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Gazette editorial: A solar future in WV?

April 23, 2017

MozBar

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The largest solar energy farm in Appalachia is being planned for abandoned mountaintop mines near Pikeville, Kentucky, a few miles from the West Virginia border.

Berkeley Energy Group teamed up with EDF Renewable Energy to study how to use worthless, decapitated, flattened hilltops to reap free electrical power from the sun.



AP file photo



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“We have already extracted the coal from this area,” Berkeley executive Ryan Johns said — and now Berkeley wants to switch to a different type of energy, to put jobless miners back to work.

West Virginia leaders should watch this project closely, because it could offer bright prospects for the Mountain State.

Last month, Downstream Strategies, of Morgantown, reported West Virginia has 1,479 “degraded” sites — mostly old mountaintop mines and industry-polluted “brownfields” — that would be ideal locations for solar farms.

West Virginia University engineer Dimitris Korakakis pointed out West Virginia gets almost as much daily sunshine as Florida does, so it makes sense to take advantage of free solar energy.

Last year, business advocate Howard Swint suggested the huge Hobet mine south of Charleston could become a solar site. West Virginia has many similar cut-off mountains.

The coal industry in southern counties continues to retreat. West Virginia's coal production fell from 182 million tons in 1997 to just 87.6 million last year and is mined with fewer workers.

Despite loud promises from politicians, King Coal never will return to heyday times. Instead of waiting for an impossible comeback, West Virginia leaders should find dynamic new uses for the decapitated mountaintops the coal industry left behind.

AP Top 25 Poll

Poll Released: Mar 14

RANK	TEAM	PV RANK
1	Villanova (59)	2
2	Gonzaga (6)	4
3	Kansas	1
4	Arizona	7
5	North Carolina	6

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