Spring 2022: Conservation Voters of South Carolina Clean Energy Internship

Claire Windsor

University of South Carolina, Department of Geography, GEOG 595

ABOUT CVSC

CVSC is the political voice of the conservation community for SC. They endorse pro-environment candidates, support their campaigns, help them craft environmental legislation, and hold them accountable with conservation scores. For 2021-2022, CVSC’s clean energy agenda prioritizes energy poverty and justice, implementation of the Energy Freedom Act, and pending legislation on energy market reform and residential solar taxes.

BACKGROUND: THE PROBLEM

Combatting climate change in South Carolina requires a rapid and sustainable transition to renewable sources for energy generation. In the United States, the electricity sector alone accounts for 25% of greenhouse gas emissions, with about 62% of electricity generation derived from burning of fossil fuels. To lower greenhouse emissions from the energy sector, government level action must facilitate renewable energy and energy efficiency innovations and policies. Energy in South Carolina follows a highly regulated or monopolized structure with two major investor owned utilities (IOUs), Duke Energy and Dominion Energy, as well as the state-owned Santee Cooper, cooperatives, and municipal utilities. Utilities in South Carolina are still 75% reliant of fossil fuel generation and state legislators and regulators still favor fossil fuels. However, they are becoming increasingly scrutinious of utility decisions and the impact on the ratepayer. Additionally, the state has great economic potential for clean energy as 24% of utility generation is renewably sourced. As a result, CVSC continues to educate the public and state politics to help advance a clean energy future for the state.

TASKS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In my role as a clean energy intern for Conservation Voters, I am focused on halting fossil fuel investments and advancing clean energy. I make sure that policymakers are aware of the environmental, social, and economic risks born by utility investments in natural gas plants and fossil fuels more broadly, alongside the growing benefits of clean energy sources. I am focused on direct and indirect advocacy with South Carolina lawmakers and citizens to help educate the public on energy issues and to prepare voters and political leaders for the future clean energy transition. I conduct research on various topics such as regulatory intervention, the effectiveness of competitive procurement for clean energy, and natural gas price volatility. I have created social media posts, newsletter content, and informational ‘one-pagers’. I work with our clean energy team to conduct research in support of our campaign messages. By attending weekly meetings and webinars about my research topics, I have become well educated on SC-specific issues related to renewable energy, as well as broader developments in other states.

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TAKEAWAYS

As a result of my internship, I have improved upon my advocacy and research skills within the field of energy regulation and clean-energy politics. While applying my previous energy knowledge and reconnecting with the SC network of energy specialists, I furthered my professional experiences while also continuing my personal passion for climate change policy innovations. Despite the challenges of remote work, I improved upon my collaboration and communication skills to feel more connected in my work. As I continue with this work into the summer, I am excited to discover and promote political solutions for SC’s future leadership in advancing clean energy and mitigating climate change.

SOURCES