

Turning Washington Climate Commitments into Results

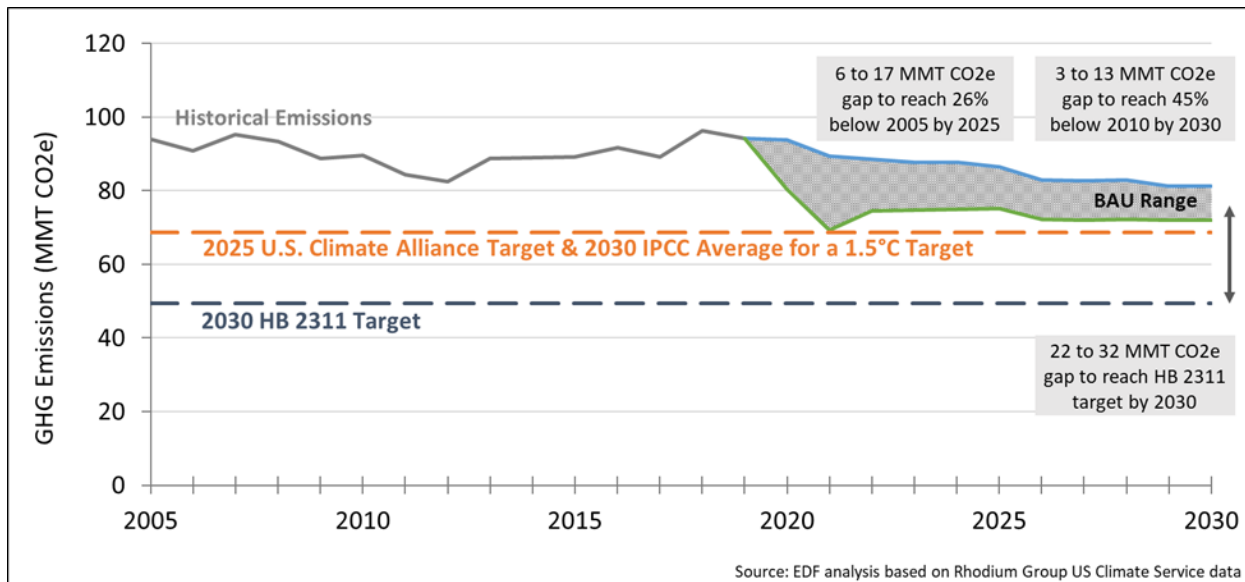
EDF's [recent analysis](#) evaluated whether Washington is on track deliver on its climate commitments. The analysis compares the state's emissions under current policy with science-based reduction goals and the state's legislative climate targets, finding that **Washington is not on track to meet these important targets, nor is it accelerating climate action at the pace and scale required** to reduce its cumulative GHG pollution over the decade—a critical metric for climate impacts.

Washington's Emissions Gaps

Washington was a founding member of the U.S. Climate Alliance in 2017 along with California and New York.ⁱ Last year, the legislature set statutory goals to reduce GHG emissions 45% below 1990 levels by 2030, 70% by 2040, and 95% by 2050. However, it stopped short of adopting a policy framework capable of achieving these reductions or directing Washington regulators to develop regulations to ensure that emissions declined consistent with these goals (as legislators had done in 2019 in Colorado, New York, New Jersey, and Maine). As shown in Figure 1 below, despite important efforts to put the power sector on a trajectory to 100% clean energy,ⁱⁱ Washington will need to adopt additional policies to achieve reductions consistent with its 2030 target and beyond.

Under current policy, Washington is on track to reduce emissions by only **10-20% below 1990 levels in 2030**, depending on how fast emissions rebound post-pandemic, **far from the 45% reduction required by state law**. In other words, the **state faces a 22-32 million metric ton (MMT) CO₂e gap in 2030** without significant further action.

Figure 1: Washington Economy-Wide Gross GHG Emissions and Targets^{iii, iv, v}



Washington's cumulative impact on climate change over the decade

Without a [policy framework](#) in place that's capable of driving enforceable, near-term emission reductions, Washington is on course to fall far short of its climate targets. Delayed action significantly increases the total emissions over the decade, which will translate into long-term climate damages. Washington urgently needs a policy framework that will deliver the ambitious emission reductions that science—and state law—demand.

To illustrate how the pace of Washington's emission reductions will affect the total pollution emitted in the atmosphere over the next decade, EDF constructed three illustrative emissions trajectories using Rhodium Group's U.S. Climate Service data. Outlined in Figure 2, the example emissions trajectories all result in the same quantity of emissions in 2030 that would meet Washington's annual target, but differ significantly in the amount of pollution actually entering the atmosphere over the decade. The first trajectory delays action until 2025; the second trajectory reduces emissions on a linear path to the 2030 target; and the final pathway accelerates reductions with ambitious action early on in the decade.

Figure 3 below summarizes the total cumulative reductions for each of the example emissions trajectories. While all three timelines would result in the same annual emissions in 2030, **the accelerated reduction trajectory prevents more than twice as much pollution from entering the atmosphere over the course of the decade compared with the delayed action trajectory—a difference of 119 million metric tons CO₂e of pollution.** This is an example of how crucial the reduction pathway is towards the point-in-time target—Washington's impact on climate change will depend on how quickly the state makes reductions, and how persistent these reductions are over time.

Figure 2: Example Emissions Trajectories in Washington (2020 - 2030)

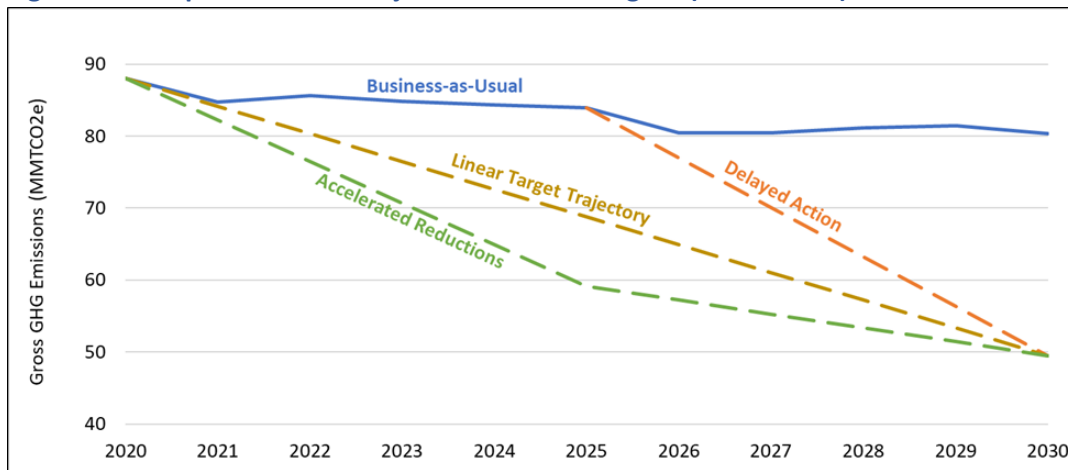
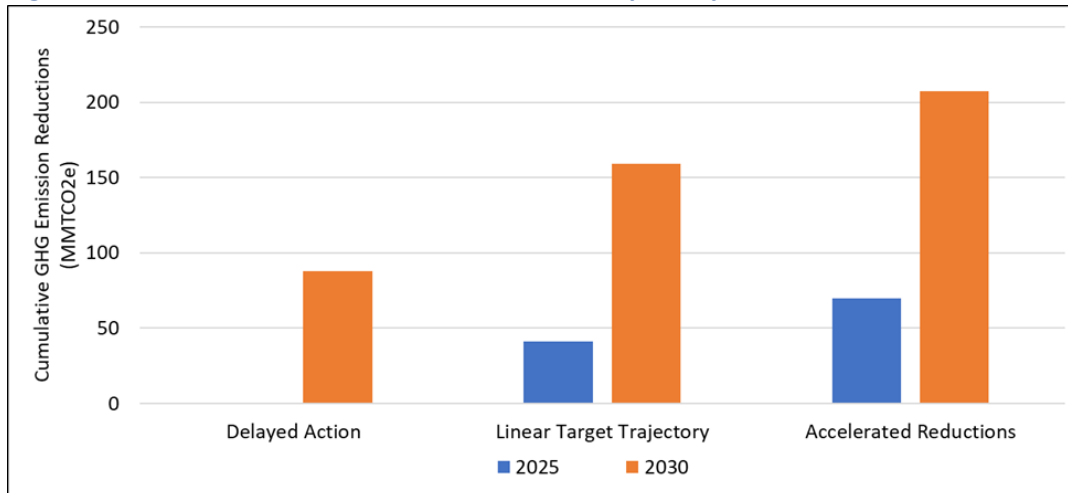


Figure 3: Cumulative Emission Reductions for Example Trajectories Relative to BAU in Washington (2020 - 2030)



Closing the emissions gap

There are several possible policy solutions that can close this emissions gap, but there are some key features that are needed:

1. **Establish a declining, enforceable limit on greenhouse gas emissions.** These limits should serve as a backstop, covering emissions from all of the state's major sources of pollution, and can be source based, sector based or applied across multiple sectors.
2. **Ensure environmental and economic benefits are directed to disproportionately-impacted communities.** Alongside and as part of an emissions limit framework, Washington must ensure that benefits from investments in a clean energy future, including in reducing transportation emissions, are directed to communities most overburdened by pollution and to communities impacted by the transition away from fossil fuels.
3. **Evaluate progress based on emissions metrics.** Thanks to the science-based climate goals established by the legislature, Washington can ensure that any climate policy framework considered secures reductions along a trajectory that declines immediately, and persistently, over time. An essential feature that must be included in an emissions limit framework is regular evaluation of climate policy to ensure that it is delivering the necessary results — and to course correct as needed to ensure goals are met.
4. **Consider an approach that puts a price on pollution.** If well designed, using a carbon price to help meet pollution limits can enable much greater ambition by securing the most cost-effective reductions, jumpstarting innovation and accelerating early action — which critically will help maximize cumulative emission reductions. Revenue from a price on carbon can also help catalyze investments to address environmental injustice, incentivize the shift to cleaner transportation, and other state priorities.
5. **Catalyze the development and deployment of clean technologies.** Supporting the ongoing adoption of performance-oriented policies can accelerate the development and deployment of clean technologies and create new clean energy jobs. Measures like a Clean Fuels Standard can also make limits on pollution easier to achieve over time.

ⁱ See <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-new-york-governor-cuomo-and-california-governor-brown-announceformation-united>.

ⁱⁱ See SB 5116, available at <http://lawfilesexxt.leg.wa.gov/biennium/2019-20/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/Senate/5116-S2.SL.pdf?q=20201118144027>.

ⁱⁱⁱ EDF's analysis uses emissions data from Rhodium Group's U.S. Climate Service.

^{iv} The 2030 HB 2311 target is based on 1990 emissions. 1990 emissions are not available in Rhodium Group's U.S. Climate Service data, so this target is based on Washington's 1990 – 2015 Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory report. Available online [here](#).

^v The BAU projections use high and low emissions scenarios to account for COVID-19 uncertainty, represented here by the blue and green lines.