



# Don't Be Misled About Renewable Energy Growth

February 12, 2012 Posted by Craig Shields under Renewables - Science

A reader waxed enthusiastic, in a kindhearted attempt to provide encouragement for me in my discussions at the Cato Institute next week. In particular, he points to the DoE "[Monthly Energy Report](#)," and notes:

*Renewable energy sources have now surpassed nuclear in the U.S. and are closing in on others. The trend is clear- renewables are growing rapidly for all kinds of reasons in [your linked article](#). Jobs in America will grow, too, when the energy sources used are 'home-grown'. Also, as you probably already know, wind and solar (in some areas) are already at parity with fossil fuels.*

There is some encouraging news, but I caution this reader and all others to keep this in perspective. The vast majority of what the DoE means by "renewable energy" is hydroelectric dams. While there is no doubt that these should be included in the total, they are not a favorable technology for expansion to meet growing load or to phase out fossil fuels. The technologies that most people think of when they say "renewables" (solar, wind, geothermal, biomass, and other more benign forms of hydro) represent about 2% of energy consumption in the U.S., a figure that's not growing quickly.

And, while it's true that the cost of wind is close to parity with "clean" coal, wind is intermittent, and thus storage solutions, perhaps [synthetic fuels](#), will eventually need to be implemented if we are to integrate large amounts. Trust me, I want this to happen as much as anyone, but there are some significant hurdles – some of them naturally occurring, others man-made – that need to be crossed before we get there.