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Earth-First Funds Are Soaring

Funds with sustainability in mind are super popular these days; these six are ready to deliver returns.

Green stocks weren't the only investments that had a scorching year. Funds that invest with sustainability in mind sizzled, too. Some posted triple-digit returns over the past 12 months. Investors followed the money and poured more than \$50 billion in 2020 into sustainable funds—mutual funds and exchange-traded funds that have a sustainability objective or that use environmental, social and governance measures as binding criteria for picking securities. That's more than double the record set in 2019. And it represents 24% of overall inflows into U.S. stock and bond funds for the year.

In other words, sustainable investing hasn't just arrived; it's taking over.

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Invesco WilderHill Clean Energy ETF ([PBW](#), 0.70%) It may look as if we're chasing returns by picking WilderHill Clean Energy, which is up 237% over the past 12 months. But we had already added the fund to the Kiplinger ETF 20, the list of our favorite ETFs, last year.

Investors embraced alternative-energy stocks big-time in 2020, and that's WilderHill's focus. It tracks an index of companies that focus on green and renewable energy sources (wind, solar, hydro, geothermal and biofuel), as well as companies involved in energy storage, clean energy conversion, power delivery and conservation.

Given the strong green rally, some stocks in the fund have posted huge returns. At least seven of the fund's 56 holdings climbed more than 1,000% in price over the past year, including FuelCell Energy. But volatility works both ways, and the ride with this fund can get bumpy. Since inception, the ETF has been more than twice as volatile as the S&P 500 as measured by standard deviation.

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