



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Economic Development through Clean Energy

By CED Program Interns & Students

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For more than two weeks in the fall of 2008, western North Carolina (WNC) was at a standstill. As many here recall, businesses were closed. Students and teachers were stranded in their homes, unable to get to campus. Long lines at gas stations resulted in tourists and residents alike waiting up to four or five hours to fill up their cars with gasoline, only to find out that the station had run out.

Events like the 2008 WNC fuel shortages emphasize the role that the region's energy infrastructure, or lack thereof, plays in ongoing efforts to promote economic development. With few local sources for fuel and energy production, the Appalachian region of North Carolina relies extensively on resources and supplies that must be shipped in from elsewhere. Although some local organizations have been working for decades to address these shortfalls, there remains a tremendous amount of work that must still be done.

However, growth of the clean energy industry in North Carolina presents a unique opportunity for the WNC region. With a rapidly growing portfolio of clean energy business opportunities, the region's leadership has identified this sector as a critical new focus area with profound implications on local energy security and economic development.

Catalyzing a new strategic approach to economic development and energy security, the Land-of-Sky Regional Council has initiated a project aptly called *Building the Clean Energy Economy in Western North Carolina*. Funded in part by the NC Rural Center and the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), the project brings together representatives from the five westernmost North Carolina councils of government (Regions A-E and I) and AdvantageWest (AW), to promote clean energy planning and entrepreneurship.

Toward this worthy goal, the LOSRC has begun work, in coordination with its project partners, on a two phase economic analysis of the existing WNC clean energy business cluster. Concurrently, efforts are also underway to convene a regional Clean Energy Leadership Group; establish a clean energy Web 2.0 interface for intra-industry networking; develop the WNC clean energy brand; and promote greater literacy and planning around the future of clean energy in the region.

With the addition of a CERC intern (also funded by the NC Rural Center) to the Clean Energy project team, LOSRC has been able to continue pushing forward these efforts, and make better use of their existing resources. Ongoing CERC involvement has included development of a request for proposals (to be officially released on July 1st) to conduct the Phase II Clean Energy Cluster Analysis for the WNC region; as well as processing and coordination for a survey of existing WNC clean energy businesses, among other tasks.

Moving forward the goal is to ensure that the region not only becomes more secure in its energy resources, but that that energy security can provide greater economic security for residents of both the urban, and more importantly the rural, communities of WNC.