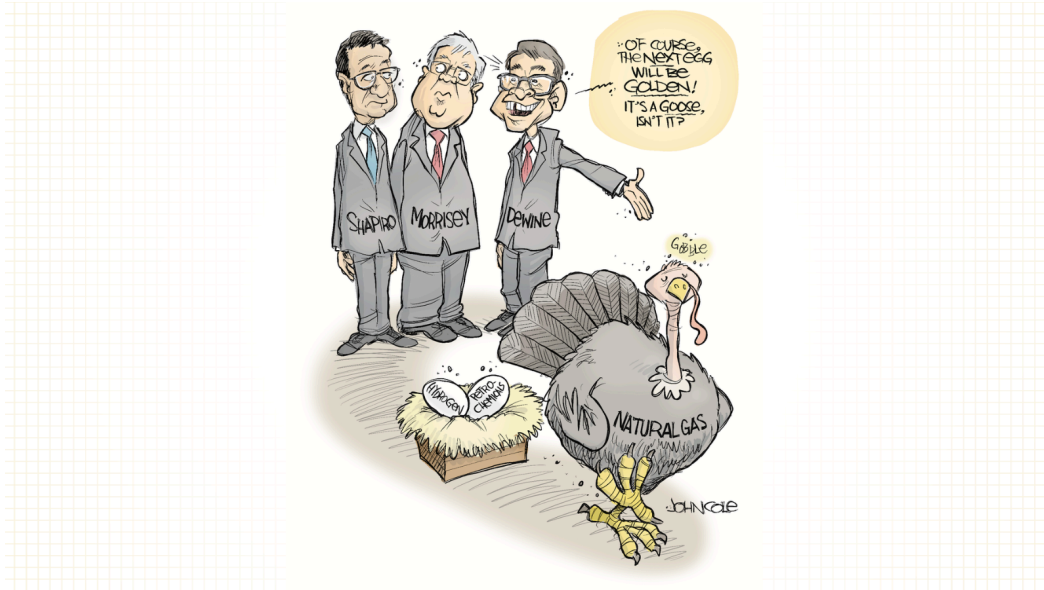


FRACKALACHIA UPDATE 2025

DIGITAL TOOLKIT



New gas development for data centers & LNG is “destined to disappoint” as Appalachia’s fracking counties continue their economic spiral.

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KEY FINDINGS:

For more than 15 years, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia have staked much of their economic futures on the ability of natural gas and its downstream industries to deliver jobs and prosperity. **But they haven't and won't because they can't.**

- Expectations that Appalachia's natural gas boom would be an economic game-changer and would serve as a foundation for job growth and prosperity continue to go unfulfilled.
- **Frackalachia's economy is going in reverse.** Indicators of economic prosperity have fallen into absolute decline in the 30 counties of Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia that produce 95% of Appalachian gas:
 - **Jobs have decreased by 1%** despite 14% growth nationally;
 - **Income growth has slowed to 75% of the national average;**
 - **Population has dropped by 3%** despite 10% growth nationally.
- Industries and sectors that are downstream of natural gas have either failed to develop (petrochemicals and hydrogen) or have demonstrated a chronic inability to deliver job and income growth even when they do expand (gas-fired power generation).

Despite fracking's failure to reverse regional depopulation and job loss, policymakers are [doubling down](#) on incentives for new gas production to meet demand growth forecasts driven largely by power-hungry data centers and a [still-constrained](#) LNG export market.

There's reason to believe power demand projections and [LNG export forecasts](#) are overblown. **But even if demand for natural gas increases as much as expected, structural weaknesses in the natural gas industry and downstream industries, including data centers, mean that it won't have much beneficial economic impact for host communities.**

RELATED READING:

- [Fracking Counties Economic Impact Report](#) (2021)
 - Our original study of Appalachia's 22 largest gas-producing counties. Despite soaring economic output, these counties had suffered declines in their share of the nation's jobs, income, and population.
- [Misplaced Faith: How Policymakers' Misguided Belief in Natural Gas is Driving Rural Pennsylvania into an Economic Dead End](#) (2022)
 - Pennsylvania's rural counties provide a natural experiment demonstrating why the claim that "rural economies would have fared even worse without the fracking boom" is not true. The 20 rural Pennsylvania counties that have not been heavily impacted by the natural gas industry have done no worse in job or population performance and, in some cases, have done better than those counties whose economies relied heavily on natural gas.
- [Destined to Fail: Why the Appalachian Natural Gas Boom Failed to Deliver Jobs & Prosperity and What It Teaches Us](#) (2021)
 - An investigation into the systemic causes behind the natural gas industry's failure to deliver on promises of economic prosperity. Very few of the billions of dollars ostensibly invested

in Frackalachia and little of the revenue generated by the resulting sales of the natural gas actually entered local economies. And growth in the mining, quarrying, and oil and gas extraction sector has had little “ripple” effect on downstream sectors of Frackalachia’s economy.

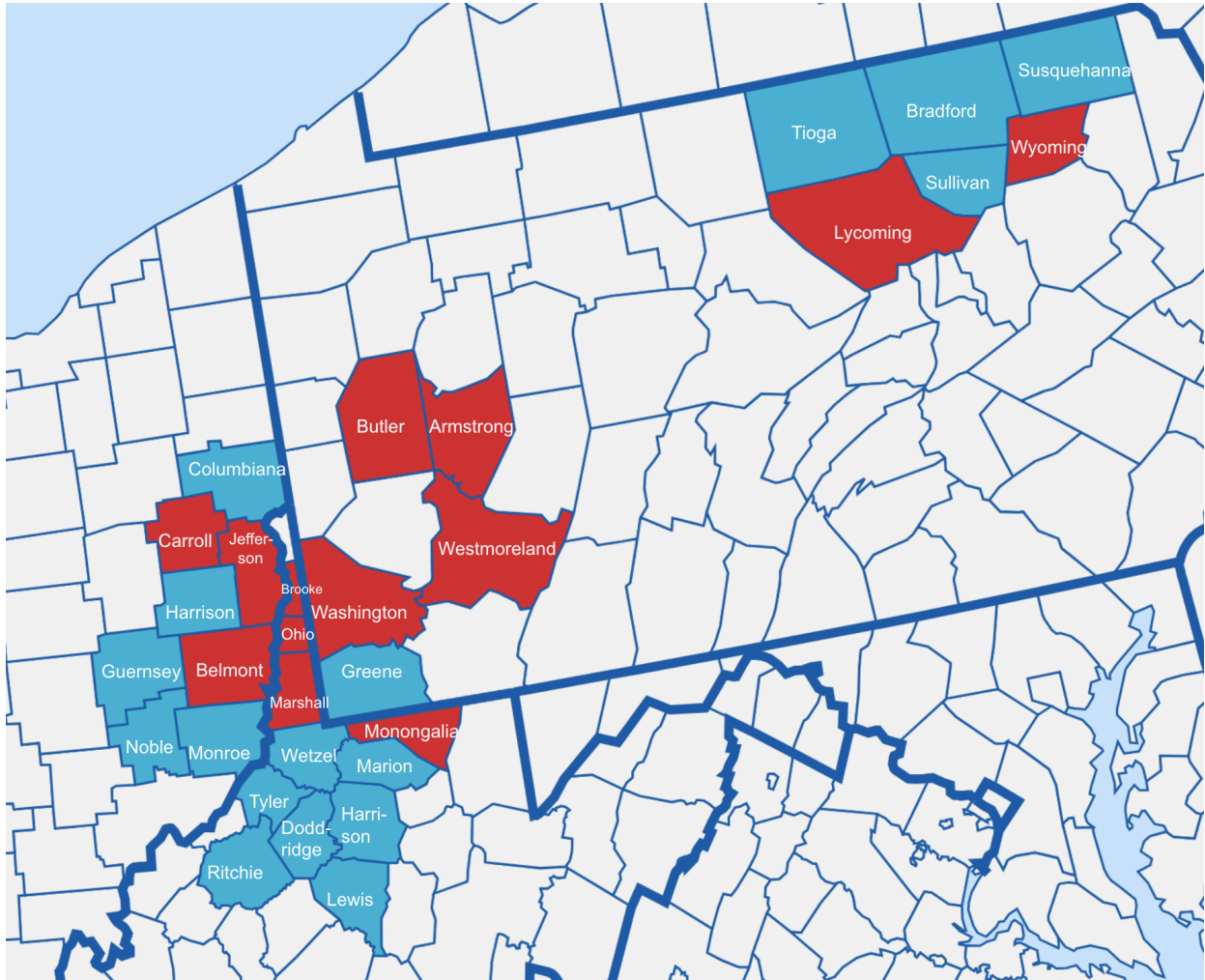
- [Frackalachia Update: Peak Natural Gas and the Economic Implications for Appalachia \(2023\)](#)
 - EIA forecasts show Appalachian natural gas production nearing its peak. Meanwhile, economic outcomes in the 22 Frackalachia counties continue to deteriorate, notching net losses of over 10,000 jobs and 47,000 residents, and gas industry employment has declined precipitously. Gas-dependent schemes like the Appalachian hydrogen hub are unlikely to turn the Frackalachian economy around.

WHAT IS FRACKALACHIA?

The Ohio River Valley Institute’s original 2021 report on Frackalachia focused on just 22 counties in Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, which at the time were responsible for over 90% of Appalachian gas production.⁶ However, the gas industry’s continued geographic expansion has pushed the number of counties that produce more than 50 million cubic feet of gas annually up to 30. Together, these 30 counties are responsible for 95% of all Appalachian gas production and 31% of all US production.

The Frackalachian counties, which are clustered in north-eastern Pennsylvania and in the greater Ohio River Valley, have a combined population of 1.85 million people as of 2024. If Frackalachia were a state, it would rank 39th in population just behind Idaho and ahead of West Virginia. When measured by growth in population, jobs, and other measures of prosperity, Frackalachia would be one of the poorest and fastest declining states in the nation.

Frackalachia includes a mixture of suburban and rural counties. In the following map, metropolitan counties are colored in red and non-metro areas in blue:



SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDANCE:

-  REPORT: New gas development for data centers & LNG is “destined to disappoint” as Appalachia’s fracking counties continue their economic spiral.
<https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>
- Since 2008, Appalachia’s largest fracking counties have seen:
 -  Jobs fall by 1%,
 -  Population drop by 3%,
 -  Income growth fall to just three-quarters the national average.<https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>
-  #Frackalachia’s economy is going in reverse. Why are the region’s largest fracking counties losing jobs and residents? Learn more:

<https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>

- 🗣️ For over 15 years, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia have waited for natural gas and downstream industries to deliver jobs and economic prosperity. But they haven't and won't because they can't: <https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>
- 📉 Wherever natural gas is produced, economic conditions—as measured by jobs, income, and population—remain stagnant or deteriorate. New data tell the story: <https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>
- 💬 Despite fracking's failure to reverse regional depopulation and job loss, policymakers are doubling down on incentives for new gas production to meet demand growth forecasts driven largely by power-hungry data centers and a still-constrained LNG export market.

It's the latest in a long series of gas-fueled false promises for Appalachian families, research shows: <https://ohiorivervalleyinstitute.org/frackalachia-update-2025/>

GRAPHICS:

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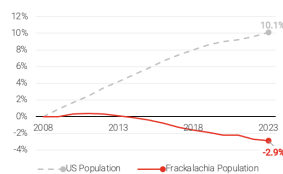
Frackalachia's economy is going in reverse.

Indicators of economic prosperity have fallen into absolute decline in the 30 Appalachian counties that produce 95% of the region's natural gas:

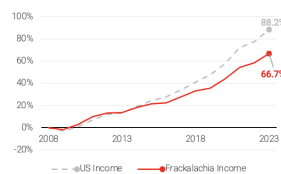
Jobs, 2008-2023



Population, 2008-2023



Income, 2008-2023



Ohio River
Valley Institute



Even if demand for natural gas increases as much as expected, structural weaknesses in the natural gas industry and downstream industries, including data centers, mean that it **won't have much beneficial economic impact for host communities.**

SEAN O'LEARY, OHIO RIVER VALLEY INSTITUTE



Beyond creating construction jobs, the potential economic benefits of AI data center development are questionable. Hype brings risks, and history shows that an AI bandwagon can run roughshod over people and the environment.

JOHN QUIGLEY, KLEINMAN CENTER FOR ENERGY POLICY

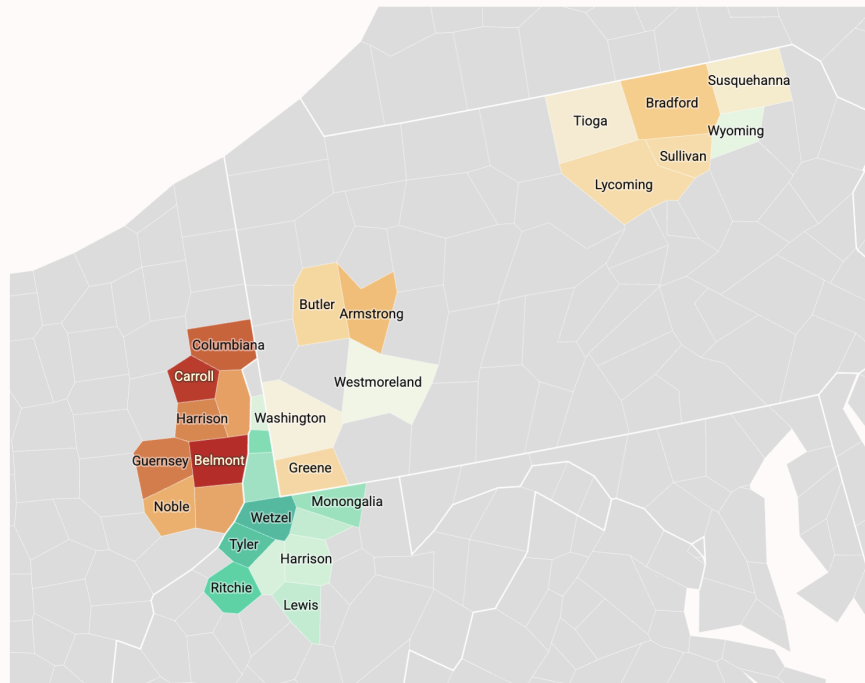


For over 15 years, Appalachia's fracking counties have premised their economic futures on the ability of natural gas to deliver jobs and prosperity. **But the fracking industry has proven structurally incapable of delivering almost any real, measurable economic benefit to the region.**

SEAN O'LEARY, OHIO RIVER VALLEY INSTITUTE

Change in jobs (QCEW), 2008-2023

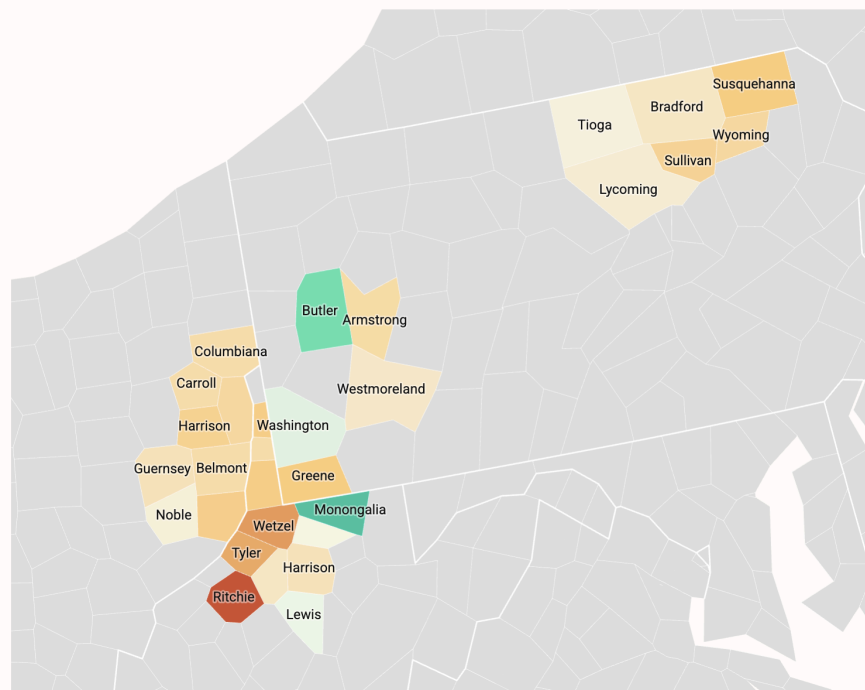
-15% 0% 25%



Map: Ohio River Valley Institute • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Change in population, 2008-2023

-25% 0% 20%



Map: Ohio River Valley Institute • [Get the data](#) • Created with [Datawrapper](#)

Change in income, 2008-2023

35% US average (88.2%) 145%

