



*Our mission: To inspire, align, and mobilize action
in response to the climate crisis.
We work with business, government, youth and the broader
community to advance practical, science-based solutions for
significant greenhouse gas emission reductions.*

Our work in the California's San Joaquin Valley: Empowering Historically Disadvantaged Communities with Community Choice Energy

Introduction

The Center for Climate Protection's work in the Central Valley addresses two critical, interrelated issues, the climate crisis and social justice, with one response: Community Choice Energy. The climate crisis is the human rights and social justice issue of our time. It impacts everything – air, water, food, economy, quality of life – and threatens our survival. The communities that are the first to feel the effects of extreme heat, drought, wildfires, flash floods, and rising sea levels tend to be those that are already severely economically and environmentally stressed.

The connection between social justice and climate change is increasing in importance in ever-broadening parts of society. The [California Environmental Justice Alliance](#), a statewide, community-led alliance representing over 20,000 people, asserts that, "Climate change is one of the biggest issues facing low-income communities and communities of color in California and across the globe."

In his 2015 encyclical "[Our Common Home](#)" Pope Francis stated, "...we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor."

The climate crisis and social justice issues are both difficult problems to solve. Yet solve them we must because of their grave, far-reaching impacts. To do so requires solutions commensurate with the scale of the problem. Key to this is making structural changes to democratize our energy system and transform our use of energy by switching from fossil fuels to decentralized renewables. Community Choice Aggregation, also known as Community Choice Energy is the most powerful means at the local level to do this. It is a key solution to the interlocking problems of climate and social justice.

By establishing Community Choice Agencies (CCAs), communities take control of the decision-making about the energy sources for the generation portion of their residents' and businesses' electricity service from the investor-owned utilities. They also gain control of a substantial revenue stream and the decisions associated with how best to invest it. Thus, CCAs offer communities a unique and powerful means for addressing climate, air quality, energy democracy, and social justice issues.



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Progress

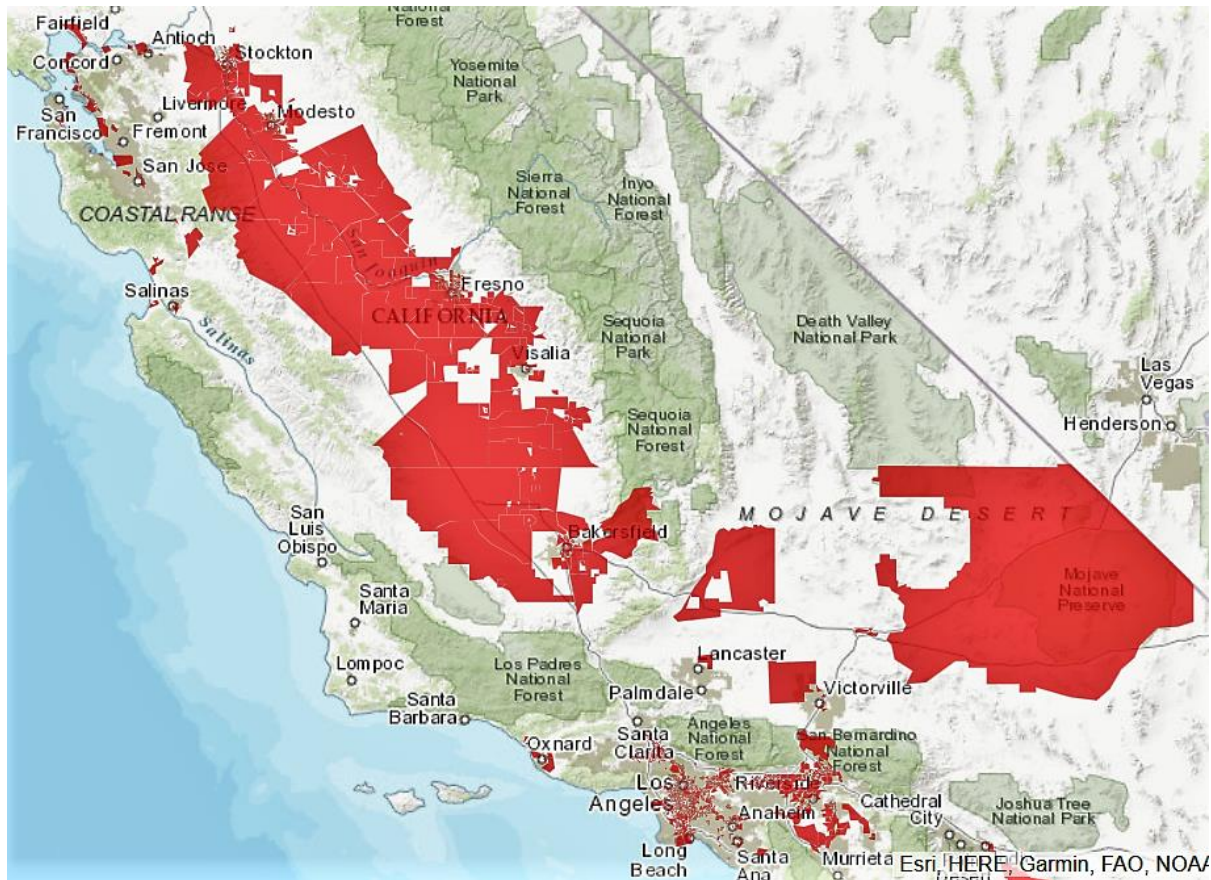
Since 2005, the Center for Climate Protection has promoted Community Choice Energy throughout California, following a “broad” and a “deep” strategy. Broad means supporting all California communities with as-needed consulting, providing resources and information on our website and in our newsletters, original reports, and symposia. Deep means targeted work with field staff and local partners to establish Community Choice in selected, high-priority communities.

Community Choice Energy is a positive disruptive force helping to drive the transformation of the energy system from a centralized fossil and nuclear-based system to a cleaner, more sustainable, decentralized renewable energy based system. CCAs have the statutory authority to initiate and administer innovative policies, programs, and projects to benefit their communities.

At the time of this writing, nine CCAs are operational and serving customers in California, with many more expected to launch service over the coming years. All are delivering greener electricity at overall lower rates than their for-profit competitors. They are initiating innovative programs such as providing incentives for electric vehicles (EVs) and smart-charging infrastructure. EVs address both air quality and climate issues. In this way, CCAs present near-term prospects for air quality improvements and local economic benefits as the transportation system is electrified via CCAs.

Why the Central Valley?

Several factors influenced our decision to work in the Central Valley, including information obtained from [CalEnviroScreen](#), a sophisticated tool developed by the State of California to identify the state's most disadvantaged communities with granularity at the census-tract level, both economically and environmentally. The red areas in the map below are those that are in the 25 percent most disadvantaged category.





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Background

In 2016 we worked in six communities that are among California’s most disadvantaged. These six along with their respective populations are:

Community	Population
Stockton	302,000
Fresno	516,000
Visalia	129,000
County of San Joaquin	716,000 (includes Stockton)
County of Fresno	966,000 (includes Fresno)
County of Tulare	458,000 (includes Visalia)

From an economic perspective, the Central Valley is home to some of the most economically disadvantaged people in California and the nation. From an environmental perspective, the Central Valley suffers from some of the worst air pollution and other environmental impacts from the fossil energy based economy in the state and nation. Climate change spells longer, hotter summers and more drought, among other impacts.

Disadvantaged communities are affected by health disparities from high exposures of carbon dioxide, soot, methane, carbon monoxide, and ozone. Many of these pollutants are associated with cancer, low birth weights, heart attacks, as well as respiratory problems like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. (Mayer, Guillermo, 20 August 2013, "Climate justice bill puts public health front-and-center")

The American Academy of Pediatrics linked climate change with the health of children, urging pediatricians and politicians to work together to solve this crisis and protect children from climate-related threats including natural disasters, heat stress, lower air quality, increased infections, and threats to food and water supplies. Further, they urged the promotion of renewable energy production. Their statement about this is dated October 26, 2015.

In “Climate Change, Vulnerability and Social Justice,” vulnerability is described as the capacity to be wounded from a perturbation or stress, whether environmental or socioeconomic, including susceptibility to harm from climate change. The authors conclude that those who are most vulnerable to climate change deserve special consideration and protective assistance, and that those who will bear the greatest harm should be among the principal architects of solutions. (“Climate Change, Vulnerability and Social Justice,” Kasperson et al, 2001)



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Looking Forward

With continued robust advocacy action by the Center and others, we project the following statewide impacts by 2020 from Community Choice Energy:

- 18 million Californians will be served
- CCA customers will save \$180 million annually on their electricity bills
- 5.5 million tons of greenhouse gas will have been reduced
- About \$6 billion per year in electricity procurement dollars will be shifted from for-profit control to community control

Our report about CCA's statewide impacts is available [here](#).

To substantiate the benefits Community Choice could yield to the businesses and residents of the Central Valley, we commissioned a study, "[Community Choice Energy: What is the Economic Impact of Local Renewable Power Purchasing?](#)". The study found that the Central Valley could enjoy significant economic benefits by establishing CCA and pursuing local renewable energy projects. In fact, by 2024 the region could expect to see the addition of approximately 8,400 jobs and \$845 million in economic activity from 2019 to 2024 were it to provide only 10 percent of the region's electricity needs from local solar procured via CCA.

The Central Valley has largely been left out of the expanding Community Choice movement. While our work in 2016 elevated awareness about Community Choice among elected and community leaders, more work is needed to build on the groundwork we laid to get CCA over the finish line in the Central Valley. As a result of our work in 2016, San Joaquin and Fresno counties are at the early stage of development (yellow).

Status of Community Choice Energy in California, January 2018

