



EESI UPDATE

A periodic update to EESI's friends on our work in policymaker education, coalition building, technical assistance, and policy development.

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Environmental Justice Is Critical to Addressing Climate



LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES and communities of color are disproportionately affected by climate change. The hard truth is that these communities suffer the consequences of climate change—the increased frequency and severity of extreme weather as well as sea level rise—at a higher rate and to a more extensive degree than wealthier communities. As but one example, it is more difficult to evacuate during extreme weather if you don't have a car and can't afford a bus ticket or hotel room in a safe area—and you can't work remotely because you're a retail or service worker. EESI has made it a priority to highlight environmental justice issues to policymakers through our briefings and private meetings. Our briefing series on regional coastal resilience has included consideration of environmental justice, as will the summary report we will prepare, pulling together lessons learned, after that briefing series wraps up. Policymakers are becoming increasingly aware of these issues, and steps are being taken to protect climate-vulnerable places.

The environmental justice movement in the United States began as a protest against the unequal dispersion and unlawful siting of toxic waste facilities in communities of color throughout the country. It has since grown in scope to encompass a wide variety of issues, from the outsized burden rural communities face in paying high energy bills to the push for energy and climate legislation to be sensitive to the goals of communities of color and low-income communities.

Here at EESI, we have taken multiple steps to support the environmental justice movement. In fact, we included environmental justice considerations as part of our major policy recommendations to the House Select Committee on the Climate Crisis. Congress can and should compel federal agencies to include environmental justice factors in decision making and program design. Stakeholder engagement, especially with low-income and minority communities, has unfortunately been a weak point in planning. But some agencies have developed programs that help include environmental justice considerations in policymaking decisions; the Environmental Protection Agency's EJSSCREEN is one example.

EESI also brings forth important community voices in our Congressional briefings. For example, we included environmental justice issues in recent briefings on workforce development and community-centered resilience, and we plan to do much more of this in the future!



Speakers at EESI's briefing on community-centered resilience in Louisiana

By better informing policymakers, EESI seeks to make environmental justice a prime consideration in climate change and resilience discussions. As our executive director, Daniel Bresette, wrote on Martin Luther King, Jr., day, "We stand a much better chance of success if we work together, care for our neighbors most immediately impacted by climate change, and change our ways to ensure environmental justice is a core value in our efforts going forward." □

Protecting the West Coast from Climate Change



Credit: Susan Bell

AS PART OF OUR WORK to enhance community resilience to climate impacts, EESI is highlighting resilience strategies through a series of briefings on regions all around our country. One such briefing was *Resilience along the West Coast*. EESI invited expert panelists to share compelling information about West Coast climate hazards and ways to adapt to those increasing hazards.

Our panelist from the U.S. Geological Survey (a federal agency) spoke about the science behind sea level rise and its connection to climate change, as well as the impacts of rising waters: flooding and beach erosion. The West Coast has 30 million people living in

coastal areas, all of whom are subject to major coastal hazards. These hazards are increasing in frequency, and pose risks to human lives and to our outdated infrastructure.

California is doing a lot to create more resilient communities. The San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission's panelist spoke of programs they have in place to restore local ecology and develop stronger shorelines in the San Francisco Bay area.

The speaker we invited from the Puget Sound Institute in Washington state discussed what they are doing to protect the Pacific Northwest coastline, such as resilient beach design to slow erosion and conserve ecological systems. The audience learned about nature-based solutions, such as beach nourishment, logs, and plants, to slow erosion.

EESI briefings feed into the policymaking process. In fact, the House just passed a bill aimed at restoring ecosystems in Puget Sound!

There is a lot being done to promote more resilient coastlines, but there is still much more to do. Supportive federal policies can help communities adapt to climate change. Thanks to our institutional and individual donors, EESI is working to do just that. □

Deep Decarbonization Is on the Horizon!

TO CURB CLIMATE CHANGE, we need to sharply cut greenhouse gas emissions. As part of EESI's overall work to further climate change solutions, we hosted a Congressional briefing on legal ways to get to an 80-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions in the United States by 2050—as scientists tell us we need to do to keep global warming below 3.6°F (2°C).

These emission cuts are critical in a warming world. And knowledge of the legal ways to achieve them is crucial to policymakers, so that they can connect the dots and move forward with federal policy changes. The timing couldn't be better, as the House bipartisan Select Committee on the Climate Crisis will be issuing a report to the rest of Congress soon.

EESI's donors have been crucial in bringing legal pathways to deep decarbonization to Congressional attention! Briefing speakers outlined a myriad of recom-

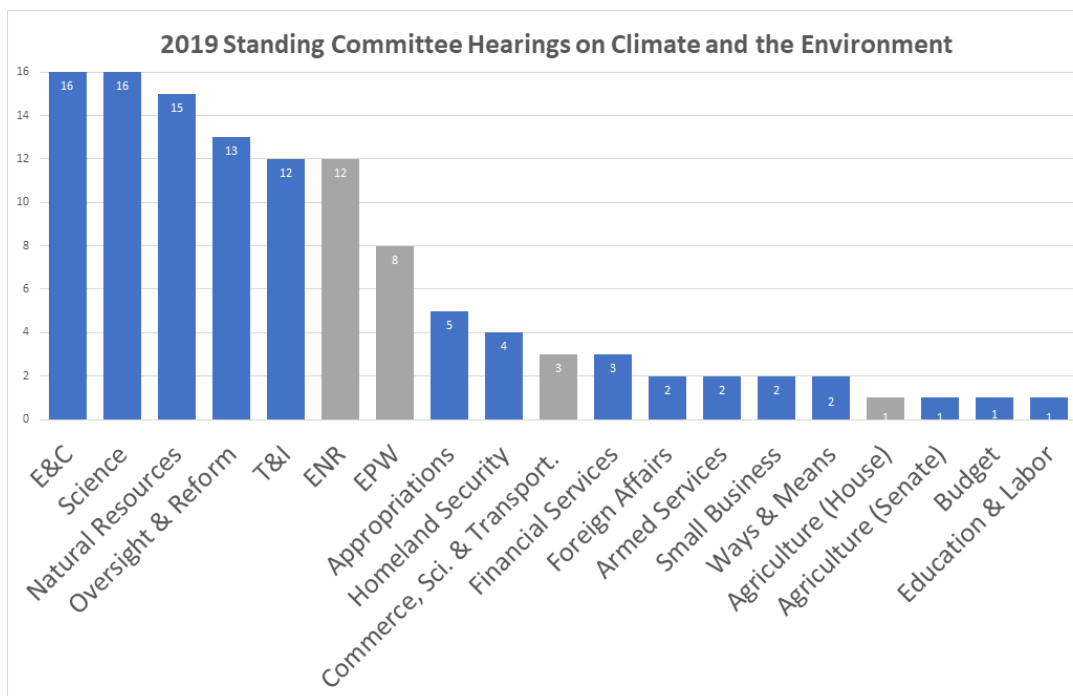
mendations as to how decarbonization legislation can be drafted and implemented at a community, agency, and Congressional level, to fight climate change head on. For example, Amy Stein, Professor of Law at the University of Florida, emphasized how critical it is to incentivize a switchover from gasoline-powered vehicles to ones that are electric or powered by biogas.

The panelists were enthusiastic as they discussed just how beneficial decarbonization will be not just from an environmental standpoint, but from social and economic standpoints as well. The two fastest growing job categories in the United States are solar installers and wind service technicians. Addressing climate change is not only critical for our planet, but also beneficial to our economy! That's a crucial message for policymakers to hear. EESI will continue to push forward this year with ways to decarbonize the economy, with you as a partner! □

Congress Held 134 Climate and Environment Hearings in 2019

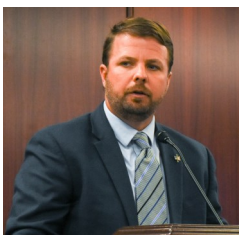
DID YOU KNOW that Congress held **134 hearings** related to climate change last year—that's more than two a week!

It's not making the headlines, but the House and Senate have been very active in holding hearings as part of the law-making process. According to EESI's analysis, the House of Representatives held 110 hearings on climate and the environment in 2019, and the Senate held 24. That averages to more than 11 hearings a month related to climate issues! The pace is continuing in 2020. These hearings are essential steps in climate mitigation and adaptation! Check out our full analysis at bit.ly/climate-hearings-2019. We continue to



be engaged in federal climate policy development thanks to the commitment of so many donors—thank you. □

South Carolina Cooperative Calls ‘On-Bill Financing’ a Win-Win



Tri-County Electric
Co-op CEO Chad Lowder

FOR MANY RURAL RESIDENTS, energy bills can be as high as \$500 a month—or higher. And it's not because they are keeping their homes at toasty temperatures. It's because a lot of energy is wasted in houses that have poor or no insulation, gaps around windows and doors, inefficient heating and cooling systems, etc... Finding the money to improve home energy

efficiency is hard in rural areas that suffer from persistent poverty. That's why EESI has made on-bill financing a focus, so residents can qualify for low-interest loans based on good bill payment history and pay back the money they owe right on their energy bill.

Chad Lowder, CEO of the Tri-County Electric Cooperative, who spoke at an EESI briefing, has called the approach “win-win.” The South Carolina cooperative helps families retrofit and weatherize their homes, thereby unlocking savings on their electricity bills while simultaneously helping the environment.

Lowder mentioned how he'd seen monthly electricity bills for some retrofitted and weatherized homes go down from \$500 to \$250. **This large reduction in monthly energy bills is particularly noteworthy for lower income households**, which are a sizable number of Tri-County's members.

On-bill financing programs are a continual focus for EESI as these initiatives remove barriers to sustainable practices, notably retrofitting homes to be more energy efficient. EESI **has been helping rural energy cooperatives**, such as the Tri-County Electric Cooperative, **incorporate on-bill financing options** into their repertoire with programs like Help My House, which EESI helped develop and which Tri-County joined in December 2019 (becoming the fifth South Carolina cooperative to do so).

EESI is excited to continue our work to promote on-bill financing programs like Help My House, and help electric co-ops such as Tri-County Electric Cooperative, as they are a tangible example of how sustainable solutions can be made accessible to all. □

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You Power Climate Solutions!



When you give, you are helping curb climate change and stabilize the climate for the next generation!

You are helping make our communities more resilient and cutting greenhouse gas emissions!

To accelerate work on climate action, you can give the way that's right for you.

How to give?

- Give online at eesi.org/donate
- Become an EESI Associate by giving \$1,000 or more per year
- Leave a legacy by naming EESI a beneficiary in your 401(k), IRA, or will (eesi.org/legacy)

Thank you so much for being part of the solution!

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Thank you
so very
much!