



# A BETTER PATH TO A JUST, RENEWABLE ENERGY FUTURE

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change’s sixth synthesis report makes clear that an unprecedented transition to renewable energy is vital to avoiding the most catastrophic consequences of climate change. But existing “permitting reform” proposals would accelerate the climate crisis, undermine bedrock environmental laws, and harm frontline communities. Congress can take many positive actions to achieve a renewable energy future while advancing environmental justice and protecting our core environmental laws.

## **CREATE A MODERN RENEWABLE, RESILIENT GRID AND ADDRESS PROCESS INEFFICIENCIES AND UTILITIES’ OBSTRUCTION**

Congress should level the playing field to address the major barriers to bringing renewable energy online, including lack of coordinated master planning and processes and obstructive practices from monopoly utilities.

- **Create a Federal Energy Planning Agency:** A master energy planning agency could end the fragmented and confusing approval process of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, Department of Energy, and numerous state and local regulatory agencies that currently oversee project and transmission planning. One agency with unified authorities could help ensure that energy decisions prioritize distributed energy resources and projects on degraded lands that have the least harm to communities and wildlands and minimize need for new transmission. The agency’s decision makers must be environmental justice leaders, energy planners, and other relevant energy justice experts that are not captured by fossil utility interests.
- **Preempt Right of First Refusal Laws:** Local utilities often strategically deploy state and local “Right of First Refusal” laws to avoid competition and protect their existing business model and associated profits. Congress should direct FERC or the new federal planning agency to preempt these anti-competitive Right of First Refusal laws, to level the playing field for competing transmission projects.
- **Integrate Texas Into the National Grid:** Texas has long resisted connecting its grid to the national grid for purely ideological reasons. Amending the Federal Power Act and requiring FERC to create a single national grid would finally connect the Electric Reliability Council of Texas (ERCOT) with the Western and Eastern grids. The Department of Energy also concluded that the integration of ERCOT would allow the nation to add significant renewable energy capacity.

## **PRIORITIZE RENEWABLES ON ROOFTOPS, DEGRADED LANDS AND EXISTING RIGHTS-OF-WAY**

Congress can ensure that renewable energy projects be built smartly and efficiently on already-built surfaces and degraded lands first, which are estimated to generate enough energy to fulfill our energy needs; it can provide incentives for additional transmission to be sited along existing rights-of-way in order to protect communities and minimize impacts to intact habitats on our public lands.

- **Build Distributed Energy Resources on Rooftops and Parking Lots:** Every private and federal government rooftop and parking lot should be prioritized for solar power. Establishing new national building codes and funding mechanisms, including financial and tax incentive programs, will increase solar on these already-built surfaces.
- **Maximize Renewable Energy Deployment on Degraded Lands:** Congress can accelerate renewable energy deployment on degraded lands, which are often close to existing communities and transmission lines. For instance, covering the Bureau of Reclamation's 8,000 miles of canals with solar panels would generate nearly 25 gigawatts of renewable energy and reduce water evaporation.
- **Prioritize Transmission Siting on Lands With Existing Rights-of-Way:** Congress can incentivize transmission deployment along the thousands of miles of nonresidential highways and railway corridors. These existing rights-of-way can allow for co-siting of projects that would not require significant new reviews.
- **Require FEMA to Build Back Communities With Renewable Energy:** Congress should mandate that disaster funding be spent on renewable energy generation rather than on rebuilding fossil fuel energy systems that were destroyed during natural disasters. Doing so would better prepare communities to withstand future disasters while helping to reduce emissions.

## **ENSURE ROBUST ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEWS AND EARLY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Early and meaningful stakeholder engagement can address legitimate siting and related concerns and pave the way for community acceptance of such projects.

- **Pass the A. Donald McEachin Environmental Justice for All Act:** This legislation, drafted with extensive community involvement, would ensure that cumulative impacts are fully considered in all decision-making and that environmental justice communities are no longer treated as sacrifice zones. It would also require a meaningful process for Tribal government input during the environmental review process built on a foundation of prior, informed consent.
- **Bolster Federal and Local Agencies Funding for Environmental Reviews:** Congress should increase funding at all federal and state agency levels that perform environmental reviews. Congress should also accelerate the renewable energy future by directing federal agencies to reallocate staff and suspend existing review on fossil fuel approvals.

## **ENCOURAGE ENERGY EFFICIENCY, MEANINGFUL RECYCLING, AND ENERGY CONSERVATION**

The most common-sense and cheapest route to accelerate decarbonization is for Congress to expand ways to conserve energy in the first place and reduce wasteful energy from the biggest users, such as the crypto-mining industry.

- **Expand Funding for Implementation of Energy Efficiency Technologies:** Energy efficiency alone is estimated to slash our energy needs by one-quarter. Congress should vastly expand funding to the woefully underfunded Weatherization Assistance Program and should prioritize disadvantaged communities that face disproportionately high energy burdens.
- **Provide Agencies With New Authorities to Recycle Materials:** Congress should follow the lead of the European Union and other nations to mandate much stricter end-of-life recycling for all minerals involved in the energy transition. Doing so would reduce the need for new mining and prevent millions of pounds of hazardous waste from contaminating the environment.
- **Address Wasteful Uses of Electricity:** Cryptocurrencies already consume more energy than some nations and are creating sufficient demand to extend the life spans of fossil fuel power plants. Congress should give the Department of Energy and EPA clearer authority to crack down on such highly energy-inefficient practices whenever they emerge to ensure that the transition to renewable energy is not delayed.