

# Survey shows strong support for nuclear power in NW Colorado

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A new survey suggests there is strong support for nuclear power in far-northwest Colorado, where economic development officials are focused on how to make up for the losses in jobs and tax revenues in coming years as a coal-fired power plant in the Craig area closes.

The survey was conducted by the Northwest Colorado Energy Initiative, which operates under the purview of Associated Governments of Northwest Colorado.

Nearly 61% of Northwest Colorado respondents, meaning for the survey's purposes residents of Moffat, Routt and Rio Blanco counties, said they strongly favor the use of nuclear energy as one way to provide electricity for the nation. A combined 88.6% from that region either strongly or somewhat favor its use.

That compares to 31.6% who strongly favor its use, and a combined 76.8% who strongly or somewhat favor its use, in a similar national poll.

Nathan Perry, a Colorado Mesa University economics professor who prepared a report on the survey's findings with the help of Dillon Chapman, an economic research assistant at CMU, wrote in the report that the survey's motivation is the upcoming retirement of a coal-fired power plant in Craig.

The plant, operated by Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association, is scheduled to close by the start of 2028. Two local mines that supply the plant with coal also will be ending operations as they lose their sole customer.

"The transition away from coal has led to much research on how to replace coal's economic activity in the region. There is significant energy infrastructure in Craig that could accommodate a small nuclear reactor in place of the coal fired power plant, which makes nuclear power a potential strategy. This study aims to provide data that will help the region, stakeholders, and policy makers understand the perceptions and interest in nuclear power in the region," Perry's report says.

Nearly 59% of respondents in the three counties said they strongly favor the use of

nuclear power as a means to provide power in Northwest Colorado.

The Northwest Colorado Energy Initiative was created to guide the region through its energy transition, identify suitable alternatives to coal and prepare for an upcoming feasibility study. It partnered with Bisconti Research, Inc., which works in public opinion and communications research, and with CMU's Unconventional Energy Center on development and analysis of the survey.

The survey was completed online by participants who were made aware of it via mass media, social media and other means. It was completed by 425 Colorado respondents, with the majority being from Moffat, Routt and Rio Blanco counties and about 42% from elsewhere in the state.

The survey also evaluated the level of knowledge about nuclear when it comes to things such as safety and cost.

"In general, Northwest Colorado residents were more strongly favorable to nuclear energy than the general U.S. public and much more knowledgeable on the subject. The difference could be because Northwest Colorado respondents have heard more about the topic from ongoing discussions of options to replace the coal plant," he wrote.

Perry said at the end of his introduction to the survey results, "The goal of this survey is to establish a baseline the Northwest Colorado region's knowledge and understanding of various energy types. After this survey, the results will lead to further actions surrounding energy education and provide the space for fact-based discussions regarding the future of Northwest Colorado's economic development."

According to media reports in recent days, Tri-State has agreed to provide Craig and Moffat County as much as \$70 million in aid in coming years for economic development and to offset lost property tax revenues. The Colorado Sun reported that Tri-State also agreed to locate a natural-gas-fired power plant to Moffat County and transfer a water storage right to the county.