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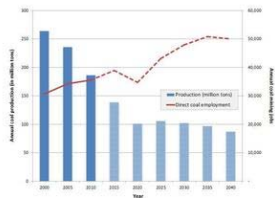
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## Report: WV Coal Production Will Fall, but Employment Will Rise

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CHARLESTON, W.Va. - For the next two decades, more miners will be digging less coal in West Virginia, according to an [in-depth report](#).

Morgantown consulting firm Downstream Strategies analyzed federal and other figures and pins the cause on thinner coal seams and, to a lesser degree, cheap natural gas. By 2040, the report said, central Appalachian coal production will be about a third of where it was at its 1997 peak.

Even so, Downstream president Evan Hansen said employment actually will rise.

"It takes more miners to produce a ton of coal," he said. "Generally that's because the thickest, most easily accessible coal seams are being mined out."

According to a new report, central Appalachian coal production is down and will keep falling, but mine jobs will rise. CHART by Downstream Strategies, based on federal and other figures.

Both production levels and per-miner productivity already have fallen a great deal in the past decade, Hansen said, adding that he expects that trend to continue.

The industry attacks what it calls a "war on coal" by regulators, but Hansen said their real enemy is geology. Thinner coal seams and cheap gas mean much of the demand for central Appalachian coal from power plants is going away, he said, and regulations often don't enter into it.

"If there's less demand," he said, "then frankly it doesn't matter how strict the regulations are because people are not going to buy as much."

Despite the decline in demand from power plants, the report said, the number of mining jobs will rise - in part, Hansen said, because of a shift from highly mechanized surface mining that supplies coal for power plants to more labor-intensive underground mining for coal to make steel.

According to the report, five West Virginia counties - Mingo, Kanawha, Lincoln, Boone and Nicholas - will be especially vulnerable as production declines. They could face a tough patch, Hansen said, but devoting part of the severance tax to a future fund would help pay for the transition.

"Set aside that fund so that it can be used in these counties long into the future, as a perpetual source of funding to help diversify the economy," Hansen said.

The report is available online at [downstreamstrategies.com](http://downstreamstrategies.com).

Dan Heyman, Public News Service - WV

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