

Issue: Renewable Energy

Myths About Renewable Energy in Virginia

1. We Don't Have Good Solar Resources

Nobody says that Virginia has access to the same solar energy as California. But it sure can do as well as German regions or its own neighbors. At the end of 2016, Germany's solar capacity was 41.3 gigawatts. Closer to home, North Carolina had 3,287 megawatts of installed capacity, 2nd in the US; Maryland had 717 MW, ranking 14th. Virginia had 241.5 MW; ranking 22nd.

2. We Don't Have Good Wind Resources

Virginia shares ridge lines with West Virginia, and both ridge lines and a coastline with Maryland, so it's hard to buy that argument. West Virginia has 528 MW of wind already installed and 365 MW more on the way; Maryland has 191 MW of wind energy from land-based sources and is looking to develop wind resources offshore. Virginia has no utility-scale wind power.

3. Solar Energy Projects Don't Create Jobs

If there's any truth here, it's only because Republican state politicians have hampered private solar companies from investing in residential and commercial rooftop solar energy projects. Virginia ranks 20th for solar jobs, much worse than neighbors North Carolina (ranking 8th) and Maryland (ranking 12th). More than two-thirds of solar jobs in the U.S. in 2016 came from the residential and commercial markets; only 31% from utility-scale development. Most of the small amount of solar in Virginia is controlled exclusively by the utilities.

4. Adding Local Renewable Power is Unfair to Everyone Else

Utilities argue that small-scale photovoltaic solar projects or small wind projects can cut utilities' income, leaving only non-renewable customers to pay for maintaining power plants and transmission lines. This ignores renewables' benefits — reducing strain on the grid during peak midday demand, producing jobs and making expensive new peaker plants unnecessary.