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James Cookman
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In 2001, James Cookman co-founded US Wind Force; he has been developing wind farms in the Mid-Atlantic Region ever since. In 2013, he and his business partner formed Laurel Renewable Partners and subsequently completed projects in West Virginia's Mineral and Grant Counties. Three additional wind farms – two in West Virginia and one in Maryland – are currently under development.

Diversifying Energy

Corporate Demand for Renewables Continues to Drive West Virginia's Growing Wind Power Industry

As West Virginia's budget once again faces struggles due to market conditions in both the coal and natural gas industries, there are renewed calls for diversifying our state's economy away from energy. These appeals to move past our legacy as an energy producer fail to recognize the transformation of the industry and the increasing opportunities for sustainable jobs and investment in wind energy.

Wind power plants are becoming increasingly important to the United States' energy infrastructure, growing fourfold in total installed capacity over the last decade – enough to power 26 million American households. With jobs and production declining in many traditional occupations, such as coal mining and manufacturing, many of our smaller towns and local residents can prepare for a brighter

future by embracing new technologies to sustain and grow their communities. Wind energy is providing those opportunities in West Virginia right now and we hope it will create even more in the coming years.

There are currently six operational wind power plants in the Mountain State, representing a total investment of \$1.2 billion. Wind farms bring more than construction and maintenance jobs; they support indirect jobs at local businesses, such as material suppliers, hotels, restaurants and convenience stores. Wind farms are often the largest taxpayers in the rural counties where they are operating, providing critical dollars that help fund schools, first responders and social services. Wind plant operators also want to be good citizens in the communities where they operate. For example, Clearway Energy's Pinnacle Wind Farm near Keyser has a community benefit fund that has donated more than \$220,000 since 2012 to organizations like fire departments, family resource centers, schools, churches and more – all as directed by an advisory board made up of local residents.

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Photo Caption 1 Pinnacle Wind
Project Tour, April 10, 2019



In addition to the operating wind farms, there are at least five known planned ones currently under consideration in West Virginia. These projects potentially represent an additional investment of \$815 million that would directly support hundreds of construction jobs. All across the country, wind power directly supports over 100,000 well-paying jobs while backing an additional 25,000 manufacturing jobs. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Wind Turbine Technician” is currently the second fastest growing job in America. With a median annual salary of \$54,370, there will be huge growth in jobs in the wind industry – many of which will be located in the small towns that need support the most.

It’s important to understand one key driver behind this impressive growth trajectory for the industry. Corporate entities, such as those our state seeks to attract, are increasingly adding energy sustainability requirements and integrating them into their organizations’ core values. Proctor & Gamble, for example, recently announced their intention to source 100 percent renewable energy in the United States, Canada and Western Europe.

There are many other examples of large employers committed to the greater use of renewable energy, too. In fact, the Renewable Energy Buyers Alliance recently formed to help major United States employers – Walmart, General Motors, Google and Johnson & Johnson among them – to partner renewables providers with the companies who want to invest. West Virginia has excellent wind resources, and we are close to the major economic and industrial hubs of the East Coast, making our state an ideal recipient for all this economic activity and infrastructure growth.

West Virginia has a long and proud history of energy production. The Mountain State’s coal fueled our nation’s steel mills and power plants for more than a century, building the United States into the world’s economic powerhouse. While coal and natural gas will continue to play a critical role in the future of the West Virginia economy, we can achieve energy diversity and position the state to power the next generation of high-tech industries by embracing wind power and supporting policies that will help it grow within our borders. **W**



Photo Caption 2 Aerial photo of Pinnacle Wind Farm during construction process.

Photo Caption 3 From the top of T10 of the Pinnacle Wind Farm, looking southwest towards Grant and Tucker Counties.

Photo Caption 4 T23 of the Pinnacle Wind Farm, located on Green Mountain, during an early winter ice storm.