



Dispatches From The Wild, Weird World Of Humanity And Its Biosphere

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Solar in America



On June 6th, President Biden took executive action of unprecedented and historic scope to boost solar power in America. ([Pictured: a solar "brightfield" at a former Superfund site in Indiana](#)). This started with dodging a

legal/judicial/regulatory "bullet" that in recent months had seemed close to paralyzing American solar installations, and then went much, much further, using all presidential powers available to increase domestic manufacturing of solar panels. As further climate legislation [continues to stall in the Senate](#), this may become a key piece of Biden's climate legacy.

First, the backstory. For the last few months, the US solar industry was paralyzed by a tariff case brought by a tiny (and [kind of shady](#)) company called Auxin Solar, which had formally petitioned the Commerce Department to impose tariffs on solar panels from Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam, as they claimed that Chinese manufacturers were operating through those countries to avoid tariffs against China. This seems arcane, but was actually really, really worrying for a while, with the potential to derail the entire US solar industry. Those four Southeast Asian countries account for 80% of the solar panels imported to the US, and [projections indicated that](#) if Auxin won their tariff case, US solar installations would likely fall by 50% or more in the next few years. And even while waiting for the Commerce Department investigation, manufacturers were starting to halt shipments to the US out of fear that the tariffs would be retroactive. [Here's a great series of articles on the whole mess](#).

But Biden handled it! With the June 6th executive orders, the president [resolved the situation to essentially everyone's satisfaction](#): the investigation into Auxin's claims will continue, but all potential tariffs on solar panels those four countries are waived for at least a two year "bridge period", and it's guaranteed that no tariffs will be made retroactive, so we can keep importing Southeast Asian solar panels without manufacturers fearing they'll be on the hook for more money later. This keeps the solar boom in the US on track! Already, that's great news.

Then, Biden took further action, [invoking the Defense Production Act](#) to boost clean energy technologies, a long-hoped for step. The DPA is a 1950 law originally used to give the President wide-ranging powers to mobilize industry for the Korean War, and when applied to a technology or material it mandates that businesses accept and prioritize contracts on the matter, bans hoarding or price-gouging, expand production at a loss if necessary by Presidential order, and much more-generally fast-tracking the industry on grounds of national security.

[To quote the White House press release](#): "Specifically, the President is authorizing the Department of Energy to use the DPA to rapidly expand American manufacturing of five critical clean energy technologies:

- Solar panel parts like photovoltaic modules and module components;
- Building insulation;
- Heat pumps, which heat and cool buildings super efficiently;
- Equipment for making and using clean electricity-generated fuels, including electrolyzers, fuel cells, and related platinum group metals; and
- Critical power grid infrastructure like transformers."

This is really good! The administration expects that after these new moves,

domestic solar production is now on track to triple by 2024. Previous invocations of the DPA have led to immense growth of American industry: it helped develop domestic aluminum and titanium industries in the 1950s, semiconductor and microelectronics industries in the 1980s, and COVID vaccines when previously invoked by Biden in 2021. This now adds a new tailwind to the already highly dynamic solar industry. "With the new DPA authority, DOE can help strengthen domestic solar, heat pump and grid manufacturing industries while fortifying America's economic security and creating good-paying jobs, and lowering utility costs along the way," [said Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm](#). Superb news!



More Clean Energy News

Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, and Belgium have [signed a multi-decade plan](#) to collaboratively build at least [150 gigawatts \(GW\) of offshore wind in the North Sea by 2050](#). [For context](#), the entire European Union's target is to build 300 GW of new offshore wind by 2050, current EU offshore wind capacity is 16 GW, and [all electricity-generating capacity in the United States in 2021 added up to under 1,200 GW](#). This is a plan to build a *lot* of offshore wind, enough to power a substantial chunk of Europe. Great news!

On May 27, 2022, the G7 countries (the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and the UK) [agreed to](#) "further commit to a goal of achieving predominantly decarbonized electricity sectors by 2035," including "[concrete and timely steps towards the goal of an eventual phase-out of domestic unabated coal power generation](#)" and moving to "rapidly scale up the necessary technologies and policies for the clean energy transition." This has no legal force, but is a strong market and political signal and a heartening indicator of the way the geopolitical winds are blowing!

In the first four months of 2022, pure EVs together with plug-in hybrids accounted for [23% of China's passenger car market](#) (the world's biggest). 1.49 million new EVs and hybrids were sold in China, more than double the number in the same period last year—even while overall car sales decreased 12%! EVs continue to advance, and are already [having big impacts](#): the adoption of non-fossil fuel vehicles avoided the use of 1.5 million barrels of oil per day in 2021, 3.3% of total demand, and that's [projected to rise massively](#)!



Right Whale Buoys.



The [North Atlantic right whale](#) (*Eubalaena glacialis*, a mother and calf pictured) is critically endangered, with less than 370 individuals left. Many have died in recent years after being hit by ships, as their home waters off East Coast North America teem with shipping. Now, the renowned Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute and major shipping company CMA CGM [are working together to deploy robotic buoys](#) that track wild whale sounds in near-real time. The first two buoys will be deployed off Norfolk, Virginia and Savannah,

Georgia, among the busiest ports in the US, to maximize their potential impact. The results are made public and are used by federal authorities to decide when to declare "right whale slow zones," ordering ships to slow down so whales in the area have more time to get out of the way. This is helpful for all whales, but is especially important for North Atlantic right whales, as are slow-moving and spend lots of time on the surface and near coasts, making them highly at risk of ship collisions. "It's a Smokey Bear fire warning, but for whale presence." [said Callie Steffen](#), a scientist at a similar West Coast initiative. This is exactly the sort of clever social-technological innovation that can help humans and wildlife coexist in the Anthropocene! Great work.

The Weekly Anthropocene

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