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No cause to extend Diablo's life

Our chapter of the Sierra Club is located in the same county as Diablo Canyon, hence we are very familiar with issues involving the power plant. It is troubling to note that the proposed legislation to extend the life of Diablo Canyon, per the L.A. Times, is based on the fact that “The governor said he started thinking about delaying the closure in August 2020, when California experienced its first rolling blackouts in nearly two decades during a severe heat wave.”

Aside from the fact that the Aug. 2020 blackouts resulted not from a shortage of energy but from a software problem that caused CAISO to allow the export of energy out of state during a heat wave, most power outages are caused by problems at the distribution level “ by problems with power lines and transformers “ not at power plants. Further, nuclear power plants are not designed to function as peaker plants and cannot be used for that purpose when the grid is under stress.

Nor has Diablo provided the allegedly guaranteed uninterrupted baseload power it is supposed to. Its™s main generator failed and was replaced in 2019, then failed again in 2020, working 30% of that year -- a harbinger of a future of both rising repair costs and unreliable power.

In “Nuclear Power in California,” a 2005 status report from the California Energy Commission, the question was posed: "What would happen were [Diablo Canyon and San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station] to shut down? The California ISO has studied this question and found that SONGS appears to provide substantial grid reliability benefits as a result of its location between the SCE and SDG&E service territories, and that significant transmission projects would consequently need to be undertaken if SONGS were shut down. It found that Diablo Canyon, on the other hand, does not provide much in the way of grid reliability benefits. (CAISO 1999; CAISO 2000).”

The CEC and CAISO are on record affirming a finding that the Sierra Club report “Meeting California™s Electricity Needs Without San Onofre or Diablo Canyon Nuclear Power Plants,” reaffirmed in 2013, a finding reaffirmed again this year in a study by GridLab, Telos Energy and Energy Innovation: The state can maintain grid reliability without Diablo Canyon.

As Diablo™s \$1 billion in annual above-market costs, multiplied by the potential years of extended life from 2025-2035 (minus inflation), comes to a total cost of over \$10 billion, we join with others in asking why California is proposing to gift PG&E with a “forgivable” \$1.4 billion loan instead of spending \$1.4 billion over the next three years on energy efficiency and conservation programs, commensurate with the state™s loading order.

We have commented elsewhere on the extremely inadvisable truncated license extension process and the proposed suspension of CEQA and the California Coastal Act, sidelining the resource agencies tasked with analyzing and mitigating impacts to the environment and California's coastal resources.

The position of the Governor's office that extending Diablo's life "is a last resort when we look at every tool that's available to ensure that we retain reliability in the course of our energy transition" misstates the case. Keeping Diablo operating past the scheduled expiration of its current license is not a last resort; it is the wrong solution to the problem.