CREATION CARE GREEN TIPS: JULY 2021
Theme: Xcel Energy and the shift away from fossil fuels

1. Minnesota Power and Xcel Energy (Minnesota's largest utility) have operated fossil-fuel power plants for decades, generating **millions of tons of carbon pollution** that have played a part in making **Minnesota one of the fastest-warming states.** In addition, **thousands of tons of sulfur dioxide and mercury** have polluted Minnesota's lakes and rivers, and have triggered respiratory illnesses. Xcel has said it is going to be **100% carbon free by 2050**, and has converted major coal plants in Minneapolis and St. Paul to **natural gas, often considered a "bridge" fossil fuel** between coal and renewables. Yet Xcel's **proposed new gas plant in Becker has just been dropped** after research from their own studies showed that cheaper renewable energy would make the plant a "stranded asset" (unable to capitalize on a shuttered plant) long before its 40-year lifespan plays out. The science is clear on climate change as well as on the economics of energy production.

2. After Xcel dropped its plans to build a big natural gas plant in Becker, MN that would have cost roughly $800 million, the company now plans to build two smaller natural gas plants (in SW MN and ND) costing less than half of the planned Becker plant. The two smaller plants will **operate sporadically to even out renewable power production**, while the planned Becker plant would have run nearly continuously, emitting far more greenhouse gases. Xcel also plans to **increase its wind and solar-power capacity by 27% over the next decade,** planning a $575 million **solar plant in Becker that is four times larger than the state's current largest solar array.** In addition, the company plans to **build significant energy-storage facilities** in Minnesota in an effort to **bolster grid reliability.**

3. According to The Institute for Local Self-Reliance, **solar energy and battery storage** are rapidly becoming **competitive alternatives** to natural gas power plants. Similar results are cited by Xcel Energy's Colorado division, showing that **gas plants are a costlier way to produce electricity than wind and solar.** Research at the Rocky Mountain Institute has found that **90% of proposed gas plants are likely to be uncompetitive by 2035,** while **energy grid modeling** from the Citizens Utility Board, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy, and Fresh Energy has shown several alternatives to Xcel Energy's proposed (now dropped) gas plant that will **cost less and pollute less.** With CO2 levels at their **highest level in 4,000,000 years,** unnecessary new gas plants will not help us avoid the worst impacts of climate change.

4. Minnesota's Clean Energy law states that in order to build a new fossil fuel power plant in Minnesota, it must be shown that **renewable energy alternatives** are not in the public interest. Minnesota's laws also allow utilities to "pass through" the power plants' fuel costs to customers, at the same time allowing shareholders to collect their profits shortly after a plant begins operation. That means customers will be **paying for fossil fuel energy for decades, at whatever market price is demanded.** With research from a broad range of groups showing that rapidly decreasing costs of renewable energy sources will make **new fossil fuel plants obsolete before they recoup costs,** the state's utilities will have to ask the Minnesota's five-member Public Utilities commission (PUC) to grant them approval to recover costs from their customers. The science of climate change is clear and so are the economics of fossil fuels.

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