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Sierra Club Report: State Doesn't Need Diablo's Energy

As PG&E ramps up its effort to garner support for the relicensing of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, a new report has concluded that “More than sufficient existing generation is available to substitute for the permanent retirement of [the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station] and Diablo Canyon.”

The 47-page draft report, “Meeting California’s Electricity Needs Without San Onofre or Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plants,” uses data from the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) to show that the state’s “peak load” in Megawatts has been essentially flat since 1998. Since 2006, there has been a total 7% decrease. There is no evidence on which to base a future projection of energy consumption estimates on increasing peak energy consumption.

The draft report concludes that these lower forecast energy demands, combined with large new capacity additions to generating capacity, add up to energy reserves far in excess of state requirements. In addition, “customer attitudes toward electricity consumption, more rigorous building and appliance efficiency standards, larger state and federal expenditures for energy efficiency and the growth of rooftop solar” are leading indicators in “what appears to be a fundamental change in electricity consumption and economic trends.”

The report notes that “California has been on a major natural-gas fired power plant construction boom over the last decade” and is “also in the midst of a major renewable energy construction boom to meet the state’s target of producing 33 percent of its electricity needs from renewable energy by 2020.” Green power is ramping up due to several factors, including “a recent change to California’s definition of the 5 percent net-metering cap [that] will result in at least 2,000 MW of additional rooftop PV by the end of 2016,” and a June decision by the California Public Utilities Commission that established an investor-owned utility procurement

target of 1,300 MW of energy storage by 2020, key to the expansion of wind and solar power. Legislation has been introduced to increase the state's renewable energy portfolio to 51 percent by 2030.

The report notes that "CAISO conducted studies in 2012 on the mid-term and long-term impact to California transmission system reliability of the permanent loss of SONGS and Diablo Canyon" and concluded that the permanent loss of Diablo Canyon is would result in no mid- or long-term impacts to the transmission system.

The report was submitted to the California Energy Commission as the Sierra Club's comments on the Energy Commission and California Public Utility Commission's July 15 workshop on the retirement of the San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station.

Report author Bill Powers is the former chair of the San Diego Chapter of the Air & Waste Management Association, and was a civilian engineer for the U.S. Navy and an engineer with ENSR International until 1993, where he worked on projects for the Western States Petroleum Association, Kaiser Aluminum and Allied Signal before forming a San Diego-based independent consulting firm in 1994 and co-founding the Border Power Plant Working Group.

A final edition of the draft report including additional information will be released in early September.

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