



Your Summer Report

Report: Texas ranks 3rd for residential rooftop solar

By Luke Metzger, Environment Texas executive director

Texas ranks third in the nation for residential solar power generation, according to a February 2024 report by Environment Texas Research & Policy Center and Frontier Group. The report “Rooftop Solar on the Rise” tracks the dramatic increase in rooftop solar power over the last decade, illustrates how far we have yet to go to take full advantage of our solar energy potential, and recommends policies to keep rooftop solar rising.

“Today, in Texas you can get your energy straight from your roof,” said Luke Metzger, executive director of Environment Texas Research & Policy Center. “Why pay for power from a distant plant spewing pollution when we can just soak up the sun on our rooftops?”

Rooftop solar reduces dependence on fossil fuels, eases strain on the grid during periods of high electricity demand, increases resilience to threats such as extreme weather, and limits the amount of land needed to produce clean energy, all at a steadily falling cost. Small-scale solar energy, of which rooftop solar is the largest component, is growing rapidly in the United States, producing 10 times as much power in 2022 as it did a decade earlier.

Texas should be #1!

The trend holds true in Texas, where rooftop solar has taken off over the past five years. Residential solar grew 646% from 2017 through 2022, while small-scale commercial solar grew 221%. In total, small-scale solar in Texas generated 2995 gigawatt hours (GWh) of electricity in 2022.



Environment Texas’ Luke Metzger shows off his rooftop solar panels.

However, while Texas ranks high for total small-scale solar generation, on a per capita basis the state ranks just 20th, a result of the lack of a statewide solar incentive, the lack of net metering, poor interconnection standards and cumbersome municipal permitting processes. The report finds that Texas ranks in the top 10 for rooftop solar generation potential, but tapped only 1.87% of that potential in 2022.

Much of Texas’ growth in solar has been fueled by local incentive programs, such as those offered by San Antonio’s municipally owned utility CPS Energy. A 2022 report by

Continued on page 3 ►

Thanks
for making it
all possible

Lawsuit: I-35 expansion fails to consider environmental impacts

Widening highways have been shown to do nothing to reduce traffic, and their expansion needs to consider local environmental impacts. On Jan. 26, Environment Texas joined Rethink35 and a diverse community coalition in filing a lawsuit against the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) over its plans to widen eight miles of I-35 from Ben White Blvd / SH71 to US 290

deadliest forms of air pollution. Now, those statistics should be changing for the better.

After more than 500,000 comments from Americans and members like you called for stronger standards against soot pollution, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) finalized a rule aimed at curbing soot pollution, a major contributor to respiratory illnesses, heart issues and cancer. The new guidelines are estimated to prevent 4,500 premature deaths and 800,000 instances of asthma symptoms annually.

“Air pollution used to be the price we had to pay to heat our homes, commute or produce goods by burning coal, oil and gas,” said Lisa Frank, executive director of Environment America Research & Policy Center’s Washington Office.

“Thankfully, in the rapidly accelerating renewable energy era, that’s no longer the case. These soot standards will save lives, clear our skies and alleviate the burden of asthma and other illnesses. That’s something all Americans should celebrate.”

To save these whales, ships must slow down

Speeding in a school zone puts kids at risk. When cargo ships speed through the Gulf of Mexico, they put at risk the Gulf’s most endangered whale—the Rice’s whale.

With only around 50 Rice’s whales left on the planet, it’s critical that large ships slow their speeds down to 10 knots in specified areas to ensure the whales aren’t hit. Unfortunately, a recent NPR analysis found that more than 80% of ships in the Gulf go faster than that.

That’s why Environment Texas Research & Policy Center is urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to establish a speed limit, among other needed protections for the Rice’s whale.

“We know how to keep Rice’s whales and their babies safe from boat strikes: We can slow boats down,” said Kelsey Lamp, director of our national Protect Our Oceans Campaign.

“These whales depend upon us for their continued survival. Slowing down when crossing their habitat or doing things differently to lessen impacts on their lives are small inconveniences compared to extinction.”

Get more updates on our work online at <https://environmenttexas.org>.

Judah Rice



Environment Texas Executive Director Luke Metzger speaks at a press conference to announce a lawsuit against TxDOT over I-35 expansion.

as part of the I-35 Capital Express Central Project.

The lawsuit argues that TxDOT failed to take a hard look at environmental impacts related to human health, air quality and water resources; failed to properly assess the project’s inequitable impacts of environmental justice populations; and did not seriously explore alternative highway designs to expansion. It also argues that TxDOT violated the law by failing to give the public an opportunity to comment on a major change to the project and failed to find a replacement for parkland at Waller Beach that the agency intends to seize.

TxDOT plans to widen I-35 through Austin from today’s 12 lanes to between 18 and 25 lanes, depending on location, more than doubling I-35’s number of lane miles through central Austin. The project would displace over 100 homes and businesses; cause a decade’s worth of disruptive construction; bring 130,000 more vehicles through Austin every day; impact air and water quality; and worsen traffic safety and carbon emissions.

EPA rule means less soot in the air we breathe

Thousands of people die each year from illnesses related to soot exposure, one of the



Toward a greener future

Support our work to build a cleaner, greener, healthier future by including a gift to Environment Texas or Environment Texas Research & Policy Center in your will, trust or retirement accounts.

For more information call 1-800-841-7299 or send an email to: PlannedGiving@EnvironmentTexas.org



Roschetzky Photography via Shutterstock

Page 1 story continued:

Texas 3rd for residential rooftop solar

Environment Texas found the Alamo City ranks first in Texas, and fifth nationally, for locally-installed solar.

“As the number one solar producer in Texas, San Antonio will continue leading the clean energy transition in the state,” said San Antonio Mayor Ron Nirenberg.

Cities finding ways to go solar

Slow, costly permitting processes are a key barrier to the growth of rooftop solar. Automated permitting can help standardize permitting processes, reducing costs and shrinking project timelines while relieving some of the administrative burden that traditional permitting places on local jurisdictions.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory and the U.S. Department of Energy have developed the Solar Automated Permit Processing Plus (SolarAPP+) software to make it easier for jurisdictions to issue permits for code-compliant residential solar

power systems. The cities of San Antonio and Houston are piloting its use while Dallas and other cities are considering adoption.

Environment Texas also pointed to the Texas Energy Fund, which includes \$1.8 billion in funding for backup power for critical infrastructure, the potential expansion of a successful pilot program to pay Texas consumers for surplus power sold to the grid, and efforts by cities such as San Antonio and Dallas to install solar on municipal buildings, as key opportunities to continue the growth of small-scale solar in Texas.

According to a February 2023 poll by the University of Houston, 64% of Texas homeowners are either somewhat or very interested in purchasing a solar energy system.

“Texas is already soaking up the benefits of rooftop solar,” concluded Luke. “With federal tax credits in place to boost solar adoption in Texas, now is the time to lean in. Every sunny roof without solar panels is a missed opportunity.”

Local incentive programs have fueled much of Texas’ solar growth, but there’s untapped potential for more solar energy in the state. Above and below: Solar panels in Austin.



Roschetzky Photography via Shutterstock

Featured staff



Kimball Nelson

Luke Metzger
Executive Director

As the executive director of Environment Texas, Luke is a leading voice in the state for clean air and water, parks and wildlife, and a livable climate. Luke recently led the successful campaign to get the Texas Legislature and voters to invest \$1 billion to buy land for new state parks. He also helped win permanent protection for the Christmas Mountains of Big Bend; helped compel Exxon, Shell and Chevron Phillips to cut air pollution at four Texas refineries and chemical plants; and got the Austin and Houston school districts to install filters on water fountains to protect children from lead in drinking water. Luke, his wife, son and daughters are working to visit every state park in Texas.



Environment Texas and The Public Interest Network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.

200 East 30th St.
Austin, Texas 78705
(512) 479-0388

Environment Texas

NON-PROFIT
ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
BROCKTON, MA
PERMIT NO. 430



Your 2024 Summer Report

Our mission:

We all want clean air, clean water and open spaces. But it takes independent research and tough-minded advocacy to win concrete results for our environment, especially when powerful interests stand in the way of environmental progress.

That's the idea behind Environment Texas Citizen Lobby, Inc., a project of Environment America, Inc. We focus on protecting Texas' air, water and open spaces. We speak out and take action at the local, state and national levels to improve the quality of our environment and our lives.

A bee-killing pesticide coated on a seed is still a pesticide

Environment Texas and our national network are calling on the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and states to close a loophole that contributes to bee die-offs.

More than 150 million acres of America's croplands are planted with seeds treated with bee-killing neonicotinoids, or neonics. But, for too long and for reasons that no longer make sense (if they ever did), the EPA doesn't regulate pesticides that are

coated onto seeds, and states adhere to this same troubling rubric.

Several states have stepped in, working to close the loophole within their borders, including California and New York. The latter passed a new law to restrict pesticide-coated seeds.

Additionally, in December, our supporters and partners teamed up to submit more than 37,000 comments to the EPA, echoing our call to action.

Thanks to the support of members like you, we'll keep up the buzz for restricting these harmful pesticides to save the bees.

A loophole allowing pesticide-coated seeds is a threat to bee populations.



Dave Angelini