The most enthusiastic backers of wind and solar power from decades past overestimated how fast the energy system would shift to renewables. But mainstream energy analysts have consistently underestimated wind and solar’s potential.

The U.S. Energy Information Administration’s Annual Energy Outlook from 1979 to 2015 included forecasts of the share of the electric power output due to renewable sources (including hydro) out to 2020. These range from 8.1 percent to 15.6 percent. Even as wind power began in gain greater market penetration in the 2010s, the EIA forecast that it would stall rather than surge, and government energy experts completely missed the rapid increase in photovoltaic solar power until the very last few years.

For 2020, the most recent year with complete data, the share of all renewables was 19.7 percent.

**MISSING THE MARK ON RENEWABLES**

BY THE NUMBERS:

The growth in wind and solar has far outstripped sober, mainstream forecasts.

**Forecasts for Renewable Electricity Share in 2020**

*Energy Information Administration Annual Energy Outlook*

- **1979:** 14.4 percent
- **2001:** 8.1 percent
- **2005:** 8.5 percent
- **2010:** 15.1 percent
- **2015:** 15.6 percent
- **Actual data 2020:** 19.7 percent