

Electricity Generating Capacity in Montana by Fuel, 1970-2021

Generating capacity is the maximum output an electricity generator can physically produce, or its “nameplate capacity,” measured in megawatts (MW). Montana’s electricity supply capacity was dominated by hydroelectric power until the mid-1970s. The first large hydroelectric plants were built on the Missouri River in the early 1900s to power the mining industry. Since then, total electricity capacity in Montana has increased and diversified. By the mid-1980s coal power matched hydro capacity, mostly from Colstrip. In 2020, that changed when coal generating capacity declined with the closure of Colstrip Units 1 & 2. Natural gas, wind, petroleum coke, solar and biomass electricity resources round out today’s mix, with wind increasing at the quickest pace.

