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Wind has almost edged out coal for No. 2 position in Texas

Wind energy generated 20 percent of the electricity used in Texas last year, nearly edging out coal as the state's second leading source of power, according to new data from the state grid manager the Electric Reliability Council of Texas. Coal-fired plants generated 20.3 percent of power in Texas last year, down from nearly 25 percent in 2018, according to ERCOT. Meanwhile, wind's share of generation climbed from 18.5 percent in 2018.

Wind energy will likely overtake coal this year, reflecting a continued decline in coal-fired generation as natural gas prices stay low and more wind projects are in the pipeline, said Ed Hirs, an energy economist at the University of Houston. More batteries on the grid will also give wind power a boost, allowing generators to store the power for periods when wind isn't blowing. The key is for wind generators to build enough capacity to meet peak demand, especially along the Texas Gulf Coast where the wind blows during the afternoons when demand for power is at its highest, he said. "Then we can see wind finish the job and push coal off the grid," said Hirs.

Power producers in Texas have projects in the pipeline with combined generation capacity of nearly 112,000 megawatts, according to ERCOT. While many of the projects won't get built, the report is an indication of what is in the pipeline in various stages of development. At the moment, 27 percent of the planned projects — or about 30,000 megawatts — are wind-related generation, according to ERCOT. None are coal. Solar energy, a power source that generated just 1 percent of the electricity used in Texas last year, is growing the fastest. New solar projects represent nearly 61 percent of the planned expansions, amounting to about an extra 68,000 megawatts of capacity, according to ERCOT. Nearly 7 percent of the proposed generation projects, about 8,000 megawatts of power, is expected to come from batteries, according to ERCOT. Natural gas is the most common source of electricity generation in Texas, accounting for 47.3 percent of power produced last year. But it's not on the same rapid growth trajectory as solar and wind.