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Report Analyzes Kentucky's Untapped Renewable Energy Potential

By [ERICA PETERSON](#) (@PEOPLE/ERICA-PETERSON)

A new analysis of Kentucky's energy potential shows renewable sources could provide more than a third of the state's energy by 2025. It points to several renewable sources—including solar, hydro and biomass—that aren't being tapped to their full potential.

The report (http://www.downstreamstrategies.com/documents/reports_publication_DS_ky_distrib_energy_opportunities.pdf) was commissioned by the [Kentucky Sustainable Energy Alliance](#) (<http://www.kysea.org/>) and written by West Virginia-based environmental consulting firm [Downstream Strategies](#) (<http://www.downstreamstrategies.com>). More than 90 percent of Kentucky's electricity is still generated from coal, and lead author Rory McIlmoil says it makes economic sense for the state to diversify

"Particularly for Kentucky's electricity consumers, such as businesses, consumers and residents, the rise in energy prices—especially as that increase continues—it's going to have a significant impact on Kentucky's economy," McIlmoil said.

The price of coal has been steadily rising, and that's resulted in Kentucky electricity rates that are 56 percent higher than they were in 2000. The report estimates that renewable energy standards would spur development. Earlier this year, the Kentucky General Assembly failed to pass the Clean Energy Opportunity Act, which would have mandated 12.5 percent of the state's energy come from renewable sources by 2022. Most states have some sort of renewable energy standard, including neighboring Ohio.

With incentives, up to 12 percent of the state's energy could be produced just by recycling waste heat at industrial sites. This is already being done at some plants around the state. The report also stresses Kentucky's solar potential, and estimates that another 9 percent could come from solar hot water systems and 6 percent from photovoltaic cells. When it comes to solar development, the report argues Kentucky is lagging far behind its neighbors:

Using solar photovoltaic electricity as an example, Kentucky's solar resource is roughly equal to that of other Appalachian states, many of which have made great strides in installing distributed solar photovoltaics in recent years. Through 2010, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland had developed approximately 55, 21, and 11 megawatts of solar, respectively. By comparison, total installed capacity in Kentucky was 0.2 megawatts. The primary reason for this difference is that the other three states have enacted mandatory renewable energy portfolio standards and created solar renewable energy credit markets by requiring a certain percentage of electricity generation to come from solar photovoltaic installations. Tennessee does not have a portfolio standard but has strong utility incentive programs provided through the Tennessee Valley Authority.

Coal will be a part of Kentucky's energy portfolio for years to come, but according to the data presented by McIlmoil and his colleagues, a mix of different renewable sources are

feasible and economic for Kentucky to diversify its energy generation.

[Click here to read the entire report. \(http://www.downstreamstrategies.com/documents/reports_publication/DS_ky_distrib_energy_opportunities.pdf\)](http://www.downstreamstrategies.com/documents/reports_publication/DS_ky_distrib_energy_opportunities.pdf)

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