

Last plants standing

The Clean Power Plan is a blow to the struggling coal industry, but not the fatal one

BY CALLY CARSWELL

On a Thursday afternoon in early August, Wyoming's governor, both its U.S. senators and its lone House representative joined dozens of coal miners and other locals in a library in the town of Gillette. The Bureau of Land Management — under pressure to reform its coal-leasing program — was holding a listening session on royalty rates for federal coal, and Wyoming's political heavyweights had opinions to share.

They all vigorously opposed raising the rates. But the frustration and fear they expressed had at least as much to do with President Barack Obama's announcement a week earlier that power plants would soon have to answer for their carbon pollution.

Finalized Aug. 3, the Clean Power Plan sets carbon-reduction targets for 2030, for states and tribes with power plants. Nationwide, the plan is expected to yield a 32 percent cut in emissions from 2005 levels. From an environmental perspective, this is momentous: Carbon dioxide is easily

the most abundant power-plant pollutant, and until now, the federal government has completely neglected regulating it at existing facilities. But Wyoming, which mines 40 percent of the nation's coal and claims 23,000 coal-related jobs, sees the plan as an existential threat. "What's happening to coal right now is a disaster for this state," Gov. Matt Mead, R, told BLM officials. "We just ask that you don't kill the golden goose," Republican Sen. Mike Enzi added. "If we put them out of business, it will ripple through the entire economy."

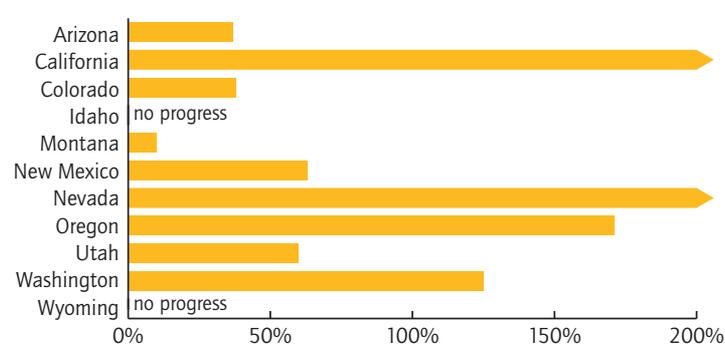
It's worth remembering that while Obama and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had some choice in *how* to regulate carbon dioxide, they had no choice in *whether* to regulate it. Supreme Court decisions since 2007 have affirmed that carbon is a pollutant the EPA is legally required to control.

Still, the coal states' hostility is understandable. Coal is responsible for 75 percent of the electricity sector's carbon emissions, and aside from improving energy efficiency, the easiest way to cut climate-changing pollution is to start burning

less of it. There's room under the plan for natural gas, wind and solar to grow, but barring major advancements in carbon-capture technology, coal has no option but to shrink.

Despite this, the plan isn't a certain deathblow for the West's oldest facilities. That's partly because a number of those units are already slated for closure, either to comply with federal regulations to clear

STATE PROGRESS TOWARD 2030 CLEAN POWER PLAN TARGETS



haze from national parks and wilderness areas, or to meet states' carbon goals. Any shutdowns after 2012 will count toward the 2030 targets and could go a long way toward helping to meet them.

Take the Navajo Generating Station and Four Corners Power Plant, both of which sit on the Navajo Nation. Under the Clean Power Plan's draft version, released last year, the Navajo would have

Percentages indicate estimates of how close states will get to their 2030 goals using the plans they already have in place, based on rates of CO₂ emissions, a common method of measuring EPA compliance.

SOURCE: UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS

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Snapshot

Wild graffiti

Urban vandals target Western parks

National Park System, vandalism of natural features, like rock faces and trees, has risen steadily in recent years, with more than 600 incidents reported since 2013. The hardest-hit areas are near large urban centers — such as Lake Mead National Recreation Area, a mere 39 miles from the Las Vegas Strip.

Joshua Tree, located about two and a half hours east of Los Angeles, had to close portions of its historic Barker Dam in February 2013, and, months later, it closed Rattlesnake Canyon as well. Superintendent David Smith says the vandalism ranges from run-of-the-mill high-school-type inscriptions ("Nancy ♥ Carl") to gang tags and unwanted works of "art," like the bright blue giraffe hikers found on a boulder in February.

This year, there have been more than 150 incidents in the Pacific West and Intermountain West regions. Such vandalism is difficult to undo, though workers can scrape off paint with spatulas, or use chemical treatments, provided they won't damage archaeological features.

People "have a desire to leave a permanent mark," says Smith, "but the difference between prehistoric times and now, is we have other mechanisms to leave a permanent record without defacing or destroying something that belongs to every American." **GLORIA DICKIE**

SOURCE: NPS

VANDALISM ON NATURAL FEATURES IN NPS-MANAGED SITES FROM 2013-PRESENT

