

News

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Report: Wind project better than strip mining

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 [Coal River Mountain economic benefits report](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- A wind-power production facility along the ridges of Coal River Mountain would provide more jobs and tax revenues than a mountaintop removal operation planned by Massey Energy, according to a new economic impact report released today.

Strip-mining the area will do more harm than good for local communities, if environmental damage and health effects are taken into account, according to the report prepared for the group Coal River Mountain Watch.

Mining the area could produce nearly 200 direct jobs and several hundred more spin-off positions. But those jobs would disappear when the coal is mined out in about 17 years, according to the report prepared by Downstream Strategies, a Morgantown-based environmental consulting firm.

Construction of a windmill operation would generate more than 275 temporary construction jobs, but then create 40 direct and more than 30 indirect jobs that could essentially last indefinitely, according to the report.

"After this construction phase, mountaintop removal jobs will surpass local industry wind scenario jobs for a short time," the report concludes. "Then, only eight years after the mountaintop removal mines close and in all successive years, the cumulative number of wind-related jobs will exceed mountaintop removal jobs."

Downstream Strategies President Evan Hansen and other study authors compared the "cumulative jobs" from the competing proposals. Each year that a job exists, it counts as one cumulative job. So 10 jobs that exist for 10 years amount to 100 cumulative jobs.

In the case of the wind project, the proposal would create far more cumulative jobs over a long period of time. Going out 100 years, the windmill operation would generate 28 percent more cumulative jobs than the mountaintop removal proposal, the new report found.

And if a local industry could sprout up to build wind turbines, towers and blades, it would surpass the mining operation's cumulative job creation by 2033. By 2113, the wind industry could create three times more cumulative jobs than the mountaintop removal mine, the study found.

"This report confirms what we've been saying all along: That developing a wind farm on Coal River Mountain is the best way to diversify the local economy," said Lorelei Scarbro, a resident and community organizer for the wind campaign. "It would provide Raleigh County with additional and much needed funds for stimulating new economic development and creating new jobs for the area surrounding Coal River Mountain."

Citizen groups are promoting construction of 220 2-megawatt wind turbines on Coal River Mountain ridges. A wind study, funded by North Carolina-based Appalachian Voices, concluded the spot is a good location for a wind farm. The project, Whitesville-based Coal River Mountain Watch says, would create enough wind power to "keep the lights on" for 150,000 homes "while preserving the mountain for future economic and community benefits."

But Richmond, Va.-based Massey Energy holds two strip mine permits and is seeking two others, for a total mine area of more than 6,000 acres. Massey officials say that if citizen groups want to wind farm in Southern West Virginia, they should buy or lease property and develop the project themselves.

Coal River Mountain Watch hired Downstream Strategies to study the "starkly different choices" for economic development of the region. Citizen groups planned two press conferences today in Beckley and Charleston to release the results. Citizen groups have also been encouraging Gov. Joe Manchin to support the wind facility, but the governor has declined.

Among other findings, the study concluded that the wind facility would provide more than \$1.7 million in annual property taxes to Raleigh County. By comparison, the report said, coal severance taxes from the mining operation would provide only \$36,000 a year.

The study estimated that the mountaintop removal mine would cost the community \$30.5 million per year in excess deaths from mining-related pollution, as well as \$36 million per year in water pollution, harm to fish and wildlife, and damage to land and buildings.

"Even without comparing it to the wind scenarios, the mountaintop removal scenario for Coal River Mountain -- while economically more beneficial for private landholders and the coal-mining company -- is not defensible from the perspective of Raleigh County citizens," Hansen said. "The conclusions of our report confirm that a wind farm would produce great economic benefits to the citizens of Raleigh County, particularly when health and environmental externalities are included in the analysis."

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