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<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702303962304577508491447591430.html>

Mutual Funds: Big Bets on the Energy Boom

It used to rank up there with death and taxes—the certainty of the rising price and eventual disappearance of fossil fuels. For a generation and beyond, images of oil dependency were drummed into the American psyche—in the form of long lines at gas stations, secretive overseas oil barons and screaming headlines about \$100-a-barrel crude.

Our spending and investing alike have reflected our energy anxiety. Americans have bought 1.6 million hybrid cars since 2007, putting up with higher sticker prices in order to reduce trips to the pump. Almost every community has homes that sport shiny solar panels. And many of us have hedged our portfolios to cope with fuel fear: **Exxon Mobil** [XOM -0.74%](#) (XOM) is one of the most widely owned stocks in America, but in 2008, shares in **First Solar** [FSLR -1.09%](#) (FSLR) cost three times as much as the petroleum giant's.

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Green Energy

Despite the ecological arguments in their favor, solar and wind power have almost always been more expensive than fossil fuels, and recent trends have widened that gap—from dwindling tax incentives to a solar-panel tariff war between the U.S. and China. All these headwinds are driving investors away: According to Lipper, assets held in alternative-energy mutual funds have fallen by two-thirds since 2009.

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Fund to Watch: The **PowerShares WilderHill Progressive Energy** [PUW -1.50%](#) ETF (PUW) shows the benefits of defining "green" broadly: With holdings ranging from gas firm **Southwestern Energy** [SWN +1.36%](#) (SWN) to industrial firms like **Johnson Controls** [JCI -4.08%](#) (JCI), which makes a key component of hybrid engines, the ETF is one of the best performers in the energy equity category, up 5% so far this year.