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TVA gets feedback on electricity generation

By CAROLINE EGGERS ceggers@bgdailynews.com 23 hrs ago

The Tennessee Valley Authority recently announced that it would be shutting down the last coal-fired unit in the Drakesboro-based Paradise Fossil Plant by the end of 2020.

Tennessee Valley Authority

The Tennessee Valley Authority hosted several dozen community members Tuesday at Knicely Conference Center to discuss and solicit feedback on its proposal for the next two decades of electricity generation.

In its 2019 Integrated Resource Plan, TVA presents several strategies to provide low-cost power while reducing air pollutants and greenhouse gas emissions.

Last year, TVA captured power from about 40 percent nuclear, 26 percent coal, 20 percent natural gas, 10 percent hydroelectric, 3 percent wind and solar and 1 percent other.

By 2027, TVA wants to boost non-hydroelectric renewables to 5 percent of its total generation. By 2038, TVA might capture 10 to 15 percent of its power from non-hydroelectric renewables, predominantly from solar, according to Hunter Hydas, project manager of the Integrated Resource Plan.

The costs associated with building new generation capacity vary in each region. Generally, estimated costs of producing electricity by wind are less than the cost of generating electricity by solar power, according to the Energy Information Administration.

TVA doesn't plan to build any wind turbines in its region, however. Hydas cited the imminent expiration of the federal production tax credit, which will be phased out completely by 2024.

"In the mid-2020s, after the tax credit expires, wind is about 40 percent more expensive than solar," Hydas said. "Solar is better for our system."

In January, the Energy Information Administration forecast that non-hydroelectric renewable energy resources will be the fastest-growing source of U.S. electricity generation in 2019 and 2020.

Wind is projected to increase to 9 percent of total U.S. generation by 2020. Solar is projected to contribute a little more than 2 percent of total utility-scale generation and will grow at a higher percentage than any other generation source in 2020.

Though more coal plants retirements are announced each year – including TVA's Paradise Fossil Plant in Drakesboro – coal and natural gas are projected to collectively provide about 61 percent of electricity generation in 2020, according to the Energy Information Administration.

Ron Whitmore, who attended Tuesday's meeting, asked if cost considerations for new sources of electricity generation included environmental costs.

The cost components considered are capital, operational, variable operating and fixed maintenance costs, which could include some environmental remediation, according to Jane Elliott, an operation performance analyst for TVA.

Whitmore later said he didn't think Elliott answered the question of whether environmental costs such as groundwater contamination and public health were considered.

"If a coal miner dies of black lung, does that show up on our electric bill?" Whitmore asked, referencing an announcement from the Department of Labor that taxpayers might be filling the gap from the recently-halved tax rate coal companies pay to support the Black Lung Disability Trust Fund.

Attendees also asked about energy demand, physical footprints of facilities and whether climate change were factored into their planning.

Julie Ellis, a professor of electrical engineering at Western Kentucky University, thought the presentation was "very thorough," but she hasn't reviewed the plan in detail yet. She's particularly interested in distributed energy resources.



"We need to have it possible for people to develop their own generation," Ellis said.

Eleanor Bower, chair of the Sierra Club's Mammoth Cave Group, thought the renewable energy goals could be higher.

"They're trying to turn this big ship around," Bower said. "They're still hanging on to the coal and gas."

State Rep. Patti Minter, D-Bowling Green, complimented the utility for touring the region and offering customers the opportunity to interact with their utility directly on important conversations.

Asked whether she thought the plan was more greenwashing than actionable environmental stewardship, Minter replied that "the proof is in the pudding."

"Renewable energy is clearly the future," Minter said.

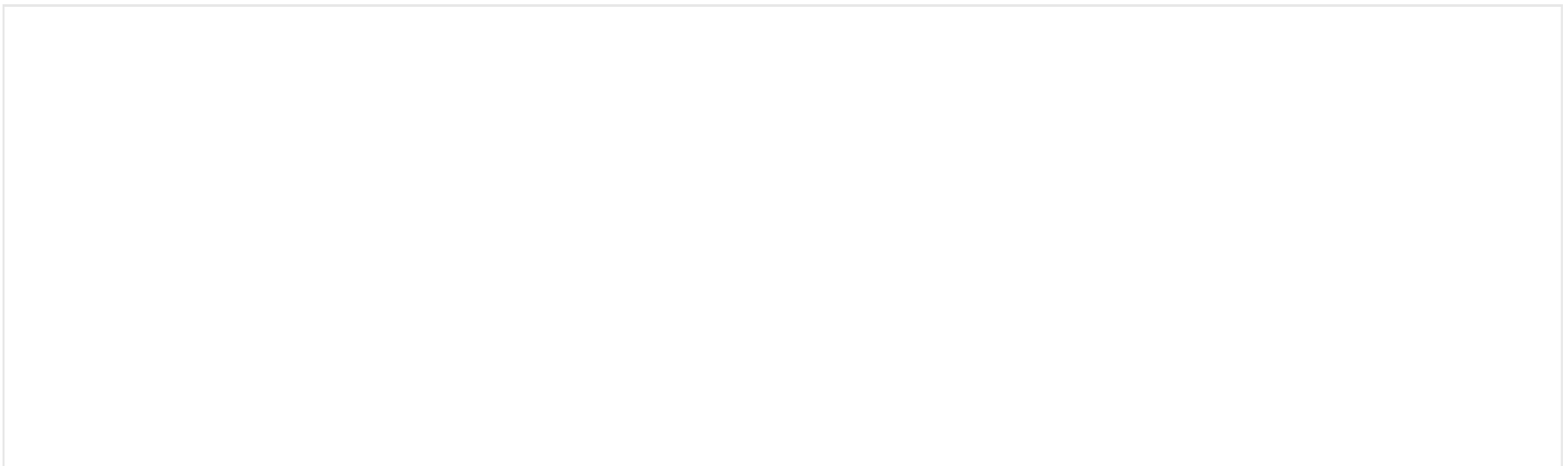
To view the full draft, and the accompanying environmental impact statement, visit tva.com/Environment/Environmental-Stewardship/Integrated-Resource-Plan. There are also links to webinar recordings of each meeting, including Tuesday's meeting.

TVA is accepting public comment through April 8.

"What we're hoping that we get from the public is challenges to assumptions that we've made," Hydas said, ultimately "helping us think holistically."

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Power planning: TVA public meeting Tuesday

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