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The Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI) held a webinar entitled, “Can Coal Country Thrive in a Clean Energy Economy?” The speakers were Tara Ritter of the Institute for Agriculture & Trade Policy, Julie Lawhorn of the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Brett Schwartz of the National Association of Development Organizations (NADO) Research Foundation, and Hannah Vargason of The Conservation Fund.

The webinar focused on attempts to build new investment and development opportunities in coal-reliant regions. Ritter indicated that the estimated 120,000 new jobs generated as a result of the Clean Power Plan will come at the cost of 24,000 existing jobs, including many in the coal industry. Lawhorn noted that this decline will add to the 23,000 jobs lost in the Appalachian coal industry from 2011 to 2015. Because the new jobs will not necessarily be in the same regions or industrial sectors as the lost jobs, Ritter emphasized the need for job retraining and financial assistance to support vulnerable areas.

Lawhorn reported that ARC and the Economic Development Administration are providing \$65.8 million in funding for communities with coal-related industries to promote economic diversification, workforce development, and job creation.

Alongside these efforts, Vargason described how the Natural Capital Investment Fund supports development projects by lending to small businesses, non-profits, and local governments to promote local job creation/retention, economic growth, and environmental stewardship.

Focusing on community building and strategy sharing, Schwartz described the resources provided by NADO to help communities with declining coal industries adapt and transition to new or locally growing industries, such as recycling, drone technology, tourism, healthcare, and outdoor recreation.

Despite the declining coal industry, all four speakers gave practical outlines of how investment on local and regional levels can promote the sustainable (re)development and economic diversification of coal-reliant regions.

A recording of the webinar, including the speakers’ slides, is available on the EESI website.

Sources: Environmental and Energy Study Institute, U.S. Economic Development Administration
