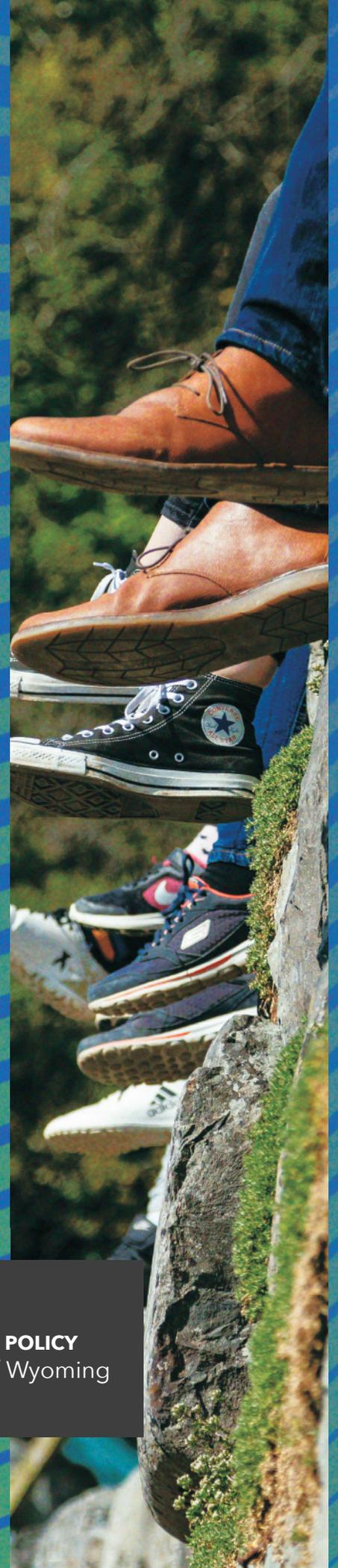




School of Energy Resources  
Center for Energy Regulation  
& Policy Analysis

# Defining Environmental Justice: WHAT IT MEANS TO ENERGY COMMUNITIES



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## WHAT THE ARTICLE IS ABOUT

The article examines the challenges of implementing a one-size-fits-all framework of environmental justice, particularly for rural energy states like Wyoming. The article analyzes potential issues within the Biden Administration's Justice40 Initiative, under which 40% of overall benefits from certain federal funding must flow to "disadvantaged communities" with an ultimate end-goal of promoting environmental justice. Yet, terms such as "Environmental Justice" and "Disadvantaged Communities" are amorphous, place-specific, and not easily pinned down within a single top-down framework. Particularly in states such as Wyoming that innately rely on energy for tax revenue and jobs, how do stakeholders in priority energy communities make an environmental justice in favor of their communities hosting a large-scale industrial project?

Grounding its analysis, the article provides historical context for environmental justice and outlines its intended function to prevent disproportionate harm to already marginalized communities near energy development and waste disposal sites. Additionally, the article highlights the injustice of those communities not having a voice or representation in conversations about where projects and/or waste from said projects are sited.

Finally, the article then examines the position of "energy communities" within predominant environmental justice frameworks. Amidst a push to move away from fossil-based fuels to less carbon-intensive forms of energy, "energy communities" which currently host coal, oil, or natural gas operations, are at risk of becoming severely disadvantaged as a result of the pressures to decarbonize the energy sector. However, current mechanisms (namely GIS screening tools) may be insufficient in identifying and ensuring new sources of revenue target these communities.

## WHY THIS STUDY WAS NEEDED

The overview assists energy communities with identifying the disconnect between current screening tools and will help to better inform conversations with federal entities seeking to enforce environmental justice requirements, so a clear and equitable framework can be established for all communities involved with past and future large-scale energy development projects.

## WHAT THE AUTHOR CONCLUDES

The author concludes that current screening and mapping tools for identifying environmental justice communities are inadequate and do not provide a full picture of a communities' relationship with energy. Additionally, the author challenges the current notion that communities sited next to energy development sites are only harmed and urges conversations moving forward to consider that many communities are actually in favor of industrial-scale energy development that could bring benefits to those communities.



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