

2022 Issue Paper: Climate Change and Energy

Energy policy is intertwined with climate change objectives, and climate change already affects or soon will affect nearly every aspect of life in Washington, America, and the World.

In Washington, climate change affects farms, rivers, forests, water, shorelines, health, and wildlife. We will need to mitigate the effects such as increased winter rain and earlier snow melt, summer droughts and disappearing streams, higher high temperatures and lower low temperatures. Climate-caused declining river flows plus requirements to maintain in-stream flows to maintain habitat will reduce our available hydro power in some seasons. (More detail at the [Department of Ecology](#).) The decisions, policies, and investments we make in **energy** and **transportation** represent the opportunities we in Washington have to do our part in reducing our contribution to the greenhouse effect.

For various reasons and for many decades we the people have delayed taking decisive action on climate. We can delay no longer. We must change our behavior through incentives and regulation. The LWV supports a price on carbon, but it appears that we may be out of time to rely on that approach alone to control greenhouse gases (GHG) sufficiently to avoid catastrophic climate change. Therefore, we must continue to enact policies through the legislative process to increase efficiency, reduce GHGs, and ensure equity. Find the details of all [League positions](#) on the web site.

Recent Legislative Progress in Washington State

2019 The Clean Energy Transformation Act ([CETA](#)), SB 5116, commits Washington to an electricity supply free of greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

The [Clean Buildings](#) bill, HB 1257, that requires owners to improve energy efficiency in large existing commercial buildings and includes some financial incentives.

2020 Clean Car Standards, [SB 5811](#), adopts the motor vehicle emissions standards of California—that are aligned with Oregon’s implementation—including the Zero Emission Vehicle (ZEV) program.

Stricter greenhouse gas emission limits in [HB 2311](#) require reducing the state’s overall greenhouse gas emissions to 95 percent below 1990 levels and achieve net-zero by 2050.

2021 Two achievements stand out that environmentalists have pursued for years.

The clean fuels bill [HB 1091](#) to reduce the carbon content of transportation fuels over time (similar to policies in Oregon and California) to 20 percent below 2017 levels by 2038. The policy is somewhat constrained by requirements for in-state production of biofuels and exempts some fuel uses such as shipping.

The Climate Commitment Act [SB 5126](#) sets a price on carbon with a cap and trade and invest program setting a limit on emissions declining over time, and creating market-tradable allowances all resulting in an escalating price on carbon.

Legislative outlook for 2022

- In the 2021 session the [Healthy Homes and Clean Buildings Act](#), HB 1084—a follow-on to HB 1257 from 2019—failed to pass the House. It was intended to reduce emissions in smaller buildings and homes by transitioning heating systems to electrification. Apparently, the complexity was too much for the Legislature to swallow in one gulp, so for 2022 sponsors plan to divide it into 4 bills for easier understanding: replace natural gas heating, encourage stronger energy codes locally than state requirements-minimums, implement performance standards for smaller buildings similar to large buildings, create incentives for switching to electric building features.
- Reducing methane releases is significant because of its intensity as a GHG, so we expect legislation addressing methane releases from landfills to: reduce and redirect organic waste (compost), monitor leaks and cap, perhaps capture methane as is practical, but that usually works only for large landfills where economies of scale make it worthwhile. In some cases it may be better to just flare off leaking methane rather than release it if not economical to purify and pipe it for a productive use (carbon dioxide is less intense as a GHG than methane).
- Adjustments will be necessary over time to the climate commitment act and the clean fuels bill to adjust exemptions, re-allocate allowances, and improve tribal consent and consultation for proposed projects. Also, rule-writing is underway for [clean fuels](#) and [climate commitment](#).
- We will also look for re-introduction of the following bills that did not pass in 2021:
 - [HB 1099](#) Improving the state’s climate response through updates to the state’s comprehensive planning. Expect the House to push this through the Rules Committee and on to the Senate early in the session. It made it all the way through the House, but died in the Senate Transportation Committee.
 - [HB 1046](#) smooths the process for community solar projects to sell electricity to utilities. The policy has had a long journey, but has not achieved traction yet.
 - [HB 1125](#) to reduce the energy burden of low-income customers and vulnerable populations, but it competed with other programs so also did not gain traction.
 - [HB 1075](#) to collect data and create plans to reduce emissions from on-demand vehicle services. The bill sponsors said Uber and Lyft were on-board with this, but it did not get out of the House Rules Committee due to more pressing priorities.

Expect emphasis to change in the Senate Transportation Committee where new leadership will take over from previous chair, Steve Hobbs, recently appointed Secretary of State. (See the Transportation Issue Paper for more perspective on the outlook for transportation the biggest contributor to GHGs in Washington.)

Coalitions: the [Northwest Energy Coalition](#) and the [Environmental Priorities Coalition](#).

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