

# Opinion: Climate change poses risk to Nev. economy

By Andy Wirth

As the leader of a major destination mountain resort in North America, thankfully located in the Reno/Tahoe area, I am deeply concerned about the risk that climate change poses to our industry, and our entire region's economy. Climate change has already begun to reveal itself as persistent drought in the Sierra Nevada, lower snowpack, increased number and scale of forest fires, and the substantially increased volatility of weather patterns across our great state.



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None of this will help our local outdoor recreation economy and our region's overall economy.

Meanwhile, the Reno/Tahoe area is still working to recover from a recession that hit our community hard, in many ways much harder than the recent drought. Widespread economic downturns like the one we began to experience in 2008 impact tourist areas dramatically, since travel and recreation are often the first things cut from family budgets.

These two issues – climate change and a recovering economy – might not seem related, but there is a very real nexus between the two.

Only by addressing those aspects of climate change that are already impacting our region can we ensure long-term economic growth and a sustainable economy. Fortunately, we are incredibly well positioned to do so in Nevada.

Nevada has such great clean energy potential that we can not only meet our own energy needs easily with solar and geothermal, but we also have the very real potential to export renewable energy to states like California. We can lead the nation on clean energy and build a stronger and more diverse local economy at the same time.

Unfortunately, our region finds itself on a different path.

NV Energy, our state's largest utility, sends billions of dollars a year out of Nevada by importing coal and natural gas from other states. Earlier this month, NV Energy protected jobs for people in Arizona by announcing the purchase of another out-of-state natural gas plant. This is decidedly disappointing to all of us in Nevada and the region, as there is a very real, plausible and fiscally responsible alternative: investing in Nevada's renewable energy. These actions would create jobs here for you and your neighbors.

So what's standing in the way of Nevada's transition to clean energy? Many Reno residents probably don't realize that over one-quarter of their electricity comes directly from a dirty, expensive, outdated coal plant – North Valmy. This coal plant, far away near Battle Mountain, is quite literally NV Energy's dirty little secret. Valmy generates more climate-disrupting carbon pollution than any other single source in Nevada.

Currently Valmy is scheduled to continue operating until 2025, importing coal from Wyoming, spewing air pollution and accelerating the climate change that's devastating our industry and our future. It's time to end coal burning at Valmy and replace it with clean, affordable renewable energy.

We must continue the forward progress we've made by bringing clean tech businesses like Tesla, Switch, Apple, Patagonia and Faraday to the region. We can't attract and retain these types of businesses if we are unable to supply them with the clean energy that is key to their business models.

Luckily, we have an opportunity before us right now to do just that. Gov. Brian Sandoval's Clean Energy Industry Task Force is considering recommendations this month on legislation to accelerate our transition to clean energy. The most important recommendation they could make would be to end coal burning at Valmy by 2020. I hope the Task Force will take a hard look at Valmy (and the out-of-state coal that powers it) as an opportunity to keep our energy dollars here at home. Let's transition away from polluting coal energy and build in its place the 100 percent clean energy that is our region's indisputable future.

Sincerely,

**Andy Wirth, chairman Reno Tahoe Airport Board of Trustees  
Chairman, Regional Air Service Corporation  
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