

# How Trump's executive orders on climate could impact California

By [Julie Johnson](#), Reporter Jan 22, 2025

[President Donald Trump's](#) sweeping agenda to reverse national policies combating global warming has [taken direct aim at climate-leading California](#).

In a series of executive orders, the Trump administration signaled it would promote the fossil fuel industry and curtail renewable and clean energy programs, on the heels of the [hottest year on record](#). Trump also targeted environmental protections, even those for a [tiny fish in San Francisco Bay](#).

The Trump administration said it aimed to “promote true consumer choice” and “market competition,” according to the orders.

“Trump has declared war on climate policy and climate action,” said Daniel Farber, a professor at UC Berkeley’s center for law, energy and the environment.

California relies on federal regulations, contracts and funding to advance its ambitious and influential climate policies, especially the state’s push to promote electric vehicles in order to slash planet-warming gases.

Executive orders direct federal agencies to make certain policy changes. But they are not laws, often take time to implement and must withstand legal challenges.

Here is an overview of some executive orders that might impact Californians.

## Electric vehicles

The Trump administration could undermine California’s flagship policy to reduce greenhouse gases generated by the transportation sector, which is the largest source of planet-warming emissions.

California has banned the sale of new combustion engine vehicles in the state starting in 2035 (drivers can continue buying used gasoline cars and driving ones they already own), which is a key component of its clean transportation policies.

But the state’s legal authority to do so depends on a waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, [which the Biden Administration granted in December](#).

The Trump administration on Monday directed the agency to rescind it, and California is expected to launch a lengthy legal battle in response. The administration has also set out to cut

federal tax credits for electric vehicle purchases and other federal grants and incentives like those to expand EV chargers.

UC Berkeley energy economist Severin Borenstein said one main question with all the orders, including electric vehicles, is to what degree the Trump administration will honor existing contracts and regulations.

“A big question is: ‘How much is Trump going to operate within the law?’ We don’t know,” Borenstein said.

Daniel Sperling, director of the Institute of Transportation Studies at UC Davis, said that while the Trump administration’s policies, including this order, could slow the pace of electric vehicle adoption, other factors could intervene. For one, the electric vehicle market is growing globally, Sperling said.

Automakers know “he’s only (in the White House) for four years” and political “whipsawing” is bad for business, Sperling said.

“A lot of these companies are committed to this electric vehicle transition — it’s just a matter of how fast,” Sperling said.

Borenstein said that Trump’s plans to cancel financial incentives could slow the electric vehicle market. And he is skeptical that Gov. Gavin Newsom will follow through with his [proposal to add state tax incentives](#) in place of federal ones, given competing demands on the state budget.

“If people think undermining incentives will have no effect on the market, that’s a false hope,” he said. “People make decisions based on money.”

## Water

Trump has attacked California water policies as problematic — most recently [related to L.A. wildfires](#) — and on Monday he directed federal agencies to “route more water from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta to other parts of the state for use by the people there who desperately need a reliable water supply.”

The order, titled “Putting people over fish,” targeted federal protections for the Delta smelt and other species of fish. As a result of the protections, according to the order, an “enormous water supply flows wastefully into the Pacific Ocean.”

Scott Artis, executive director of the Golden State Salmon Association, called the Trump Administration’s water policy, which originated during his first term as president, “a salmon extinction plan.”

California’s salmon runs are both economic drivers and symbolic of water ecosystem health, but the populations have plummeted in recent years, leading the state to close both the 2023 and 2024 fishing seasons.

## Wind

The administration also issued a broad executive order pausing the development of wind power, both wind farms on federal lands and turbines floating or anchored offshore in the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

Trump's Monday order temporarily halted leases, permits and loans for wind energy projects and directed federal agencies to reassess both environmental impacts and economic costs to surrounding areas.

The order could impact two major offshore wind projects in California, off the coasts of Humboldt and San Luis Obispo counties.

The federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management awarded five leases to companies developing offshore wind in California in 2022, and it is unclear whether the Trump administration intends to honor them. The order stated that "nothing in this withdrawal affects rights under existing leases" but then it directs agencies to conduct "a comprehensive review of the ecological, economic, and environmental necessity of terminating or amending any existing wind energy leases, identifying any legal bases for such removal."

California's offshore wind projects are in their early phases. The industry is still designing new types of turbines to float in California's deep coastal waters, and the state estimated it would need to build at least two dozen new ports to support coastal wind farms.

Trump has been critical of wind power, particularly since 2006 when he began battling with the Scottish government over a planned wind farm near Aberdeenshire where Trump wished to build a golf course, [according to the Washington Post](#). He ultimately lost his legal battle and was ordered to pay the Scottish government's legal fees.

## Oil and gas

As the Trump administration aimed to shrink wind power, the president set out to expand the oil and gas industry and declared "a national energy emergency."

Trump directed the government to open new lands and waters in Alaska and elsewhere for drilling and mining. He ordered agencies to expedite oil and gas projects, including infrastructure development and environmental reviews.

Borenstein said that energy prices — which are currently not high — "are not very favorable for new exploration," which could dull any expansion from the policy shift. But he said that "pulling the rug out of wind" and other renewable energy sources will slow innovation and the shift away from fossil fuel energy supplies.

"Trump is going to slow down the energy transition," Borenstein said.

# Paris Agreement

Trump is again pulling the United States out of the landmark global pact among countries to reduce planet-warming gases, which he also did in his first term.

The 2015 Paris Agreement is a voluntary pact among most of the world's countries to enact policies to help keep global temperatures from warming more than 2.7 degrees Fahrenheit (1.5 degrees Celsius) above pre-industrial levels — a goal scientists believe to be vital but increasingly fear the world will blow past.

By withdrawing, the United States joins Iran, Libya and Yemen as the four nations not part of the pact. Nearly 200 countries have signed and enacted the agreement, including North Korea and Russia.

Sperling of UC Davis said that while no other country followed Trump's lead during his first administration when the United States withdrew, this time could be different. Sperling said that if more countries withdraw, that could have a larger impact on the urgent need to slash greenhouse gas emissions and limit planet warming to prevent worsening storms, wildfires and flooding.

“Other countries might think, ‘Maybe we should not make it a top priority, either,’” Sperling said.