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## Executive Director **Federal** Update –April/May 2021

*\*Articles may be edited for content\**

### State Targets Urgent Projects As Wildfire Season Looms

*Published: April 15, 2021*

California is in such an urgent race with another devastating wildfire season that officials began soliciting local project ideas even before they had money to pay for them. It faces such a threat of drought that the governor said Tuesday that he has executive orders drafted and ready to sign as needed.

In normal years, the worst of the fires don't start until late summer or fall, leaving a window through about May to thin forests, clear buffer zones designed to slow the spread of fires near communities, and beef up the state's seasonal fire crews. Not this year, officials said.

A dry winter is already blending into a tinder-dry summer that has produced twice as many wildfires as this time last year, Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) said.

That led legislative leaders to speed up what Newsom had proposed as a \$1 billion infusion in fire mitigation projects during the fiscal year that starts in July. Newsom signed into law Tuesday a \$536 million early action package, roughly \$200 million more than he had sought to spend in the first half of this calendar year.

Fire conditions have worsened so much in recent years that once-rare fire tornadoes have become more common as megafires create their own weather. Last year's record-setting wildfire season scorched more than 4% of the state while killing 33 people and destroying nearly 10,500 buildings.

The new spending package will distribute about 86% of the money in the form of grants, so the state solicited project proposals from local governments and other organizations even before the budget appropriation, said Jessica Morse, deputy secretary for forest resources management with the California Natural Resources Agency. The money is nearly seven times more than what had been in this year's budget for wildfire mitigation.

## **'Paradigm Shift': Chief Calls For More Thinning, Burning**

*Marc Heller, E&E News reporter    Published: April 16, 2021*

The Forest Service needs to more than double the pace at which it's thinning or carefully burning land it oversees if the threat of wildfire is to be tamed, agency Chief Vicki Christiansen told lawmakers yesterday.

At a hearing on the Forest Service's budget outline for the next fiscal year, Christiansen told a House Appropriations subcommittee the agency would need to treat an additional 2.6 million acres a year, on top of the 2 million or 3 million it already does, for the next decade to eliminate a backlog that's dominated the agenda for several years.

The Forest Service's lag in managing what officials consider overgrown national forests gains new attention every time the wildfire season is severe — as it was in 2020.

The National Interagency Fire Center reported 10.3 million acres burned last year across public and private lands, and Christiansen said the season was the worst for her agency since the historic "big burn" of 1910 in Idaho and Montana.

## **DeFazio: Members May Get Up To \$20M Each For Earmarks**

*George Cahlink, E&E News reporter - Published: April 16, 2021*

All House members will have the chance to direct up to \$20 million in earmarks for infrastructure projects in the upcoming surface transportation authorization bill due to be unveiled next month, a top House Democrat told E&E News.

Transportation and Infrastructure Chairman Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) said this week: "Every member of Congress, from me — the chairman — down to the freshmen, will get the same amount. It will be between \$15 million and \$20 million."

He called the overall level of earmarking in the bill — which could reach \$8.5 billion if all members take their share — as "pretty insignificant" for a measure that's expected to cost several hundred billion dollars.

This year will mark the first time in 15 years that the five-year authorization bill will carry the directed spending.

## **Glick Discloses That FERC Is In Discussions With State Regulators On Transmission Issues** *April 19, 2021 - Paul Ciampoli*

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is in discussions with the National Association of Regulatory Utility Commissioners (NARUC) to develop a formal approach between the states and FERC "that will allow us to jointly tackle" transmission issues head on, FERC Chairman Richard Glick said on April 15.

At the Commission's monthly open meeting, Glick said he believes that FERC must make changes to its regulations and policies "to improve the way electric transmission is planned, paid for and operated."

### 3 Flashpoints to Watch During Haaland's First Hearing

*Emma Dumain, E&E News reporter - Published: April 20, 2021*

After two years of questioning administration officials as a member of Congress, Deb Haaland is about to experience a reversal of roles.

The newly minted Interior secretary will testify this morning before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Interior and Environment, the first time since her confirmation last month that the former New Mexico Democratic Congress member will endure a grilling by her ex-colleagues.

The queries Haaland is most likely to field, however, are the ones she probably won't answer. The Interior Department, in early April, submitted a broad overview of its \$17.4 billion fiscal 2022 budget request. It was, along with every other agency's proposal, very thin on specifics — the byproduct of a new administration getting its footing during a pandemic and the Office of Management and Budget still lacking a permanent, confirmed director ([Greenwire](#), April 9).

Among topics the blueprint barely addressed or ignored were three controversial policy areas within Interior's jurisdiction relating to energy extraction and federal land management. Each of these issues is currently undergoing a formal internal review.

Here are three flashpoints to watch:

#### **Oil and gas**

When it comes to Interior's to-do list, the agency's designs for the fate of the federal oil and gas leasing program represent the current biggest source of tension between the two parties.

With the exception of those lawmakers who represent communities dependent on the fossil fuel industry, House Democrats are largely hopeful Haaland will enact new policies to significantly scale back the number of new permits issued for energy extraction on public lands as the administration's second 60-day pause on new leasing activity remains in effect.

Republicans, meanwhile, are overwhelmingly urging Haaland to allow new permits to be granted, arguing there are other ways to combat climate change than cutting off a crucial economic lifeline for many Americans.

Haaland will likely be asked by members of both parties where the administration stands in its review of the program, with lawmakers hoping for hints about whether Interior plans to continue the moratorium on issuing new leases, revert to the status quo or restrict drilling activity even further. The expectation is that Democrats will, in their fiscal 2022 Interior-Environment appropriations measure, seek to match language to whatever the Biden administration recommends in the coming weeks as it relates to drilling.

Last year's House-passed spending bill sought to restrict the scale and scope of the drilling activities the former Trump administration was pursuing at that time.

It's not clear, however, what happens if House Democratic appropriators decide Haaland and her team are going too far in instituting new drilling restrictions — or if they don't think she's going far enough. Though Haaland isn't likely to tip her hand, the questions Democrats do or don't ask on this topic today could offer some clues about what lawmakers hope for in a final verdict.

## Monuments

Senate Republicans failed to stop Haaland's confirmation, but Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah), the ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining, won a major victory during that process.

That victory was a promise that Haaland, if confirmed, would visit Utah as the Biden administration mulls whether to reinstate the acres then-President Trump removed from the Bears Ears and Grand Staircase-Escalante national monuments and would hear from local leaders about why Biden should leave the reductions in place.

Haaland visited the Beehive State earlier this month to tour the monuments and meet with Lee and other members of the Utah congressional delegation, including Rep. Chris Stewart, a Republican member of the House Interior and Environment Appropriations Subcommittee (*Greenwire*, April 9).

After that visit, Stewart signed onto a statement with his fellow delegation members urging the administration to work with Congress to find a legislative solution to Utah's vulnerability to executive orders, which can change monument boundaries from one presidential administration to the next. This legislative solution won't be hammered out by the Appropriations Committee, but given Stewart's membership on the subcommittee, it is likely to come up in some capacity, particularly given larger conversations about the Haaland-led Interior Department's designs for use of public lands.

## 30x30

Three of the four Republicans on the Interior-Environment panel — Stewart, Mike Simpson of Idaho and Mark Amodei of Nevada — recently signed onto a letter from the Congressional Western Caucus demanding answers about the administration's plans for meeting its ambitious goal of conserving 30% of all U.S. lands and waters by 2030, also known as 30x30 (*E&E Daily*, March 16).

Of the three issues under review, 30x30 was actually the only one that received any sort of substantive mention in the administration's fiscal 2022 budget request, which called for additional investments to encourage private landowners to enter into agreements to achieve the conservation initiative's objectives.

Lawmakers of both parties could ask Haaland to elaborate on what that funding would look like and how it would aid in the effort.

But Western Republicans like Stewart, Simpson and Amodei see the Biden administration's enthusiasm for 30x30 as suspect, increasingly anxious that the goal is less about protecting the erosion of nature than it is about "locking up" land and restricting multiple use opportunities (*E&E Daily*, April 13).

Advocates of the effort insist that a process is still being developed for how best to move forward. Haaland, who was the lead sponsor of a 30x30 resolution as a member of the House, has also urged patience as discussions continue and has promised to consult with all stakeholders during that process (*E&E News PM*, March 4).

She is likely to continue expressing these sentiments at today's hearing. The administration is due to put out a report by the end of the month on how the federal government will approach 30x30, meaning there will be little of consequence for Haaland to say on this topic in advance of that release.

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## Drought Turns Klamath Basin Into A Political Tinderbox

*Jeremy P. Jacobs, E&E News reporter*

*Published: April 20, 2021*

President Biden's first major water supply crisis is unfolding in southern Oregon, testing how the administration will balance the needs of farmers, tribes and endangered fish in the parched West.

At least one irrigation district in the Klamath River Basin is keeping its canals open, directly disobeying Bureau of Reclamation orders to halt water deliveries.

Irrigators say they have a state right to that water, a contention that recently received some support in a state order.

Last week, Reclamation announced one of the lowest water delivery allocations in the history of the Klamath Project, rattling farmers who use that water to irrigate about 230,000 acres of cropland.

The Klamath Project provides irrigation water to large swaths of southern Oregon and Northern California. Construction of the project began at the turn of the 20th century. The main source of contention right now is its primary reservoir, Upper Klamath Lake.

Souza said that even in previous drought years like 1992, Reclamation has provided adequate water from the lake for irrigators — roughly 400,000 acre-feet.

The problem is record low flows to the lake, the irrigators said, and no precipitation on the weather forecast.

Last week, Reclamation announced it would make an "initial minimum" allocation of 33,000 acre-feet, with no deliveries occurring before May 15.

"This water year is unlike anything the Project has ever seen," Deputy Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton said in a statement. "We will continue to monitor the hydrology and look for opportunities for operational flexibility, provide assistance to Project water users and the Tribes, and keep an open dialogue with our stakeholders, the states, and across the federal government to get through this water year together."

Reclamation also said it would provide \$15 million in aid to the area, along with \$3 million to local tribes for ecosystem technical assistance.

The dispute is providing a first test of the administration's and, specifically, Interior Secretary Deb Haaland's ability to address irrigation needs along with tribal and endangered species requirements.

### **'This Isn't The Wild West'**

There appears to be a fundamental legal disagreement between Reclamation and Klamath irrigators: At issue is how the water stored in Upper Klamath Lake above a certain elevation must be used.

The farmers contend that the water must go to irrigation — not downriver for fish flows. Earlier this month, the Oregon Water Resources Department largely [agreed](#) with that analysis but also said that its decision doesn't change Reclamation's obligations under "other sources of law," presumably referring to the Endangered Species and Clean Water acts.

There is at least one other lawsuit on the issue currently in a federal district court in Oregon.

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## **White House Launches Drought Relief Working Group to Address Urgency of Western Water Crisis**

*Interagency effort will coordinate resources across the federal government to bring immediate relief to irrigators, Tribes, and western communities*

**WASHINGTON** – The Biden-Harris administration today announced the formation of an Interagency Working Group to address worsening drought conditions in the West and support farmers, Tribes, and communities impacted by ongoing water shortages. The Working Group will be co-chaired by the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to build upon existing resources to help coordinate across the federal government, working in partnership with state, local, and Tribal governments to address the needs of communities suffering from drought-related impacts. The White House [released a readout from today's National Climate Task Force Meeting](#) announcing the new Working Group.

Water allocations are at historic lows, including in areas like the Klamath River Basin and the Colorado River Basin, creating an urgent need to minimize the impacts of the drought and develop a long-term plan to facilitate conservation and economic growth. The Working Group will work to identify immediate financial and technical assistance for impacted irrigators and Tribes. Development of longer-term measures to respond to climate change and build more resilient communities and protect the natural environment will also be a priority, including through President Biden's proposed American Jobs Plan and through a recommitment to strengthening the National Drought Resilience Partnership (NDRP). Formed in 2013, the NDRP brings together multiple federal agencies to build long-term drought resilience, including developing innovative science-driven actions to address water supply challenges.

## **GOP Senator Floats \$900 Billion Trimmed Infrastructure Spending**

*By Tony Czuczka and Yueqi Yang - April 25, 2021*

Republicans may be ready to back as much as \$900 billion in infrastructure spending, according to a senior senator, though that would still be less than half of President Joe Biden's proposal.

Rather than an increase in the corporate tax rate to 28% that Republican flatly reject, he suggested "to not pay for some of the infrastructure spending, because I think it over time pays for itself."

Democrats and Republicans are laying down markers while sounding out bipartisan approaches to Biden's \$2.25 trillion plan before it's taken up by Congress. The administration needs every Democratic vote in a Senate split 50-50.

Senator Joe Manchin, the West Virginia Democrat who's a key moderate in the bargaining, said last week that Biden and Congress should focus on traditional infrastructure projects such as roads and bridges, an approach broadly favored by Republicans.

"There's probably an 800 to 900 billion-dollar infrastructure bill that we could all agree on," Graham said. "Watch Joe Manchin. I think there's a sweet spot on infrastructure where we can find pay-fors that won't hurt the economy."

Manchin's support will be critical for Biden. He's suggested a two-track approach that deals first with physical infrastructure, including transportation systems, water projects and communications networks.



Elements involving what's been dubbed "human infrastructure," such as funding for child care and education, should be split off, Manchin said on CNN's "State of the Union." "I do think they should be separated," he said.

Manchin said he and others in a group of 10 Republicans and 10 Democrats who tried to broker a deal on the previous stimulus bill -- passed with only Democratic votes -- are now discussing an infrastructure proposal. Along with the coalition of House moderates known as the Problem Solvers Caucus, they're seeking a bipartisan way forward.

'Very Encouraging'

An ABC News-Washington Post poll released on Sunday showed such an approach would have broad support among the American people. By a two-to-one margin, respondents said Biden should be willing to make "major changes" to his proposal to win GOP support, rather than going it alone.

A group of senior Senate Republicans last week gave few specifics on how to pay for the spending beyond possibly taxing electric cars and repurposing unspent funds. They rejected rolling back former President Donald Trump's 2017 tax cuts or adding to the national debt.

The House group has suggested measures such as raising the fuel tax to help pay for roads and bridges, an annual registration fee on fully electric or hybrid electric cars, or broadening the air-cargo tax to trucking services.

**The Biden Administration [announced](#)** an \$8 billion plan to *upgrade and build out high-voltage transmission* through Energy Department loans and the Western Area Power Authority's (WAPA's) Transmission Infrastructure Program (TIP), a little-used borrowing authority specific to Western states. As part of the plan, the Department of Transportation also issued new guidance on siting transmission along existing highway rights-of-way. It is not clear that any policy changes have been made to the existing TIP program or DOE loan program, other than highlighting the available financing tools, but the focus of the Administration will be on making loans available to projects that spur clean energy development. Separately, Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) Chair Rich Glick announced that [transmission policy reforms](#) would be a major focus of the Commission's policymaking time this summer, and a group of lawmakers introduced legislation establishing a new tax credit for high-voltage transmission builds.

## **Granholm Sets Targets For Renewable Hydrogen, EV Batteries**

*David Iaconangelo, E&E News reporter - Published: April 26, 2021*

Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm floated a target Friday of slashing costs for renewable or "green" hydrogen 80% by 2030 — a plan that analysts said hinges on additional federal policies.

Granholm's comments came during a global climate summit hosted by the Biden administration, where she and other top U.S. officials sought to underscore the importance of technological innovation for addressing climate change.

Granholm said the Department of Energy would seek to make the cost of renewable hydrogen competitive with that of natural gas by the end of the decade.

Battery cell costs also would be halved by 2030 under DOE's new clean technology goals, which could make electric cars "affordable and maybe even cheaper than gasoline vehicles," according to Granholm.

Clean energy researchers, however, emphasized the scale of the challenge in cutting renewable hydrogen costs 80% within a decade.

Without new policies to scale up the fuel — which is made by splitting hydrogen from water using wind or solar power — the best efforts of national laboratories and university researchers likely wouldn't be sufficient, they said.

Among the many uncertainties involved in DOE's new hydrogen goal is how much renewable hydrogen should actually cost right now. Neither Granholm nor the department's spokespeople specified a benchmark or target price.

In recent years, international energy authorities and hydrogen advocates have put the cost of renewable hydrogen at anywhere from \$3.75 to \$7.70 per kilogram. BNEF's market analysts say that in the United States, the lack of large-scale renewable hydrogen projects provides little basis for a precise estimate, since prices might vary depending on the kind of electrolyzer and power source.

If wind turbines were built to provide dedicated power, producing renewable hydrogen now in the United States would cost roughly \$4.5 per kilogram in 2021, said Xiaoting Wang, BNEF's solar and hydrogen technology specialist. About 120 million tons of hydrogen is produced globally per year, according to the International Renewable Energy Agency, but only a tiny sliver of that is done with renewables.

DOE's new goal would entail bringing the cost of hydrogen to about 90 cents per kilogram by 2030 — not wildly far off from BNEF's current projection of \$1.21 per kilogram for that date, noted Wang.

Granholm also referenced a separate DOE goal — announced last month — of cutting solar power's costs 60% by 2030.

To support that, the administration is directing \$128 million in funding for research into materials used in two next-generation types of solar cells, as well as for new types of concentrated solar-thermal projects.

Aside from greater R&D spending, the United States should start channeling money toward demonstrations of new technologies and enact everything from tax credits and federal procurements to manufacturing subsidies and consumer incentives for U.S.-made products in order to bring technologies into widespread commercialization, it said.

## **FERC Urged To Protect Grid From EV Boom**

*Miranda Willson, E&E News reporter - Published: May 3, 2021*

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission needs to prepare for a surge in electric vehicles that could transform the nation's power grid and increase electricity demand and costs.

That was a chief message from more than 30 panelists last week to FERC during a conference on the electrification of vehicles, buildings and other sectors of the economy.

State and local energy officials, researchers, utility executives and others discussed the transmission infrastructure that could be needed as people switch to electric cars and heating, the benefits and costs that might arise in the transition, and how FERC — an independent agency that regulates the interstate transmission of electricity — should support state and local policymakers on the issue.



In the past several years, some states and cities have also taken steps to encourage people to adopt EVs and build electrified housing units, which panelists said have set the stage for a more widespread transition.

Electrification of buildings and heating remains controversial, however, with the natural gas industry having warned that it could raise energy costs. Additionally, despite President Biden's push for electric cars, EVs made up less than 2% of new car sales last year.

Panelists largely agreed that a transition from gas heating and appliances to electric versions, and widespread adoption of EVs, was integral to decarbonization and would take off in the coming years. Electrification is likely one of the most cost-effective ways to achieve the target Biden set for 50% emissions reductions economy wide by 2030, said Pedro Pizarro, vice chairman of Edison Electric Institute, a trade group for investor-owned utilities.

But electrification of buildings, heating, cars and buses could also strain the electric grid and create reliability challenges if not properly planned for, panelists said.

Some analysts estimate that electricity demand and capacity needs could double by 2050 in some regions of the country as electrification occurs. As more people adopt EVs and electric heating, that could shift power demand to different times of day or seasons, depending on when people charge their cars or heat their homes.

To meet those challenges, the transmission and distribution infrastructure that transports power to homes and businesses will need to be upgraded and expanded, panelists said. FERC could help streamline and modernize the processes for building new high-voltage transmission lines — something Glick has expressed an interest in doing — and encourage efficiency improvements to reduce the amount of power that is lost in transit, attendees said.

### **Costs, benefits**

Commissioners asked several questions about who should pay for electrification infrastructure such as new power lines and EV charging stations, and pressed panelists on what the impact of electrification might be for low-income Americans.

While a few panelists cited analyses that project overall societal benefits and lower energy costs from electrification, they said the transition could initially increase energy costs, disproportionately affecting those least able to pay.

Although conference participants said that FERC could take steps to incentivize high-voltage power lines and other transmission infrastructure, the high price of transmission build-out and litigation over who should pay for it have historically impeded it. FERC could revisit its cost allocation processes for transmission infrastructure given that the infrastructure could become more valuable as electrification takes off, said former FERC Chairman Norman Bay.

The commissioners' questions about transmission needs hinted that they might revisit FERC Order No. 1000, Dennis of Advanced Energy Economy told E&E News. The 2011 order modified the transmission planning process, but some analysts say it didn't go far enough in encouraging high-voltage power lines.

## **SRP To More Than Double Utility Scale Solar To 2,025 Megawatts By 2025**

*May 4, 2021 Paul Ciampoli*

Salt River Project (SRP) (Tempe, AZ) on May 3 unveiled plans to more than double its 2025 utility-scale solar commitment to now add a total of 2,025 megawatts (MW) of new utility-scale solar energy to its power system by the end of fiscal year 2025, driven in part by dedicated customer demand for new renewables.

This is more than 1,000 MW beyond SRP's original 2025 commitment of 1,000 MW announced in November 2018, the Arizona-based public power utility noted.

As part of this 1,025 MW solar increase, 450 MW is enabled by a SRP commercial customer to meet its renewable energy commitments. All the renewable energy purchased is expected to be from solar energy developments built in Arizona or on the Navajo Nation and will ultimately be used by SRP commercial and residential customers.

SRP currently has 648 MW of utility-scale solar plants online or contracted and under development across the state and will add more than 1,375 MW of newly contracted solar power by 2025.

SRP recently contracted for the output from the Sonoran Energy Center, which will be the largest solar-charged battery project in the state, giving SRP one of the largest commitments to energy storage in the nation, it said.

The utility has also contracted for an additional large-scale solar and battery storage project at Pinal Central Solar Energy Center and is bringing online a new grid-charged battery storage project at the Agua Fria Generating Station.

SRP is already in the process of procuring the additional 1,025 MW of solar capacity from solar developers interested in building new generation resources in Arizona, it noted.

## **Coalition Pushes Lawmakers On \$63B Plan For Hydropower**

*Geof Koss, E&E News reporter - Published: May 7, 2021*

The hydropower industry and conservation groups are seeking support on Capitol Hill and the White House for a \$63 billion investment in overhauling U.S. dams as part of President Biden's multitrillion-dollar infrastructure package.

The [recommendations](#), backed by the National Hydropower Association, American Rivers, the Union of Concerned Scientists and others, aim to speed up the "3 R's" — rehabilitation, retrofit and removal — of the nation's more than 90,000 dams, only 2,500 of which currently generate electricity.

Doing so, its supporters say, will support roughly 500,000 jobs and restore 20,000 miles of rivers while boosting climate resilience; reduce cumulative greenhouse gas emissions by 5.1 billion metric tons by 2050; and facilitate more than 100 gigawatts of carbon-free power, while rehabilitating or removing hundreds of the nation's most hazardous dams.

While those goals complement Biden's climate-focused infrastructure proposal, the [framework](#) released by the White House in March references hydropower just twice: once as a qualifying source for a proposed clean energy standard, and a second time in a section on boosting the resilience of land and water resources through dam safety.

The late March release of the White House framework came as coalition members were in the process of negotiating their agreement, said Brian Graber, American Rivers' senior director for river restoration. "Dams were underrepresented" in the White House proposal, he said yesterday.

The [proposal](#), dated in April but obtained by E&E News yesterday, aims to fill in the details absent from Biden's plan.

It focuses on investment in four areas: dam safety, tax incentives, dam removal, and investments in existing federal hydropower assets and research, according to a summary.

On dam safety, the plan calls for investing \$19.46 billion over 10 years, including \$1 billion for oversight and \$18.15 billion for activities including rehabilitation and watershed grants, funding the national flood mapping program, and developing emergency plans.

The plan also calls for establishing a 30% investment tax credit at qualifying facilities in dam safety, environmental improvements, grid flexibility and dam removals. The proposed break, estimated at \$4.7 billion, would include a direct pay alternative, mirroring a payment mechanism that has become in demand due to the slowdown in tax equity markets during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The proposal also calls for a public source of funding for removal of dams that have reached the end of their useful lives, which would boost climate resilience and conservation efforts.

The groups want Congress to authorize mandatory annual grant funding of \$15 billion to remove 2,000 dams over 10 years, with additional funds raised through cost sharing.

The proposal calls for an executive order to establish an interagency and stakeholder advisory committee to coordinate dam removals and harmonize associated permitting.

The coalition also wants to see \$24 billion spent over 10 years at existing federal dams and relevant research efforts to speed up decarbonization and boost renewable power generation, while improving dam safety and environmental performance.

That amount would include \$22 billion for federal agencies that own dams, including the Bureau of Reclamation, with \$2 billion steered toward research.

### **Seeking support**

The coalition, which also includes the World Wildlife Fund, the American Society of Civil Engineers and the Hydropower Reform Coalition, is courting support from members of both parties on Capitol Hill, as well as the White House.

"We've got the environmental community, the dam safety community, the climate community coming together in a really unique way," Woolf said. "And we're saying that we need to deal with the nation's 90,000 dams as infrastructure, and that we have the potential to use them to help address the climate challenge, generate more carbon-free power. And at the same time, there's opportunities to address real dam safety issues, principally in nonpower dams that are not federally regulated."

In March, Rep. Ann Kuster (D-N.H.) led more than three dozen House Democrats in a [letter](#) to Biden in support of hydropower, urging the inclusion of funding, tax breaks and other federal support for the rehabilitation, retrofit and removal of the nation's dams, which the legislators said would "help improve public safety, increase freeflowing rivers, expand low-carbon generation, and create jobs."

The coalition is "actively educating" members from both parties in the House and Senate, including members of the tax-writing House Ways and Means Committee and appropriations committees, Woolf said.

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## **Arizona Commissioners Shut Down Proposed Rule On 100 Percent Clean Energy By 2050** 5.7.2021

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona’s utility regulators have rejected new rules that would have required most of the state’s electricity providers to get 100% of their power from clean energy sources by 2050 to limit carbon emissions and address climate change.

The 3-2 vote by the Arizona Corporation Commission was a surprise because the plan was backed by the state’s major regulated utilities and was given initial approval by the commission on a 4-1 vote in November after three years of work.

Two new commissioners took office in January, but that change did not have a major effect on the outcome of Wednesday night’s vote. Instead, an amendment that turned the requirements into goals cost the support of the two Democrats on the panel. They were never backed by Republican Commissioner Justin Olson even though he pushed the amendment turning the rules into goals.

The decision means Arizona utilities will only be held to the current renewable energy standards adopted in 2006. They require utilities to get at least 15% of their electricity from renewable energy sources by 2025, although the state’s two largest utilities have announced voluntary plans to vastly increase their use of renewable energy and cut carbon emissions tied to climate change.

Failing to require changes that will lower carbon emissions puts Arizona behind other Western states that have increasingly been adopting tough new standards in an effort to limit the effect of climate change.

The defeated proposal would have required regulated Arizona utilities to get half their power from solar, wind and other renewable sources by 2035 and 100% from clean energy, including nuclear, by 2050. It took three years of work by the commission and its staff, which held hours of hearings and took thousands of public comments, to craft the rules.

While the change was backed by the state’s largest utilities, Arizona Public Service and Tucson Electric Power, Gov. Doug Ducey opposed the commission’s effort.

The Republican governor pushed legislation this year to strip the elected regulators of their power to set energy policy. That legislation stalled after APS publicly opposed the effort and a Republican senator said he did not support the change. With all Democrats opposed, losing one Republican meant the proposal could not advance. *By Bob Christie, Associated Press*

## **Interior Head Haaland Revokes Trump-Era Orders On Energy**

*By Matthew Daly - April 16, 2021*

WASHINGTON (AP) — Interior Secretary Deb Haaland on Friday revoked a series of Trump administration orders that promoted fossil fuel development on public lands and waters, and issued a separate directive that prioritizes climate change in agency decisions.

The moves are part of a government-wide effort by the Biden administration to address climate change ahead of a virtual global summit on climate change that President Joe Biden is hosting next week.

The orders revoke Trump-era directives that boosted coal, oil and gas leasing on federal lands and promoted what Trump called “energy dominance” in the United States. Haaland also rescinded a Trump administration order intended to increase oil drilling in Alaska’s National Petroleum Reserve.

Haaland called the orders by her predecessors, Ryan Zinke and David Bernhardt, “inconsistent with the department’s commitment to protect public health; conserve land, water, and wildlife; and elevate science.”

Collectively, the previous orders “tilted the balance of public land and ocean management without regard for climate change, equity or community engagement,” Haaland said.

The new orders do not affect Interior’s ongoing review of proposals for oil, gas, coal and renewable energy development on public lands and waters, she said.

Environmental groups heralded the orders and pledged to work with Haaland to ensure Interior Department decisions are guided by science and respect for Indigenous communities, wildlife, outdoor recreation and other uses.

More than 25% of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions originate on public lands, and Interior has “unrivaled opportunities to restore natural carbon sinks, responsibly deploy clean energy and reduce existing emissions,” said Collin O’Mara, president and CEO of the National Wildlife Federation.

“Rescinding the previous administration’s orders that encouraged unfettered drilling in ecologically and culturally sensitive areas and establishing a climate task force will help ensure wise management of our natural resources for people and wildlife alike,” O’Mara said.

One of the orders issued by Haaland cancels a 2017 action that revoked a moratorium on federal coal reserve sales that had been imposed under President Barack Obama to deal with climate change.

Agency spokeswoman Melissa Schwartz said Friday’s move does not automatically resurrect the coal moratorium. “Today’s announcement does not take any action on coal development. We are continuing to review an appropriate path going forward,” she said.

The coal moratorium brought a sharp backlash by Republicans, who said it was evidence of a “war on coal” by Obama and other Democrats. The moratorium had little practical effect, however, since interest among companies in leasing large tracts of federal land dried up when coal markets collapsed over the last decade amid competition with cheaper natural gas.

The American Petroleum Institute, the oil industry’s top lobbying group, warned that policies aimed at slowing or stopping oil and natural gas production on federal lands and waters could harm national security, environmental progress and the economy.

“Banning or greatly hindering federal leasing ... would threaten decades of American energy and climate progress and return us to greater reliance on foreign energy with lower environmental standards,” said Kevin O’Scannlain, an API vice president.

*Associated Press writer Matthew Brown in Billings, Mont., contributed to this story.*

## Senate Democrats Introduce Bill To Reform Energy Tax Credits

By Zack Budryk - 04/21/21

Senate Democrats introduced legislation Wednesday that would overhaul “overly complex” energy tax incentives to encourage clean energy development.

The Clean Energy for America Act, sponsored by Senate Finance Committee Chairman [Ron Wyden](#) (D-Ore.), would add tax credits for clean electricity production for both fossil fuels and renewables if the facilities in question are carbon-neutral or carbon-negative. It would also make grid improvements such as high-capacity transmission lines eligible for the full-value investment tax credit.

The measure would also add tax incentives for electrified transportation, including long-term credits for battery-powered and electric fuel cell-powered vehicles. Separately, it would create a tax credit for domestic manufacture of clean fuel for transportation, open to any form of fuel 25 percent cleaner than average. The bill would also eliminate current tax incentives for fossil fuels.

Separately, the bill would require that any clean energy projects receiving tax subsidies meet all federal labor and wage standards, an addition to previous versions of the bill. In its pitches for transition to renewable energy, the White House has frequently vowed to ensure workers in the fossil fuel industries are able to transition to high-paid union-backed jobs in renewables. Earlier this week, the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) backed the Biden administration’s transition plans provided it can ensure the preservation of jobs.

“There needs to be a tremendous investment here,” UMWA President Cecil E. Roberts [told](#) The New York Times on Monday. “We always end up dealing with climate change, closing down coal mines. We never get to the second piece of it.”

## Biden Releases Money In Push To Modernize US Electric Grid

By CATHY Bussewitz April 27, 2021

NEW YORK (AP) — The federal government said Tuesday it is making more than \$8 billion available to build and improve the nation’s transmission lines as part of its efforts to improve America’s aging electric grid and meet President Joe Biden’s ambitious clean-energy goals.

The administration is also pledging to speed up a sluggish permitting process that has delayed the types of major transmission projects that are crucial to meeting Biden’s goals.

The president has said he wants the nation to produce 100% clean energy by 2035. But that goal [faces massive hurdles](#). Those include an electric grid that has been pummeled by climate change and which needs enormous expansion to carry electricity from renewable energy sources to densely populated regions.

The Department of Energy said it will release \$8.25 billion in loans for developers to improve the grid’s ability to carry renewable energy from the windy, sunny plains to the regions that need it most.

“These investments will make our power system more resilient against threats and more reliable as we increase our clean energy capacity, creating thousands of jobs in the process,” said Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm, in a statement.

There will be \$3.25 billion in loans available for projects that unlock renewable energy in the Western U.S. Another \$5 billion in loans will support transmission projects owned by federally recognized tribes and Alaska Native Corporations, including transmission to connect offshore wind.

The Department of Transportation will help speed the siting and permitting of transmission projects by facilitating the use of public highways and other transportation rights-of-way, Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg said. It will also issue guidance that will help states build renewable energy projects and transmission lines.

Winning the necessary approvals to build major transmission projects that cross state lines frequently takes a decade or more, and that's before construction begins.

The administration's actions are a "giant first step" toward building the grid of the future, said Larry Gasteiger, executive director of WIRES, a transmission industry trade group. "It is unprecedented to have an administration so actively support needed transmission development across so many of its agencies," he said.

The need for more solar, wind and wires to carry the electricity to homes under Biden's plan is extraordinary.

The group Americans for a Clean Energy Grid, a nonprofit organization dedicated to modernizing and expanding North America's high voltage grid, released a report Tuesday listing 22 shovel-ready transmission projects that could boost the use of wind and solar energy and generate 1.2 million jobs. It would cost \$33 billion to build those transmission lines, the group said.

If all 22 projects were completed, the 8000 miles (13,000kilometers) of wires could enable a 50% increase in the amount of wind and solar energy on the U.S. grid. But those 22 projects represent just 10% of the transmission investment needed to completely decarbonize the power sector, the group said.