

Obama: A Mighty Wind Awaits You on Coal River Mountain



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If Senator Barack Obama ever needs a living symbol of change we can believe in, and a hopeful way to transcend the dirty politics of our failed energy policies, he should go and see the future of renewable energy in the Coal River Valley in West Virginia.

Yes, renewable energy in Appalachia.

Something historic is taking place in West Virginia this summer. Faced with an impending proposal to stripmine over 6,600 acres -- nearly 10 square miles -- in the Coal River Valley, including one of the last great mountains in that range, an extraordinary movement of local residents and coal mining families have come up with a counter proposal for an even more effective wind farm.

Mother Jones, the miners' angel, once declared: "Pray for the dead, and fight like hell for the living."

Having witnessed the destruction of over 470 mountains and their adjacent communities in Appalachia, the Coal River Valley citizens are doing just that. On the frontlines of one of the most tragic environmental and human rights scandals in modern American history, the community-wide Coal River wind advocates have devised a blueprint to get beyond the divisive regional politics and break the stranglehold of King Coal on the central Appalachian economies.

The [Coal River Wind Project](#) is the first bottom-up community-based full scale assessment to directly counter the nightmare of mountaintop removal with a renewable energy and economy alternative prior to the actual mining. We have a choice. It is not simply coal or no coal. Jobs or no jobs. The issue is how do we create jobs and clean energy forever, and begin the transition in Appalachia and America away from dirty coal.

And Barack Obama, and all Americans, have a chance to be part of Coal River Valley's landmark decision for our nation's dependence on renewable or nonrenewable energy sources. Either we continue to hand out permits for mountaintop removal (two permits in this area have already been granted), unleashing millions of tons of explosives, blasting local communities to Kingdom Come, provide less than 200 jobs for 14 years of coal mining, contributing the dirty coal firepower for continued carbon dioxide emissions and global warming, or, we can stake out a third way in renewable energy and economic development.

(Obama: A Mighty Wind cont...)

Consider this: The Coal River Mountain Wind Project would:

-- Create 200 local employment opportunities during construction, and 50 permanent jobs during the life of the wind farm. It takes only 35 years for a wind farm to provide a greater number of one-year jobs than the proposed four surface mines combined.

-- Provide a maximum of 440MW of electricity, or enough energy for 150,000 homes, indefinitely, as well as a sustained tax income that could be used for the construction of new schools for the county.

-- Allow for concurrent uses of the mountain, including harvesting of wild ginseng and valuable forest plants, sustainable forestry, and mountain tourism, as Coal River Mountain is one of West Virginia's finest mountains.

-- Preserve the historic Coal River Mountain heritage, and protect the land and communities from blasting, dusting, poisonous drinking water, increased flooding, damaged homes and personal property, and devastated wildlife habitat.

In 1892, in Barack Obama's adopted city, the *Chicago Tribune* wrote in an editorial: "How long can the earth sustain life," if we depend on the "wonderful power of coal?" The *Tribune* editors lambasted Americans for our lack of vision and our lack of energy conservation, and our need to "invent appliances to exhaust with over greater rapidity the hoard of coal." They declared:

"Doubtless the end of the coal, at least as an article of a mighty commerce, will arrive within a period brief in comparison with the ages of human existence. In the history of humanity, from first to last, the few centuries through which we are now passing will stand out prominently as the coal-burning period."

The *Tribune* editors in 1892 assumed Americans would move beyond coal and onto renewable energy sources.

We may be a hundred years late, but the realities of global warming and climate change, and the brutal process of extracting coal, should remind us that it is not too late for Barack Obama and the rest of the nation to be a part of this exciting new energy future for Appalachia, and the entire country.

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