

TVA's Integrated Resource Plan

TVA's Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) lays out five different concept models that run through different economic and environmental scenarios and then overlaying this new document is the TVA mission, federally mandated at its inception in 1933. The mandate which is a classically tall order from the New Deal era, includes providing reliable, low-cost power to its customers, stimulating economic development within the Tennessee River Valley, managing the river system for energy, recreation, economic benefits, promoting technological innovation, and stewardship of natural resources—which has largely come to mean reducing the environmental impacts and emissions of the nation's largest public power company.

Last summer, TVA's Board of Directors attempted to reaffirm part of that mission in 21st century terms by declaring that the institution becomes “one of the nation's leading providers of low-cost and cleaner energy by 2020.” The Board also spelled out the main ways it wants this done, i.e. by “lead(ing) the nation in improving air quality, and lead(ing) the Southeast in increased energy efficiency, and in increased nuclear production.” With that tone set, each of the five potential power-producing strategies was plugged into a scorecard system. A few critical facts have emerged from the draft IRP in terms of preferred strategies:

- First, defining nuclear energy as “clean energy,” puts TVA at odds with environmentalists concerned with unresolved issues of high level radioactive waste disposal. It nevertheless takes advantage of a major existing power-generating asset that emits zero greenhouse gases.
- Second, anywhere from 2,400 to 5,000 megawatts of coal-fired generation capacity will be idled, for the first time in TVA history, to reduce air pollution/greenhouse gas emissions and to avoid retrofitting the smokestacks with expensive new scrubbers to capture toxic coal ash.
- Third, nuclear overtakes coal as the leading energy producer. At least three new nuclear reactors are in the preferred strategies.
- Fourth, energy efficiency and some mix of renewable generation plays an increasingly important role in every future scenario. Best case scenarios meet 8 percent of projected demand with efficiency and another 5 percent with renewables. Greenhouse gas and acid-rain-causing air emissions, as well as mercury emissions, decrease in all of the scenarios.