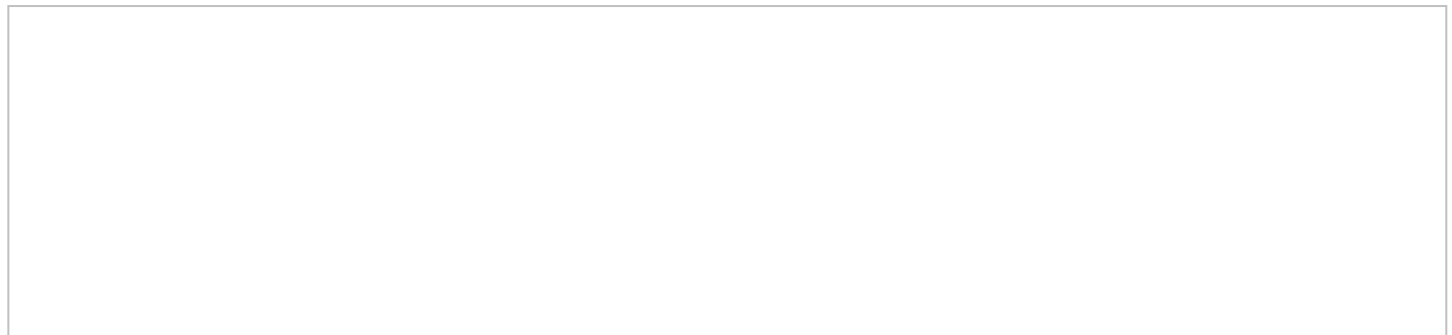


# Study: Savings possible by shutting down nuclear power plant



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FILE—In this April 8, 2003, file photo, steam rises from Energy Northwest’s Columbia Generating Station, Washington state’s only nuclear power plant, near Richland, Wash. A new study says Pacific Northwest ratepayers could save... (AP Photo/Jackie Johnston, file) **More** ✓

**The Portland-based McCullough Research consulting firm estimated savings from \$261.2 million to \$530.7 million over 10 years due to historically low renewable energy prices at the aging plant, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.**

*The Associated Press*

PORTLAND — A new study says 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.

The Portland-based McCullough Research consulting firm estimated savings from \$261.2 million to \$530.7 million over 10 years because of historically low renewable-energy prices, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

“The rapid drop in renewable-energy costs in recent years has been shocking to McCullough. “It is now possible to affordably replace

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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 salvo against the economic feasibility and reliability of the aging Columbia Generating Station (CGS). The Oregon and Washington chapters of the group also have questioned the site's [seismic status](#).


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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 problems. Federal regulators recently cleared it to run through 2043.

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Officials at Energy Northwest, a public-utility consortium that operates the plant, criticized the report and said 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 round-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 could soon go into a capacity deficit. Such a shortage could be exacerbated by the scheduled closure of three coal-fired plants in Oregon, Washington and Montana in 2020 and 2021.

Kieran Connolly, Bonneville's vice president for generation and asset management, said the agency is dependent on the nuclear plant when water conditions are low at energy-producing dams.

He said some of the nuclear plants scheduled to close early, such as Diablo Canyon in California, were facing major new capital investments. That's not the case for the Columbia Generating Station, he said.

“Our customers' focus is on safely, reliably and cost effectiveness” in meeting electricity needs, he said. “They're not seeing it as a resource they are questioning. They just want to make sure it's well-managed.”

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