

**2020 Vision * BrightSource Energy * Calvert Asset Management Company
Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies * Defenders of Wildlife * Earthjustice
Environment America * eSolar * Fresh Energy * Jewish Reconstructionist Federation
National Audubon Society * National Parks Conservation Association * National Wildlife Federation
Natural Resources Defense Council * Physicians for Social Responsibility * Sierra Club
Solar Energy Industries Association * Union of Concerned Scientists * The Vote Solar Initiative
Western Resource Advocates * The Wilderness Society**

February 3, 2009

Honorable Jeff Bingaman
Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
The United States Senate
Washington, DC 20150

Chairman Bingaman and Ranking Member Murkowski:

Expanding and upgrading our electric power transmission system to convey greatly increased amounts of renewable energy is critical to enabling the nation to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions responsible for global warming and revitalizing the lagging economy. Policies aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and other air pollutants from electrical generation have already been adopted at the state and regional level across the country, and new national policies promoting renewable energy, energy efficiency, and emissions reduction clearly must be an integral part of a new energy policy. None of these efforts will be able to collectively achieve their goals without rapid and transformative investments in green transmission on a national scale.

The country's aging transmission grid is insufficiently prepared to support the national investment required to repower America with clean renewable energy. Planning and siting interstate transmission lines can be a lengthy, contentious, and expensive process that does not ensure outcomes consistent with national clean energy or other environmental goals. Siting decisions are left until late in the process after significant investment has been made in developing a proposal, missing opportunities to cooperatively identify zones and corridors that protect sensitive areas and bypass redundant analyses to speed project construction.

Energy efficiency measures that limit the amount of new generation and transmission infrastructure needed should be taken immediately in order to maximize resources for building lines where the potential for new renewable energy generation is greatest. This includes energy storage and innovative "smart grid" technologies that are already proven cost-effective, but have struggled to penetrate markets due to insufficient incentives for adoption.

But new legislation will be needed that accelerates development of new green transmission in an environmentally responsible manner. New lines must be built that are specifically planned, designed, and appropriately sited in order to serve renewable resources, not expand the carbon-intensive electrical generation largely responsible for global warming and unhealthy air. In order to ensure that new transmission moves the nation toward a clean renewable energy future, a greenhouse gas performance standard should apply to any facilities that connect to these lines.

Repowering the nation must also safeguard the wildlife and natural resources that help keep American communities healthy, safe, and prosperous. Decisions on where to build these lines, and the new renewable generation facilities that they will serve, must ensure the protection of unique and sensitive natural systems, wildlife habitat, and cultural resources, as well as national park units and other protected places on public lands. The social and ecological impacts of these lines must be assessed in full compliance with our nation's environmental laws through science-based planning processes with opportunities for robust public involvement. The federal government must be given a strong role to set standards for transmission planning and siting that are based on meaningful public participation and environmental performance criteria, while respecting the expertise and traditional role of the states. Additional incentives should be available to transmission projects that further encourage development of renewable energy and protection of natural resources.

New transmission designed to unlock clean renewable energy offers significant opportunities for creating jobs and contributing to our economic prosperity. At a time of unprecedented economic uncertainty, investing in a clean, smart grid is a wise and necessary choice. Building a robust, well-planned, and innovative grid will result in a more reliable, resilient, and secure energy delivery system for decades to come.

We ask that you consider these principles in drafting transmission legislation this Congress and look forward to working with you on this important issue.

Sincerely,

2020 Vision

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CC: Senator Byron Dorgan

Senator Tim Johnson