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Report: Proposed Southwest coal plants would create flood of global warming pollution

Recommendations provide new energy roadmap for the region

BOULDER, Colo. – If more than a dozen coal-fired power plants planned for Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah begin operating, they would emit global warming pollution equivalent to the tailpipe exhaust of 12.5 million cars driving around the Southwest for a year. The potential for such a huge increase in carbon dioxide emissions is the focus of a new report from Environmental Defense and Western Resource Advocates: “Climate Alert: Cleaner Energy for the Southwest.”

The threat posed by those emissions – 70 million tons of carbon dioxide a year – reinforces the importance of the ongoing shift to clean energy being championed by policy-makers in these five states, according to the report. The Southwest, with some of the nation’s fastest growing cities and dependent on scarce water resources, is particularly susceptible to the effects of global warming. Predicted impacts include increased flooding, more frequent and intense wildfires, infectious disease outbreaks, poorer air quality and increased respiratory health problems, prolonged droughts, the disappearance of fragile alpine and desert habitats, and the loss of billions of dollars in outdoor-related recreation.

“Perhaps as much as any region in the country, the Southwest will feel the impact of global warming,” said John Nielsen, energy program director for WRA. “We’re at a critical juncture, and we have an opportunity to choose a path that will ensure our prosperity. This report highlights the benefits of creating programs and policies that support energy efficiency and

renewable energy, as well as the risks and potential consequences of following a business-as-usual course.”

The region already is home to some of the nation’s largest and dirtiest coal plants. Combined, they emit 176 million tons of global warming pollution each year, and if the proposed plants are built, they will boost that annual output by 40 percent – and continue operating for decades.

“Our elected leaders have already shown strong leadership on global warming and clean energy issues by adopting greenhouse gas reduction and renewable energy benchmarks,” said Jana Milford, a senior scientist at Environmental Defense. “These new plants, which are based on outdated technology, threaten to undo much of their hard work.”

“Climate Alert: Cleaner Energy for the Southwest” provides a roadmap toward a new energy future based on clean, reliable and efficient resources. The report lays out seven recommendations that will help Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah make important strides toward not only reaping the benefits of a new energy economy but also toward mitigating the disruptive effects of global warming. Numerous bills addressing renewable energy already have been introduced in the five states. The report, which is being delivered to key leaders, helps explain why such efforts are so important.

The report is available online at either www.environmentaldefense.org/go/swcleanenergy or www.westernresourceadvocates.org.

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Founded in 1989, Western Resource Advocates is a non-profit environmental law and policy organization dedicated to restoring and protecting the natural environment of the Interior American West in collaboration with other environmental and community groups, and by developing solutions that are appropriate to the unique environmental, economic and cultural framework of this region. www.westernresourceadvocates.org

Environmental Defense, a leading national nonprofit organization, represents more than 500,000 members. Since 1967, Environmental Defense has linked science, economics, law and innovative private-sector partnerships to create breakthrough solutions to the most serious environmental problems. www.environmentaldefense.org