INSPIRING AMERICANS TO PROTECT WILDLIFE FOR OUR CHILDREN'S FUTURE.

Fact Sheet

Frequently Asked Questions about the Clean Power Plan

Q. What is the Clean Power Plan for existing power plants?
A. EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan establishes first-ever limits on carbon pollution from power plants. These take the form of "emission guidelines," which establish benchmarks for each state to meet. Once implemented, EPA estimates that these standards will reduce carbon pollution 26% below 2005 levels by 2020 and 30% by 2030.

Q. Why do we need a carbon rule?
A. Climate change is the single largest threat facing wildlife today. If we don't dramatically reduce carbon pollution, runaway climate change could cause the extinction of 50% of species, and result in severe disruption to habitat areas, causing even more localized impacts on wildlife. Power plants are our nation's single largest source of carbon pollution, accounting for 40% of total climate-change-driving emissions in the United States. Reducing carbon pollution from power plants is a necessary first step to bring climate change under control. Right now we limit mercury, arsenic, lead, smog and soot from power plants but not carbon pollution – the key driver of climate change. That's wrong. We need to take sensible steps to address this major threat to wildlife and public health.

Q. How are the carbon rules structured?
A. The EPA has created targets for each state to reduce the carbon intensity of their power sector. These targets are based on each state's historical (2012) baseline, and what reductions can be reasonably achieved. In order to meet this reduction targets, EPA has identified a slate of "building blocks" states that comprise what EPA sees as the "best system of emissions reductions." These building blocks include reductions at individual plants, increased reliance on natural gas, increased reliance on renewable energy, and implementation of energy efficiency measures. However, states do not have to rely on these building blocks, but are changed with designing their own plans to meet these targets.

Q. Where does EPA's authority come from?
A. In the absence of Congressional action to combat climate change, EPA is now exercising its authority under the Clean Air Act to regulate carbon pollution. Section 111(d) of the Clean Air Act gives the EPA the authority to regulate pollutants, such as carbon dioxide, from power plants in order to protect public health and welfare. This authority has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Q. Can the plan be strengthened?
A. While the flexible framework of a state specific approach helps put us on the path towards significant emissions-reductions, we believe states can do even more to deploy renewable energy and energy efficiency. The estimates for how much renewable energy and energy efficiency each state can provide are conservative and we believe that states can reduce their emissions even further by relying on these resources.

Q. What are some clean energy options that can help states meet this plan?
A. Wildlife-friendly renewable resources like on- and offshore wind power, and solar energy emit no carbon and are becoming increasingly cost-competitive with fossil fuels. Energy efficiency measures can allow electricity providers to reduce pollution and save consumers money on their utility bills. These are all compliance options that can help states meet their targets under this standard.

Q. Are states prepared to implement this plan?
A. Yes. 29 states and Washington, DC, already have in place Renewable Energy Standards (RES), which require utilities to generate a certain percentage of their power from renewable sources[1]. 24 states have Energy Efficiency Resource Standards (EERS), which require utilities to employ energy efficiency measures to decrease energy demand.[1] There are 9 Northeast states that participate in the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), which is a systems-wide approach to reducing the carbon footprint of the region's power sector.

Q. Have these state initiatives worked?
A. Yes. The states that participate in RGGI have already seen huge successes, showing that emissions can be reduced at lower costs than predicted. In the five years since RGGI began, renewable energy and energy efficiency has caused emissions to decrease by nearly 30% while electricity prices remain lower than before RGGI took effect.[2]

Q. When will EPA's plan go into effect?
A. The proposed rules for both existing and newly-built power plants are expected to be finalized in June 2015. By June 2016, states will submit their state implementation plans to show how they plan to meet these new standards. These plans will then be reviewed and approved by the EPA.

Q. How can I weigh in on the process?
A. Public input is a critical piece to how these rules take shape and the EPA needs to hear that strong support exists for protecting wildlife from carbon pollution from power plants. The EPA will be accepting public comments on the proposed rule through early Fall 2014. You can submit comments to the EPA in support of the rules by visiting: http://www2.epa.gov/carbon-pollution-standards/forms/comment-clean-power-plan-proposed-rule . There will also be public hearings in Pittsburgh PA, Denver CO, Washington DC and Atlanta GA, where you can attend in person to weigh in on the rules. These hearings will be held the week of July 28th, 2014.

Q. Where can I find more information?
A. More information about the EPA's proposed rule can be found here: http://www2.epa.gov/carbon-pollution-standards. Additional information can be found at the National Wildlife Federation website: http://www.nwf.org/What-We-Do/Energy-and-Climate/Reducing-Emissions.aspx.

Contact:
Lena Moffitt, Manager, Federal Policy, Climate and Energy / 202-797-6632/ MoffittL@nwf.org

[1] http://www.ucsusa.org/assets/documents/clean_energy/Tapping-Renewables-and-Efficiency-to-Meet-Carbon-Standards-for-Power-Plants.pdf
[2] http://pbn.com/Report-RGGI-states-cut-greenhouse-gas-emissions-29-since-2009,97366