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Study: Replacing nuclear power with renewable energy could save Northwest ratepayers over \$260 million



Steam rises from Energy Northwest's Columbia Generating Station near Richland, Wash. A new study says that ratepayers could save millions if the plant was closed. (Jackie Johnston/The Associated Press, 2003)

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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PORTLAND — Pacific Northwest utility ratepayers could save hundreds of millions of dollars if the Bonneville Power Administration and Energy Northwest close the region's only commercial nuclear power plant in Richland, Wash., and replace its output with renewable energy, a new study says.

The McCullough Research consulting firm based in Portland estimated savings from \$261.2 million to \$530.7 million over 10 years because of historically low renewable energy prices at the aging plant, [The Oregonian reported](#).

“The rapid drop in renewable energy costs in recent years has been shocking to everyone,” economist Robert McCullough said. “It is now possible to affordably replace aging facilities ... without increasing the region's carbon footprint.”

The report was commissioned by the anti-nuclear group Physicians for Social Responsibility and is the latest in a salvo against the economic feasibility and reliability of the aging - Columbia Generating Station.

The station is all that's left of a plan to build five nuclear plants in the Northwest, a debacle that led to one of the largest municipal bond defaults in history. The Richland facility was the only one completed. It is an older design that has had a variety of operating issues. Federal regulators recently cleared it to run through 2043.

Energy Northwest, a public utility consortium that operates the plant, criticized the report and told the newspaper that the 1,200-megawatt plant has set generating records in four of the past five years.

The consortium markets the power through the Bonneville Power Administration.

The study cited the low cost and abundant supply of renewable power. But the plant's supporters point out that supply differs from capacity — making sure that power is there when you need it.

“The report faults CGS for what makes it so valuable: We make electricity around-the-clock,” said Mike Paoli, a spokesman for Energy Northwest. “With wind and solar, a lot of the generation happens at off-peak times. When peak demand comes, you have to have baseload generation to cover that.”

Most experts note that the Northwest wholesale markets are awash in energy but soon could go into a capacity deficit. Such a shortage could be exacerbated by the slated closure of three coal-fired plants in Oregon, Washington and Montana in 2020 and 2021.

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Outsider77

1 day ago

So we have an in place operating reactor producing more than a billion watts of power that is available day and night 24/7 and replace it with wind and solar which are sometimes here and sometimes not. That fact that anyone can take a suggestion to close the reliable nuke seriously when climate change concerns suggest that all fossil-free sources should be fully utilized is amazing. It makes much more sense to leave the nuke online, add the solar/wind, and close the coal plants.



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AlwaysThere

12 minutes ago

We are going to use it all anyway at some point. Killing off certain segments of our energy portfolio is not going to help the coming generations, a balanced portfolio of Gas, Nuclear, Coal, Wind, Solar, Hydro, Bio etc. would be the best win win scenario. The enviro-idiots in this state believe we can go back to an agrarian way of life, I wonder how many of those lost their power in December, and how they dealt with it.

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motleycrew

2 days ago