rugged foundation, emplaced in bedrock 85 feet above sea level, was built in the location on California's coast least vulnerable to earthquakes and tsunamis.

So, unlike our natural gas supply that is reliant on aging and vulnerable transmission lines, Diablo Canyon will likely be up and running after a major earthquake, providing reliable electricity for recovery.

Furthermore, California’s electricity rates are the highest in the continental U.S. with rolling blackouts last summer, and more blackouts probable this year.

**This is not the time to shut down an emission-free, reliable energy source.**

As an independent, non-profit intervenor, [Californians for Green Nuclear Power](#), Inc. (CGNP) for years advocated before the state for clean nuclear power to support the interests of the environment, ratepayers and public safety. We’ve been met by a stone wall of denial, obstruction and obfuscation.

Consider the recent [procurement order](#) issued by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) that requires utilities to provide an additional 11,500 megawatts of energy by 2026

In the document — and in comments to the news media — the CPUC has claimed that all that new energy must be emission-free.

How will that be possible, given the short time frame?

That’s one of the questions Californians need to be asking themselves.

Here’s a hint: “Incremental imports could help meet short-term resource needs while resources are planned and constructed to address the 2026 shortfall,” a document filed by the [California Independent System Operator in 2020](#) states.

Clearly, there must be an out-of-state electricity supplier.

In fact, the CPUC document even references “unspecified imports” in one section of the procurement order. This is a California legal euphemism mostly applied to out-of-state coal fired generation.

One of the most likely candidates to provide imports is [PacifiCorp](#), a subsidiary of Berkshire Hathaway Energy (BHE), which owns several coal and natural gas plants in the West and is constructing an Energy Gateway transmission project that will link several states. (There is already a transmission line in southern Nevada that [links to a Southern California Edison substation](#), providing access to the California grid.)

Despite a 2006 California law (SB 1368) that sets an emission standard for power provided to California, PacifiCorp obtained an [exemption due to its “small footprint”](#) in California.

With 5,234 megawatts of coal-fired power and 3,013 megawatts of natural gas power, PacifiCorp operates in marked contrast to Pacific Gas and Electric, which already has 85% carbon-free power — and no coal.

The Clean Air Task Force’s [Toll From Coal website](#) tabulates annual deaths from air pollution caused by coal-fired power plants. Based on those calculations, BHE’s western U.S. power plants were responsible for 276 deaths in 2019.

Keeping Diablo Canyon running past 2025 will prevent the annual emissions of about 15 million metric tons of carbon dioxide as well as prevent substantial quantities of toxic oxides of nitrogen, sulfur and mercury from being emitted.

Yet the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) is acquiescing to Diablo Canyon’s closure.

The CPUC is the state agency in charge of overseeing public utility matters that affect every Californian. Yet it occupies a place in our state’s legal landscape devoid of accountability, oversight or independent review.

Appellate review of the commission’s decisions is typically unavailable. Challenges are denied without explanation. CPUC commissioners, those of the California Energy Commission and the California Independent System Operator (CASIO) Board of Governors are all appointed by Gov. Gavin Newsom.

Absent the possibility of any meaningful review by independent ratepayer organizations, the three groups effectively “rubber stamp” the governor’s policy objectives.

In 2015, there was an attempt to appoint a CPUC inspector-general to [ensure ethical compliance](#). Then-Gov. Jerry Brown quashed that initiative.

With the 2005 revisions of the 1935 Public Utility Holding Company Act, deep-pocketed special interests can directly lobby the CPUC to obtain favored treatment.

It’s going to take a fight against greedy special interests to keep Diablo Canyon running.

Californians for Green Nuclear Power wants SLO County to follow California environmental laws when they review possible plant closure. We believe Californians can’t afford to lose this fight.

*Gene Nelson the is legal assistant for Californians for Green Nuclear Power. He has a Ph.D. in radiation biophysics.*

**RELATED STORIES FROM SAN LUIS OBISPO TRIBUNE**

**[EDITORIALS](#)**

**[Ready or not, Diablo Canyon is closing — and California will just have to adjust](#)**

JULY 23, 2021 7:00 AM

**[READERS-OPINION](#)**

**[Will California keep the lights on when Diablo Canyon shuts down?](#)**

MAY 27, 2021 11:53 AM

**[EDITORIALS](#)**

**[To fulfill promises of Diablo Canyon closure, California ignores fossil fuel emissions](#)**

JULY 23, 2021 5:00 AM

**[ENVIRONMENT](#)**

[Devin Nunes wants to keep Diablo Canyon open. PG&E says its plans haven't changed](#)

JULY 16, 2021 4:20 PM



Gene Nelson *COURTESY PHOTO*