

**Expert calls on state
to abandon 'war on
coal' rhetoric,
diversify energy
efforts
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expert-calls-on-state-
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Carrie Salls (/author/carrie-salls) Aug. 15, 2016, 9:27am

MORGANTOWN – A report compiled by the Center for Energy and Sustainable Development at the West Virginia University College of Law and environmental consultant Downstream Strategies LLC suggests that the impact of the federal Clean Power Plan’s mission to reduce the use of coal to cut carbon dioxide emissions from power plants could be lessened if policymakers work to tap West Virginia’s other energy resources.

“Implementing the legislative and regulatory policy recommendations in this report would create a climate that promotes new investment in renewable and distributed generation technologies, energy efficiency, and natural gas-fired generation,” according to the report, entitled “Expanding Economic Opportunities for West Virginia under the Clean Power Plan.”

The federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) issued its Clean Power Plan in August 2015. Under the Clean Power Plan, existing power plants in West Virginia would be required to reduce the rate of carbon dioxide emissions by 37 percent in 2030 compared to 2012 levels or, if West Virginia elects to rely on a statewide emissions cap, by 29 percent from 2012 levels.

“West Virginia has done a very poor job of positioning itself for this inevitable decarbonization of the nation’s electricity supply,” WVU Law Center for Energy and Sustainable Development director James M. Van Nostrand told *The West Virginia Record*. “Our policymakers have wasted valuable time and resources futilely attacking EPA regulations.”

Van Nostrand said the EPA's rules and guidelines are not too much of an overreach for West Virginia, but, at the same time, the EPA's rules will hit the region disproportionately hard, given its dependence on the coal industry and coal-fired electricity generation.

“The impacts of the decarbonization of the nation's electricity supply – irrespective of the role of the Clean Power Plan – are devastating to many of the mining communities of southern West Virginia,” Van Nostrand said. “The job losses in the coal industry are staggering, and most of those jobs will be lost forever.”

Van Nostrand said the state's policymakers need to move beyond the ineffective “war on coal” rhetoric and start laying the foundation for a meaningful role for West Virginians in the transformation of the energy economy.

“Climate change is the most pressing environmental issue of our time, and the cuts in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions required under the Clean Power Plan are necessary in order to have any chance at all of reversing the climatic trends that threaten the quality of life for future generations,” Van Nostrand said.

Van Nostrand said the report demonstrates that compliance can be achieved with minimal disruption to West Virginia's economy. He said many of the changes necessary to achieve compliance with the Clean Power Plan are already underway in the electric industry, resulting from economic forces, not government regulation.

For example, Van Nostrand said, utilities are shifting to cleaner, inexpensive natural gas, and the cost of renewable energy, such as solar and wind, continues to drop. In addition, he said, West Virginia has already achieved a large portion of the GHG reductions required under the plan.

“Appalachian Power’s recent long-term resource plan demonstrates that solar and wind, along with utility energy efficiency programs, can be cost-effectively integrated into a utility’s resource portfolio,” Van Nostrand said.

The report’s recommendations include removing legislative restrictions on state planning, issuing revised resource planning requirements for electric utilities, adopting energy efficiency resource and renewable energy portfolio standards, encouraging greater use of the state’s natural gas resources, adopting policies that encourage investment in clean distributed generation resources, exploring options to partner with neighboring states to develop an emissions trading plan and supporting integrated regional economic development initiatives.

West Virginia led a group of 28 states that responded to the Clean Power Plan by filing a lawsuit challenging the EPA’s authority. On Feb. 9, the U.S. Supreme Court granted a stay, and oral argument in the District of Columbia Circuit Court of Appeals is scheduled for September. The release said an appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court is likely after the circuit court proceeding.

Organizations in this Story

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (</organizations/644944767-u-s-environmental-protection-agency-epa/stories>)
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