On June 2, 2014, as part of the President’s Climate Action Plan, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed the Clean Power Plan, our nation’s first protections from carbon pollution from coal-fired power plants. The Plan puts states in the driver’s seat to hasten their shift to clean energy and reduce carbon pollution. It will also help reduce other forms of dangerous air pollution, helping to keep our children healthier.

By cleaning up and modernizing power plants, we will begin to clean up our air, reduce pollution-related illness and curb climate disruption. Reducing carbon pollution from power plants will not only save billions of dollars each year, it will save lives. As solar and wind power become more cost-effective every day and continue to grow exponentially, clean energy and energy efficiency can and should be the focus of North Carolina’s Clean Power Plan. The plan will spur innovation, accelerate the clean energy economy, and create good jobs that will move North Carolina closer to a clean energy economy.

CARBON REDUCTION GOALS

While the Clean Power Plan will reduce carbon pollution from power plants nationally by 2030, the EPA has set a goal for North Carolina to reduce its carbon pollution from power plants by 39% from 2012 levels. Because of North Carolina’s landmark renewable energy portfolio standard legislation and booming solar energy industry, our state is already well on its way to meeting this goal. North Carolina can be a leader in making the transition to a clean and equitable energy future.

PROPOSED EPA GOALS

To set state-specific goals, EPA analyzed the work that states and utilities are already doing to lower carbon pollution from the power sector. The EPA developed standards for each state based on an analysis of states’ reported emissions in 2012. Goals are individualized for each state. Together, these steps make up what the EPA defines as the best system for reducing carbon pollution.

The Clean Power Plan calculates state targets using four basic building blocks that include a wide range of cost-effective methods to reduce carbon emissions. The four basic building blocks that make up the “best system of
emission reduction” according to EPA are: 1) making existing coal plants more efficient, 2) using existing gas plants more effectively, 3) increasing the use of renewable energy; and 4) increasing end-use energy efficiency.

STATES DECIDE HOW THEY WILL MEET EPA GOAL
North Carolina will choose how to meet the goal. The NC Department of Environmental and Natural Resources is the state agency that will develop a plan to meet the goal and the Environmental Management Commission is the body which must approve the plan. States may work alone or in cooperation with other states to comply with the proposed rule.

Energy efficiency and renewable energy can deliver a substantial portion of the emission reductions need to meet North Carolina’s goals. In fact, the EPA\(^1\) used assumptions when modeling how NC might achieve emissions reductions that underestimate the actual potential. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory\(^2\), the technical potential for renewable energy in the state is nearly 70 million megawatts (MWh) annually by the year 2030, yet the EPA assumed closer to 12 million. Similarly, the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy\(^3\) sets the technical potential for energy efficiency at 31 million MWh annually by 2030, yet the EPA assumed 11 million MWh. With an increase in renewable energy and investments in energy efficiency, North Carolina could reduce its carbon emissions dramatically. Retiring outdated and uneconomic coal plants, like Duke Energy’s Asheville and Allen coal plants, could further reduce carbon emissions in North Carolina.

THE CLEAN ENERGY OPPORTUNITY
The Clean Power Plan is an unprecedented opportunity for North Carolina to cut carbon and combat our contribution to climate disruption here at home. We can achieve this by moving beyond coal, choosing clean energy, and making investments in energy efficiency.

ENDNOTES