



## ENVIRONMENT CALIFORNIA Your Fall Report

# Land Not Needed: Why we should go big on rooftop solar

In 2020, a Pew Research poll found that nearly 80 percent of Americans believe our country should be prioritizing renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, over fossil fuels. Renewables have a number of obvious benefits, chiefly that they don't emit greenhouse gases or air pollution and use far less water than fossil fuel generation.

But every source of energy has impacts on the environment. Utility-scale wind and solar facilities require large amounts of land. One analysis estimated that a national transition to wind and solar power could require land equivalent to the area of several Midwestern states.

Wind and solar plants don't ruin land in the same way as fossil fuel production, and can co-exist with other land uses such as farming and ranching. But it's still important to reduce land impacts where we can. That means maximizing the amount of energy we save through efficiency and conservation while taking advantage of sustainable renewable energy.

California is already feeling the tension between decarbonizing the economy and protecting land and threatened species. But there's a key technology that can help: rooftop solar.

As Environment California Research & Policy Center wrote in a recent report, "The Environmental Case for Rooftop Solar Energy," there are many reasons to go big on rooftop solar, namely reducing greenhouse gases and air pollution. But the fact that rooftop solar provides these benefits without impacting landscapes and ecosystems is one of its most powerful assets.



*Environment California Research & Policy Center State Director Laura Deehan (top, center) joined our research partners and supporters at a Stand Up For California Solar virtual event.*

That's what makes the current fight over net metering (the policy that allows solar owners to be paid for the excess electricity they sell back to the grid) in California so important. Our state's three biggest utilities—PG&E, SoCal Edison and SDG&E—are pushing to slash net metering payments and impose large fees on rooftop solar owners. If they succeed, rooftop solar could grind to a halt—forcing California to get more of its power from large-scale sources of renewable energy, many of them in ecologically sensitive areas.

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Thanks  
for making it  
all possible

## 59,000 supporters, 40 lawmakers tell Whole Foods to put 'planet over plastic'

A massive environmental crisis requires a massive call to action.

That's why our national research partners at Environment America Research & Policy Center, along with our friends at U.S. PIRG Education Fund and the Student PIRGs, delivered a letter to Whole Foods on May 6, 2021—signed by nearly 60,000 supporters,

and more than a dozen other states to follow California's lead—until the Trump administration tried to revoke our state's authority.

On April 26, the Biden administration started the process of undoing this action—checking off one of the “First things to fix” identified by our national research partners at Environment America Research & Policy Center, in a series of 20 recommendations shared with the Biden team before they took office.

“Thank you, President Biden, for taking this first step,” said Morgan Folger, Destination: Zero Carbon campaign director with our national research partners at Environment America Research & Policy Center. “Now it's time to reaffirm that states can and should lead the way for clean air and cleaner cars.”

Vehicle tailpipes are a major source of climate-changing, health-harming air pollution. A report by our research partners showed that in 2018, 108 million Americans lived in areas that experienced more than 100 days of degraded air quality.

## In historic move, California to end drilling by 2045

We know that drilling inflicts irreversible damage on our environment, and now, Californians can finally look forward to the end of this dangerous practice.

On April 23, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued a directive to phase out oil and gas drilling in California no later than 2045 and ban new permits for fracking by 2024, making the Golden State the first in the nation with a commitment of this kind. The governor has tasked the California Air Resources Board (CARB) with bringing California—a state that produced nearly 150 million barrels of crude oil in 2020—out of the oil age.

“This action is the beginning of the end of fossil fuel's dominance and the environmental and public health problems that it causes,” said Environment California Research & Policy Center State Director Laura Deehan.

Environment California Research & Policy Center looks forward to working with CARB on this existentially important project.

Get more updates on our work online at <http://environmentcalifornia.org>.

Staff



Our national network's Oceans Associate Reino Hyyppä (top, center) joined legislators and supporters for a virtual rally against plastic waste.

including 40 state lawmakers—calling on the grocer to phase out single-use plastic packaging in its stores. Once an environmental leader that stopped providing plastic bags to its customers at checkout in 2008, Whole Foods recently earned an “F” for its plastic policies in a report by environmental group As You Sow.

“Nothing we use for just a few minutes should pollute our rivers and oceans for hundreds of years,” said Kelsey Lamp, Protect Our Oceans campaign director for Environment America Research & Policy Center, our national research partners. “That's why the companies that rely on single-use plastic to package their products must adopt more sustainable packaging options or eliminate single-use plastic packaging altogether.”

“Change is possible, and Whole Foods should lead the way to a future where we put the planet over plastic.”

## Back on course: Biden administration moves to allow states to set stronger vehicle emissions standards

For nearly 50 years, federal law allowed California to set stronger clean air standards



### Toward a greener future

Support our work to build a cleaner, greener, healthier future by including a gift to Environment California or Environment California Research & Policy Center in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: [PlannedGiving@EnvironmentCalifornia.org](mailto:PlannedGiving@EnvironmentCalifornia.org)



## Page 1 story continued: Why we should go big on rooftop solar

Tensions are already arising here between clean energy and conservation goals. A utility-scale solar project built on the Palo Verde Mesa in the Sonoran Desert occupies 4,000 desert acres home to rare species, including the threatened desert tortoise and Harwood's woollystar, a wildflower that grows in fewer than 20 locations worldwide.

Transitioning to a renewable energy system will require utility-scale generation infrastructure. The siting and design of those facilities should minimize conflicts with fragile ecosystems and species, while also minimizing the footprint of wind and solar.

Rooftop solar can make a big difference in reducing the impact decarbonization has on natural spaces. As we calculated in our report, 1 gigawatt of rooftop solar capacity can substitute for utility-scale solar installations that would occupy 5,200 acres of land, an area just slightly smaller than Monterey.

Building out the nearly 129 gigawatts of rooftop solar technical potential that California has would protect a huge amount of land. More desert, forest and farmland could flourish. Hawaii has reached this exact conclusion—that rooftop solar must play a critical role in transitioning to clean energy while preserving land—and is supporting the growth of rooftop solar statewide.

Preventing the worst impacts of climate change will require big shifts in the way we live and massive build-outs of infrastructure, including and especially renewable energy. By going all-in on rooftop solar, we can transition away from dirty fossil fuels faster, generate energy locally, and do it all with less impact on the environment we're working so hard to protect.

*By Laura Deehan, Environment California Research & Policy Center state director, and Bryn Huxley-Reicher of Frontier Group*

*Environment California Research & Policy Center State Director Laura Deehan speaking at a rally in June urging the governor to stand up for rooftop solar.*



Thank you for supporting our work to take on the vast environmental challenges we face and to create a greener, healthier, more sustainable world. In these pages, you'll find the stories of the advocacy you made possible.

Your action and support allow us to keep working for a better world. Thank you.

*Laura Deehan*

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## Your Fall Report

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### Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment California. We focus exclusively on protecting California's air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

## Over 47,000 supporters tell Amazon: Stop selling bee-killing pesticides

To save the bees, our staff have asked the world's largest online retailer to stop selling the pesticides that kill them. And we're not alone.

In March, Environment California and our national network kicked off our campaign to convince Amazon to take neonicotinoid pesticides (or "neonics")—the substances linked to a troubling decline in bee populations—off its (virtual) shelves.

By August, campaigners with our network had collected more than 47,000 petition signatures online and in 10 communities across the country.

"We need to reduce the use of this pesticide that's contributing to the collapse of our most important pollinators," said Malia Libby, our national Save the Bees campaign associate. "Amazon should join other retailers in doing the right thing and taking it off its shelves."

Our ask is far from unprecedented: The Home Depot and Lowe's have already pledged to phase out the use of neonics on their live plants, and Lowe's has committed to taking the pesticides off its shelves altogether.

*Our national network's summer canvassers talked to tens of thousands of people across the country about our campaign to get Amazon to stop the sale of bee-killing pesticides.*



Staff