For much of its history, West Virginia has relied on its abundance of fossil fuels to exist as an “energy state.” Indeed, West Virginia contains coal in 53 of its 55 counties, and coal once accounted for $3.5 billion dollars annually in the state’s gross domestic product (1). However, as the state continues into the 21st century, it must adapt to a changing world and work to diversify the industries it houses in order to stay relevant in the world of industry. As West Virginians, we have a duty to our state to continually work to further its progress and economic success. As a state that has a large quantity of renewable resources, West Virginia has the potential to utilize these resources to generate clean and efficient energy. After this is achieved, it will be much easier to attract new, thriving industries.

The main sources of West Virginia’s energy resources come from the natural gas and coal industries. In the past, these industries promoted growth throughout the state, but they have become less fruitful in recent years. Factors such as foreign competition and shortages of easily available mineral resources have caused important parts of the mining industry to shut down. While some call for a redoubled effort to restore the mining industry, it would be much more beneficial for the state to work at developing alternative sources of energy—namely cleaner sources of energy. In specific, hydroelectric and wind energy could perform quite well in this state. After all, the state is home to approximately 32,260 miles of powerful rivers, most of which could be used to effectively produce energy via hydroelectricity plants (2). Additionally, while wind energy may not be as easy to implement in West Virginia as in some other states, it would still go a long way in modernizing WV’s energy industries, and it could also generate substantial energy if turbines were installed at higher elevations.
If the state of West Virginia can work towards implementing newer and cleaner forms of energy, new possibilities for attracting other modern industries will open up. The implementation would have an immediate positive impact on jobs. The construction of hydroelectric plants and wind turbines would open up job opportunities in construction, as well as in fields such as architecture and civil engineering. Additionally, these new facilities would require employees to run and maintain them. In the United States, there are projected to be nearly 1.4 million cumulative jobs in the hydropower industry by 2025, and some of those jobs could possibly reside right here in West Virginia (3). These new hydropower jobs could provide work for unemployed West Virginians and even draw in workers from outside the state. If more people reside in West Virginia because of these new job opportunities, the creation and growth of many other industries could flourish. In urban areas and small towns, the influx of people could allow small businesses to thrive as well as help to attract larger commercial companies to West Virginia.

The modern world is forever changing, and people must be ready and willing to adapt in order to thrive into the future. In West Virginia, there is great untapped potential for the future of the state, but changes must be made now to ensure the state stays competitive from a modern industry standpoint. The state already has a strong basis built on the natural gas and coal industries. However, with clean energy becoming increasingly more relevant and fossil fuels increasingly more scarce, it is imperative that West Virginia must diversify its energy scene. If a wider variety of efficient, profitable energy facilities can be implemented in West Virginia, not only will the state’s energy output be cleaner, but also new job opportunities and economic growth will be encouraged. With these types of goals in mind, West Virginia can certainly work toward economic and environmental success in a cleaner, brighter future.
Works Cited

