

Opinion: Renewable energy mandate needs second look

By Carl Danner

Important details are delaying legislative confirmation of California's commitment to a requirement of 33 percent renewable electricity by 2020. But there are more fundamental questions about what this mandate might achieve, and at what cost.

Start with the basics. The idea of renewables seems to be electricity made without fossil fuel, and therefore sustained through natural processes such as sunshine and wind. But the legal definition excludes our greatest renewable resources, California's huge Sierra hydroelectric dams and the imports we get from similar facilities in the Pacific Northwest. Why not them?

The answer seems to involve a political perception that the genuine numbers make a less compelling case for the policy. In fact, not-eligible hydroelectricity covers between 10 percent to 20 percent of California's needs, and existing nuclear power plants (if a lack of emissions is the test) add another 10 percent. It would weaken the argument to acknowledge that an additional quarter of our electricity already comes from zero-carbon sources.

Read the whole story

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