Appalachian Ohio Energy Economic Development Summit
October 29, 2007

The Appalachian Ohio Energy Economic Development Summit brought together over 100 professionals involved with economic development in the 29-county Appalachian Ohio region to talk about utilizing energy as a tool for economic growth. Energy has traditionally played an important role in the economy of the region. Advanced energy technologies and policies provide the region with the chance to build on this history and to implement economic development strategies to take advantage of these new energy-related opportunities.

At the summit, experts provided participants with an overview of new advanced energy technologies and some of the available sources of financing for energy-related businesses. They also discussed the unique challenges and opportunities for Appalachian Ohio.

Participants also split up into three breakout sessions based on the sub-regional Local Development Districts (LDDs) to discuss current energy-related economic development activities in Appalachian Ohio, to explore ideas for possible new energy-related opportunities, and to identify what resources and assistance are needed to enable the region to capitalize on these opportunities.

While each of the sub-regions had its own unique take on energy-related economic development, there was a consensus about the need for certain types of assistance and resources to help facilitate these opportunities.

Among the needs identified were:

1) Inventory and mapping of resources at the local, sub-regional, and regional level. This resource information can be used to identify projects that build upon local assets.
2) Coordinated workforce development. There is a need to work with colleges and universities in the region to ensure that students are being trained for current and future jobs and to adjust that as the needs of the region change.
3) A database or clearinghouse of information on energy-related industries and businesses. Local economic development officials need to know where to get information and how to assess the validity of a potential opportunity.
4) Feasibility studies of specific energy-related business opportunities.
5) Technology resources and technical assistance. New industries need broadband and other technology infrastructure and support. Technical assistance can help traditional industries to transition to take advantage of new advanced energy opportunities.
6) Business planning, market studies, and other business assistance. This assistance helps identify the potential market, ensures the business concept is sound, and helps prepare entrepreneurs that are starting new, energy-related businesses.
7) Energy efficiency assistance. Job retention is an important piece of economic development. With increasing energy costs, helping businesses to be more energy efficient can allow them to stay competitive and retain their employees.
8) Financing. Appalachian Ohio has traditionally been underserved by business financing. Additional financing is needed to help the region take advantage of the new energy-related opportunities.

Thanks to the Appalachian Regional Commission and the Ohio Governor’s Office of Appalachia, $120,000 will be available to take the first steps toward addressing some of the needs identified above to enable advanced energy and environmental sustainability as the engine of economic growth in the region. Further details on how to apply for these funds will be available in January 2008.