

## **Another Voice: Wind and solar are not the solutions to climate change**

Gary Abraham July 26, 2023

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At the start of my 23-year legal career as an environmental attorney, I represented towns and grassroots environmentalists opposed to massive landfills in rural communities. Today I focus on the same sorts of clients, concerned about the environmental impacts of wind farms and solar farms.

For example, the recently approved (but stalled) Alle-Catt wind farm, with a project area over 100 square miles covering parts of Wyoming, Cattaraugus, and Allegany counties, would, according to the state Siting Board, kill 41 bald eagles and 26,000-39,500 bats, and clear-cut 1,550 acres of mature forest. The project will also fragment large blocks of contiguous forest affecting the movement, breeding, roosting or nesting behavior of birds and bats. This is in addition to the noise level and extent of shadow flicker when the sun rises or sets behind moving wind turbines, which the state Department of Health testified would harm public health in these communities.

When you consider wind and solar's inability to deliver energy downstate, where it is needed, their environmental destructiveness makes more large-scale renewables upstate unacceptable. The New York Independent System Operator (NYISO) recently reported that continued efforts to replace reliable power plants downstate with renewables upstate will likely cause the electric system to fail with increasing regularity. Climate activists who continue to lobby for "100% renewables" ignore these consequences, rooted in the physical limits of renewables. Nor do they want the public to learn how the grid works.

In April 2016, NYSIO commented to PSC that it should stop siting large-scale intermittent renewables until the transmission issues are fully understood: "Given the potential gravity and magnitude of the CES (Clean Energy Standard)-related transmission additions, the NYISO believes it would be prudent for the Commission to study this question in depth before taking any final action to implement the 50% by 30 initiative." No one in state government who matters listened. Instead, the state has added to the CES a commitment to achieving "net zero" emissions in the state economy, as a whole, using renewables. New York is now poised to take about one million new acres upstate for poorly performing large-scale renewables that destabilize the grid.

Unlike hydropower, nuclear power and low-emissions natural gas-fired power plants, which operate at 90-99% of their design capacity, wind in New York last year generated at 22% of its capacity, and solar at 14% (the same as Alaska). Today, downstate electricity is about 9% carbon-free, but upstate enjoys 91% carbon-free power, owing primarily to hydro- and nuclear power. After Governor Cuomo shut down downstate's well-functioning Indian Point nuclear power plants in 2021, New York City's carbon-free electricity plummeted from 27% to today's 9%. From 2019 (before Indian Point's closure) to 2022 (first full year after its closure), downstate fossil fuel consumption for electricity generation increased 32%. New York's energy plans are going backward.

Including the rare events of Chernobyl and Fukushima (where no one died from radiation exposure), nuclear power is as safe or safer than other forms of energy, including wind and solar. Most energy analysts around the world say there is no pathway to decarbonization without nuclear power.

Wind and solar cannot power a modern grid unless electricity consumers are willing to go without power at times when demand is greatest. As NYISO is telling us, a "net zero" economy based on wind and solar is physically impossible and threatens an energy crisis to which, unlike slow-moving climate change, most New Yorkers will be unable to adapt.

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