Title: The Power+ Plan and citizen’s movement for just transition in Appalachia and beyond

Category: Group Session
Format: Roundtable Presentation and Discussion
Subject: Economic Development/Poverty

Contact Information:
CONVENER: Betsy Taylor
betsy.taylor@gmail.com
Appalachian Studies, Virginia Tech

Title: The Power+ Plan and citizen’s movement for just transition in Appalachia and beyond

Abstract: In January 2015, President Obama announced a five-year plan to direct over $1 billion into economic transition and reclamation in Appalachia and elsewhere. The proposed POWER+ plan draws funds from the Abandoned Mine Lands Fund and from five federal agencies. Through 2015, the Alliance for Appalachia and other grassroots organizations lobbied local governments to support POWER+. Dozens of county governments across Central Appalachia have passed resolutions in support. This roundtable reflects on this remarkably successful mobilization for just transition policy. It analyzes POWER+ in historical context of past macrostructural shifts in the relationship of the Corporate to the Local State. Many of the panelists have been doing grassroots organizing to mobilize local governments and elected officials to endorse the POWER+ Plan. Others have been involved in earlier struggles to democratize the relationship between federal, state, and local levels of economic planning. The roundtable will seek to apply lessons from earlier eras of struggle to contemporary challenges of neoliberal globalization.

Panelists:

- Dwight Billings is Professor of Sociology at the University of Kentucky, and past president of the Appalachian Studies Association and recent editor of The Journal of Appalachian Studies. He is author of Planters and the Making of a “New South,” and The Road to Poverty: The Making of Wealth and Hardship in Appalachia (with Kathleen Blee). He is co-editor of Back Talk from an American Region: Confronting Appalachian Stereotypes and Appalachia in the Making: The Mountain South in the Nineteenth Century.

- Eric Dixon, Coordinator of Policy and Community Engagement, Appalachian Citizens’ Law Center, Whitesburg KY. Eric coordinates ACLC’s policy analysis and engagement efforts—particularly around abandoned mine land reclamation, renewable energy, and electric utility issues. Eric graduated summa cum laude from the University of Tennessee in 2013 as a quadruple major in Philosophy, Economics, Sociology, and Global Studies.

- Gabby Gillespie, Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards, is a community organizer living in Appalachia, VA. Her work is focused on collaborating with community members regionally in visioning just economic transition in Central Appalachia. She is near completion of her Master’s degree in Social Responsibility and Sustainable Communities from Western Kentucky University.

- Mary Anne Hitt is director of the Sierra Club’s Beyond Coal Campaign, which is working to eliminate coal’s contribution to global warming and repower the nation with clean energy.

- Bill Price is Senior Organizing Representative, Sierra Club Environmental Justice Program. He has spent most of his life living and working in Appalachia. He currently works with the Environmental Justice and Community Partnerships program of the Sierra Club. He works with the Beyond Coal to Clean Energy campaign and believes that economic transition from the grassroots up is possible.

- Betsy Taylor is a cultural anthropologist who has worked with numerous participatory research projects in central Appalachia and India. She is currently a research faculty member of the Dept of Religion & Culture, Virginia Tech.
• Adam Wells, Economic Diversification Campaign Coordinator, Appalachian Voices. Adam served as Outreach Coordinator for Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards and as a field organizer for the Sierra Club. He is committed to bringing clean energy and other economic diversification opportunities to the Virginia coalfields. He lives on his family farm in Wise County.

Discussant

Jeremy Richardson is a senior energy analyst in the Climate and Energy program at the Union of Concerned Scientists, conducting analytical work on the Environmental Protection Agency’s carbon regulations, and working in other areas of energy research. He is continuing research on economic diversification in his native West Virginia.