

Environment & Energy

Top California Air Official Outlines Emissions Reduction Pathway

By Zach Bright

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- California has goal to make state carbon neutral by 2045
 - Key endangered species decision expected in June
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The California Air Resources Board has big emissions reduction goals that nothing short of a clean “new industrial revolution” can fulfill, Chair Liane Randolph said.

The state’s air agency wields the power to create California’s scoping plan, an emissions blueprint that aims to make the state carbon neutral by 2045. California needs to triple its current electricity power capacity to meet that goal, according to a state joint agency report.

But Randolph and others speaking Wednesday at an Environmental Law Institute event voiced concerns over upcoming decisions, including an endangered species rule and pivotal court case, that could tie up the state and agency’s ability to enforce emissions reduction standards and promote renewable energy development.

Ethan Elkind, who directs the University of California, Berkeley Law’s Climate Program, said it’s often older environmental protections that are “bumping up” against today’s clean energy demands.

Elkind added that renewable energy developments, such as solar farms planned for the Mojave Desert, are being tied up by endangered species protections for the Joshua tree, environmental reviews, and long permitting processes.

The state Fish and Game Commission will decide in June whether to end or make permanent protections that were temporarily granted, then upheld by the Fresno County Superior Court in February under the California Endangered Species Act.

‘Terrifying’ Lawsuit

Randolph also said a recent lawsuit that aims to take away California’s Clean Air Act waiver to adopt its own vehicle emissions standards is “terrifying.” Losing the regulatory authority would severely limit California’s ability to meet its emissions reduction goals. Fourteen other states have adopted California’s stricter rules.

The board's 2022 scoping plan draft is set for a June hearing and a board vote by fall.

The board is set to begin hearings starting June 9 on rules to phase out gas-powered cars by 2035, adopt complementary clean fleet rules transition to zero-emission heavy-duty vehicles by 2040, and attain federal ambient ozone standards by 2037.

Reaching its goals requires "all hands deck coordinated partnership with a lot of agencies" and speedy renewable energy development, Randolph said.

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