

Gulf to Appalachia Climate Action Strategy 2022 - 2023



#WeChooseNow





OUR JOURNEY

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OUR PURPOSE

They say water takes the path of least resistance, flowing from mountain headwaters towards the sea. Rivers travel through riffles and rapids, converging to gain volume and speed, all in search of lower altitudes and calmer waters. This is a fact of nature. We know it to be true like we know the sun will rise and the grass will grow. But this doesn't mean water's path is always easy or that it is not a powerful force. We have much to learn from water.

We know the power of water, strong enough to carve through mountains. From [devastating hurricanes](#) to [record breaking floods](#), we know water's capacity for destruction. But alongside storms there are jubilees, teaching us the power of water to heal and bring people together. We look to water across faiths and traditions to cleanse our bodies and refresh our souls. **We know that water is life.** But our very lives are threatened when we do not honor natural forces like water, when we exploit it for profit, and when we pollute our water systems.

Such exploitation and pollution has degraded our waters and lands, put profit over people, and divided our communities for too long. We know some communities, especially Black and Indigenous people, have been most targeted by systems like racialized capitalism and colonialism. These systems have fueled climate change and put frontline communities in harm's way, including long-term impacts to our health. **This is the climate crisis.**

Yet, our story does not end here. Learning from water, we know that when there is a confluence of streams and rivers, **there is a shift in direction, velocity, and movement. We choose now to be that shift, to move in a different direction together – a new horizon that is rooted in community vision and solutions.**

At this moment, the United States is advancing sweeping federal actions that could fund critical climate solutions or sink us further towards climate disaster. However, the change needed to truly shift our future from the event horizon towards climate justice will not come unless restoring power to people, community to community and region to region, is part of the solution. **Policy cannot function justly outside of the context of history, community, and culture.** So we brought folks together to strategize policy differently.

The **#WeChooseNow Climate Action Strategy** convened over 150 frontline and allied leaders for community power building sessions rooted in ancestral wisdom and radical vision. #WeChooseNow aligned grassroots organizers and regional efforts across the Gulf South and Appalachia to affirm a path forward in repairing generational harms of environmental racism through collective governance to protect what is sacred and help our communities thrive.

The Climate Action Strategy was developed through a Gulf to Appalachia [People's Movement Assembly](#). While the assembly was composed of diverse representatives working on community issues across the Gulf and Appalachia, the core of these sessions were residents from four states (Texas, Louisiana, Kentucky, and Pennsylvania) with a focus on one of the Six Pillars of Climate Justice (Energy, Democracy, Labor, and Economy, respectively).

"Like the event horizon of a black hole, 2030 is seen by some as our point of no return. The United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warns that we need swift global action by 2030 or we will not be able to limit the future impacts of climate change. This countdown has fueled misguided ventures that seek to treat the symptoms but not the root causes.

*We choose instead to look at 2030 as our **Liberation Horizon**. We believe that we can shift our future for the global good if we move in solidarity, abundance, and love. By embracing solutions rooted in community and justice we will heal and arrive at our liberation – together."*

OUR PURPOSE

Taproot Earth 6 Pillars of Climate Impact



WATER



ENERGY



LAND



LABOR



ECONOMY



DEMOCRACY

Our purpose was to build relationships across communities deeply impacted by extractive economies and cultivate regional solutions that move us towards collective healing and climate justice. Virtual and in-person gatherings held over the course of a year relied on transparent dialogue and exercises to strengthen collective analysis and decision making.

From the Gulf to Appalachia, #WeChooseNow to create a climate-just future.

Our movement is beyond one issue, locale, or principle. It is the energy that connects us all through the wisdom of our Elders and Ancestors, it is the continuous joyful act of building community, and it is the strategic investment in collective leadership towards a bright, just future for many generations to come. We call others to The Movement to learn, work together, be proactive, find connection and safety, and uplift hope.

Our Story

The Gulf and Appalachia have been linked long before people called these regions home. Connected by the earth's crust through the Appalachian-Ouachita-Marathon mountain range, influenced by rivers and coasts, populated by native flora and fauna, the Gulf and Appalachia are lush ecosystems with long histories of interaction. Florida's white sandy beaches, for example, are largely made of Appalachian quartz that has been weathered and swept south by rivers to be washed ashore by waves. Following these patterns of lands and tides, [Indigenous societies of the Mississippi and Ohio watersheds once traded](#) shells from the Gulf of Mexico, mica from the Appalachian Mountains, and many other natural riches, laying the backbones for a deep heritage of environmental stewardship and regional exchange.

Early Gulf and Appalachian cultures were distinct but both shared soulful appreciation for the gifts of nature. When these regions were colonized beginning in the 15th century, Indigenous peoples were subjected to [violence and removal, natural resources were quickly exploited, millions of African peoples were extracted from their homes and forced into slavery to support plantation economies, and oppressed communities were pitted against each other to further enforce colonial dominance](#). Black and Indigenous peoples in the Gulf and Appalachia fought to keep their communities intact, from legally challenging colonial governments, to creating covert freedom networks, and passing down seeds of wisdom through traditions and oral history. These are the legacies inherited from our ancestors as modern day residents of the Gulf and Appalachia.

"The reason it's so important to educate our young people is to let them understand that this land means more than just a place to put your foot on or to walk on, it's your identity, it's who you are, it defines you."

– Chief Thomas Dardar, United Houma Nation

Today a web of fossil fuel infrastructure, [disproportionately built in communities of color](#), overwhelms the Gulf and Appalachian landscapes. In many states, plantation and slave economies were quickly replaced by [petrochemical complexes](#) and [prisons](#). While these industries are touted by some as economic drivers, in reality they rob these regions of the very elements that once gave our ancestors life – namely, healthy land, water, air, and communities. The impacts of toxic industries are not invisible. [Places like Louisiana are physically losing ground](#) due to land loss associated with fossil fuel activity. Meanwhile, [absentee coal corporations continue to harm Appalachian communities](#), abandoning clean-up responsibilities and leaving poverty in their wake. Exploitative industries have left their marks on the Gulf and Appalachia, largely for worse.

"Where I'm from the economy is dominated by fossil fuels. There's a lot of coal-based development and company towns, with some worker organized community control, but fossil fuel companies continue to control the economy, pushing out all other industries by buying politicians. In my hometown the only real money making job options are military, mines, or drugs. Women's labor is completely unvalued, and the only choice for upward momentum is which kind of guy you'll marry. But there's resistance and opportunities to move beyond that through intergenerational organizing."

*– Veronica Coptis, Senior Advisor Taproot Earth
(formerly Executive Director of the Center for Coalfield Justice)*

Our Story

The Gulf and Appalachia have proudly led the United States in energy production for over 150 years, but now grapple with the long-term environmental and public health impacts associated with fossil fuel industries. The majority of coal and gas power plants in the United States are in the Gulf and Appalachia, with a stark lack of renewable energy production.

Location of power plants in the United States

Coal



Natural Gas



Hydropower



Wind

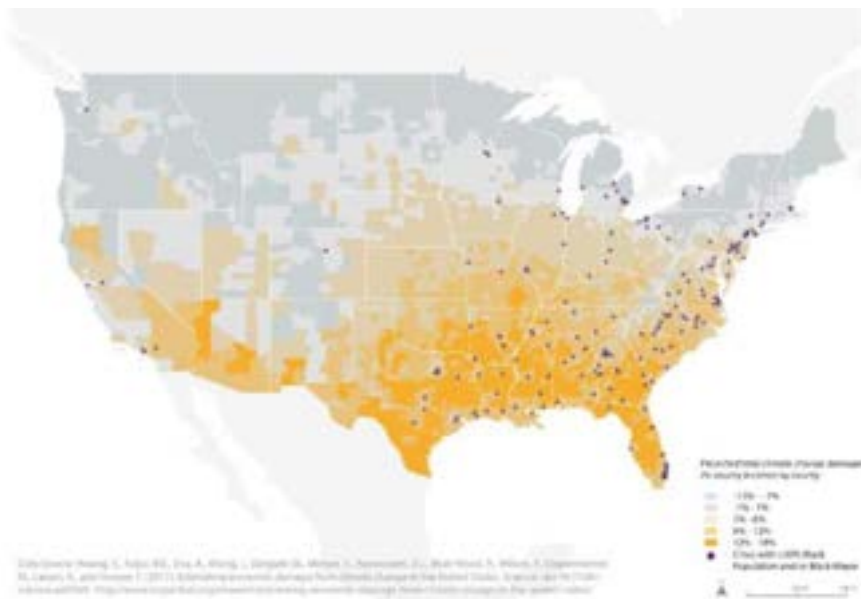


Maps: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/national/maps-of-american-infrastructure/>

National projections estimate that the Gulf and Appalachia are most at-risk of experiencing detrimental effects to agricultural yields, mortality rates, energy expenditures, high-risk labor, land loss, and crime associated with future climate change (Hsiang et al. 2017). The majority of American cities with large Black populations can be found in these regions, yet most lack a major climate response and resilience plan; these are the same cities that have faced chronic government disinvestment in public infrastructure, pointing to the larger trend of environmental racism within government decision-making that exacerbates inequities in all aspects of life (Data via CityScale). The people of the Gulf and Appalachia have been oppressed for too long and the potential risks due to climate change are too high for us to not act now in the best interest of our communities and future generations.

Our Story

Projected total climate change damages



Like the seeds of resistance from centuries before, communities across the Gulf and Appalachia have moved with grit, solutions, and power in response to these threats against our lives and futures. From [organizing everyday folk](#) in the coalfields of southwest Pennsylvania, advancing political change in West Virginia, and building new ways of reclaiming abandoned mines in [eastern Kentucky](#), Appalachian communities have shown the power of community-led processes to shape solutions. In the Gulf, frontline leaders continue to build upon a [deep history of labor organizing that cuts across race and class](#) – from forging urban-rural alliances in Alabama, to advancing community-[owned off-shore wind resources in Louisiana](#), and demanding [accountability in energy systems](#) in Texas – Gulf communities are reimagining what it looks like to have a just energy economy.

The Gulf and Appalachia are at the epicenter of a major climate turning point. Our people have fought long and hard for justice because our homes, our cultures, and our survival are on the line. We refuse to be sacrificed any longer for toxic industries, profit, and greed. #WeChooseNow to resist patterns of corruption and resignation, to heal ourselves and our communities, to build alignments across regions, and to seek liberation together.

"To survive this next phase of our human existence, our social, political and economic systems must be transformed to regenerate the earth and advance human liberty globally. We must transform from a disposable, individual society into one that sees our collective long-term humanity, or else we will not make it. We must acknowledge that the only way to survive is for us to figure out how to reach a shared liberation together."

– Colette Pichon Battle, Taproot Earth



The Gulf and Appalachia are at the epicenter of a major climate turning point:

- An opportunity to resist and build communities across the Gulf and Appalachia, GCCLP convened a Reimagine South gathering to address narrative change in the face of consequential elections in MS, KY, and LA. These moments of shared narrative and message, like "Our Health is our Wealth" played key roles in communicating shared values with communities across these two regions.
- In 2021, Hurricane Ida's wrath quickly went from a category 2 to a near category 5 in a matter of hours, and impacted communities from Southern Louisiana across the Appalachian mountain communities and flooded parts of Philadelphia and NYC. The first we have seen a storm have lasting and powerful impacts across these two regions.
- Mutual Aid response /solidarity action with PA and TX

Our Approach

Policy in a vacuum leads to solutions without a purpose. The current climate reality is not one of chance, it is the result of economic, political, and social systems that rely on extraction from the Earth and people. Top-down policy solutions cannot solve the problem. Drawing on the rich traditions of the global southern movement, the Southern Movement Assembly, and our partners at Project South, Taproot Earth practices a process called the [People's Movement Assembly \(PMA\)](#). We use this process to build relationships, cultivate solutions, create community-driven policies, practice collective decision-making, and develop strategies.

The Taproot Earth Climate Action Strategy (CAS) builds upon the PMA processes of facilitative leadership, participatory research, policy creation, and decision-making to develop community-driven climate solutions that can influence national policies and standards towards advancing climate justice. Through community building and models of restorative resourcing, the CAS builds multi-racial and intergenerational frontline leadership that is accountable to Black Liberation to develop climate strategies in key states and territories.

Climate Action Strategy Methods

Facilitative Leadership	Policy Research
Narrative Building	Community Action
Restorative Resourcing	

Rather than create policies in a vacuum, we build analysis and solutions that are crafted by and for frontline communities. This is not simply an academic exercise or hypothetical discussion. The PMA is a convergence of real people, lived experiences, and firsthand knowledge coming together with the express goal of liberating our communities from current injustice. Simply put, through a PMA we build relationships, contextualize and learn about our collective reality, cultivate visions and solutions, affirm decisions, and commit to action.

Goals of the Peoples Movement Assembly



Our Approach

Taproot Earth convened frontline residents for a PMA to identify shared priorities, strengths, and visions for securing climate justice for the Gulf to Appalachia. Typically, PMAs are done in-person over a four-day period. Given that this process started at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic and engaged residents across two vast regions, we deconstructed the PMA process into three parts, held virtually and in-person, over a year-long period:

Part I – Feb – May 2022:

Building Relationships, Setting Context, and Establishing Vision

Part II – June – Sept 2022:

Cultivating Analysis and Solutions

Part III – Oct 2022 – Jan 2023:

Affirming Our Strategies and Committing to Action



Taproot Earth – Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) New Orleans, LA 2022

Throughout the year, Taproot Earth facilitated small group discussions, one-on-one meetings with local leaders, and policy research conducted by [climate+community project \(ccp\)](#) to support the vision and solutions developed by community members in this process.

The following is the result of this process.

Our Shared Reality

In our effort to build alignment and solutions, our PMA process started with the important process of shared community analysis, asking ourselves:

- What is happening in your community that is creating challenge and harm?
- How are these challenges connected across states, regions, and globally?
- What vision and hopes do your community have as it faces a new climate reality?
- What opportunities do you see in your community related to our climate pillars?
- What solutions are critical for your community to live, rest, and thrive?

By considering these questions together, we put context to our experiences. We explored how the climate crisis developed, how it will impact future generations, and how we reckon with our current reality, both the lived impacts and our capacities for change.



Our shared climate reality is largely one of rage and grief. Rage against systems steeped in individualism, racism, colonialism, and militarism that overwhelmingly harm poor communities and people of color while upholding inequitable public policies. Rage against toxic industries and influential corporations that continue to divide our communities by race, class, and geography in order to maintain exploitative practices. Rage against the general feelings of apathy, inaction, and fatigue. Our communities also hold heavy grief for the loss of land, waters, and health caused by toxic industries; grief for the loss of life due to pandemics, the carceral state, and natural disasters; and grief for the time and energy lost trying to build and sustain movement momentum to create a better future.







Yet alongside our rage and grief is a thread of hope. Our PMA reflected on the hope and gratitude felt for shared community space, children and the next generation, work on the ground to learn and build, and connections between the Gulf South and Appalachia.

The PMA went deep into analyzing toxic industries, particularly the extractive fossil-fuel energy system, and how it impacts us from local to global scales.



Our Shared Reality

How the fossil fuel industry harms communities across the Six Pillars of Climate Justice

 <p>WATER</p>	<p>Oil and gas drilling, irresponsible disposal of industrial wastewater, and water privatization pollutes key watersheds and violates the human right to water.</p>
 <p>ENERGY</p>	<p>The commodification of energy for profit makes homes less affordable and climate resilient, causing families to face utility debt and homelessness.</p> <p>Inability to keep homes cool puts some of our most vulnerable community members, including Elders, at major health risk during heatwaves.</p>
 <p>LAND</p>	<p>Unsustainable industry development, including the use of eminent domain, scours the landscape contributing to erosion and land loss.</p> <p>Rising sea levels, made worse by emission-related climate changes, force coastal communities from their homelands.</p>
 <p>LABOR</p>	<p>Migrant, refugee, and prison laborers are used to build fossil fuel infrastructure and fight climate disasters without fair pay or work conditions.</p> <p>Legacies of unethical land grabs by fossil fuel companies, largely on Indigenous lands, have constricted community sovereignty and limited job opportunities in many rural and coastal communities of color.</p>
 <p>ECONOMY</p>	<p>The fossil-fuel industry is an extractive, scarcity-based economy that has benefitted from putting pressure on our ability to live.</p> <p>Individual, community, and movement capacity are all stifled by financial instabilities such as fossil-fuel employment busts, gas hikes, and utility debt.</p>
 <p>DEMOCRACY</p>	<p>Our current system of governance was designed to benefit a small margin of society, manifesting in social, economic, and environmental inequities that are exacerbated by fossil fuel development and other corporate influence.</p>

As PMA participants built this shared analysis – it was clear – technical solutions are not really the solutions. It is not just about the source of energy. **It is clear that renewable energy commodified for profit will not address the realities frontline communities are facing.**

Renewable energy developed as an extractive economy in the same manner as the fossil-fuel industry will not make homes more affordable, will not challenge the use of forced or prison labor in energy manufacturing and operations, will not move the power of democracy back to the people, and will not protect the sacredness of our land and water.

The challenge is clear: when we do not build together, corporations shape trade agreements, public policies, and economic decisions that will continually replicate the harms of racialized capitalism, land displacement, colonialism, violent repression, and militarism against communities who stand up for their people. #WeChooseNow to build alternatives together.

Renewable energy developed as an extractive economy like the fossil-fuel industry will not make homes more affordable, will not challenge the use of forced or prison labor in energy manufacturing and operations, will not move the power of democracy back to the people, and will not protect the sacredness of our land and water.

Examples of how our systems connect from the Gulf to the South to Appalachia to the Global South

- Participants shared how easy it is for the petrochemical industry to move from the Ohio River Valley to Cancer Alley, when our
- communities are not in relationships or position to say “not here, not there, not anywhere”
- Participants made clear connections that the pipeline developments in Uganda share the same corporate investors as the Permian pipeline in Texas.

Our Visions and Solutions

The answer to this challenge is that communities must transform our current systems of governance from upholding extractive economies like the fossil fuel industry towards a vision shared and built for all of us.

At a grassroots level, we have the power to organize the unorganized, particularly those most impacted by power disparity and systemic oppression. To leverage community voices, challenge the status quo, and build solidarity from the Gulf to Appalachia and beyond to the Global South, we must first stop participating in our own exploitation and regain sovereignty.

To leverage community voices to challenge the status quo and build solidarity from the Gulf to Appalachia, the South to the Global South, we must first stop participating in our own exploitation in order to regain sovereignty.

The Seventh Generation Principle — reflected in the traditions of many Indigenous cultures — teaches that our decisions should be made in the best interest of seven future generations. To ensure we can live, rest, and thrive in the places we love for many generations to come, we must become good stewards and repair our relationships with each other and with the Earth.

Learning from ancestral wisdom, we must reject our current practices of disposability, isolation, and exploitation in favor of cultures that foster sustainability, community, and equity. We must restore justice and balance to our systems of governance. We must reshape our economy to work for the greater good of all and in synergy with the environment. We must practice democracy built on deep listening, ethically informed decision-making, and community consensus. We must act with respect, reciprocity, responsibility, and rights at the forefront of our minds. We must take bold and impactful steps to alter the course of climate change for the sake of human existence.

“We’re envisioning a better world and we’re gonna start now. We’re gonna pay people valuable wages, treat people well, insist on rest inside of our work, resist capitalist and colonized ways of producing just to produce.

We’re gonna be and we’re gonna love and we’re gonna thrive because of the invisible things, that care economy and spirit. These invisible things have been devalued much too long, and now we want to value them.”

– Colette Pichon Battle, Taproot Earth



Taproot Earth – Peoples Movement Assembly/Climate Justice & Joy (PMA) Baton Rouge, LA 2022

Our Visions and Solutions

Using the Pillars of Climate Justice as guides, we asked: what does a liberated future look like?

TEXAS:

"We want energy to be..."



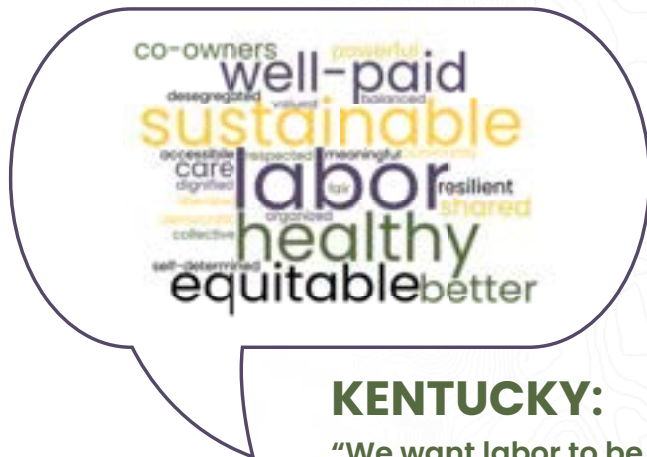
PENNSYLVANIA:

"A healthy economy looks like..."



LOUISIANA:

"The most important elements to democracy are..."



KENTUCKY:

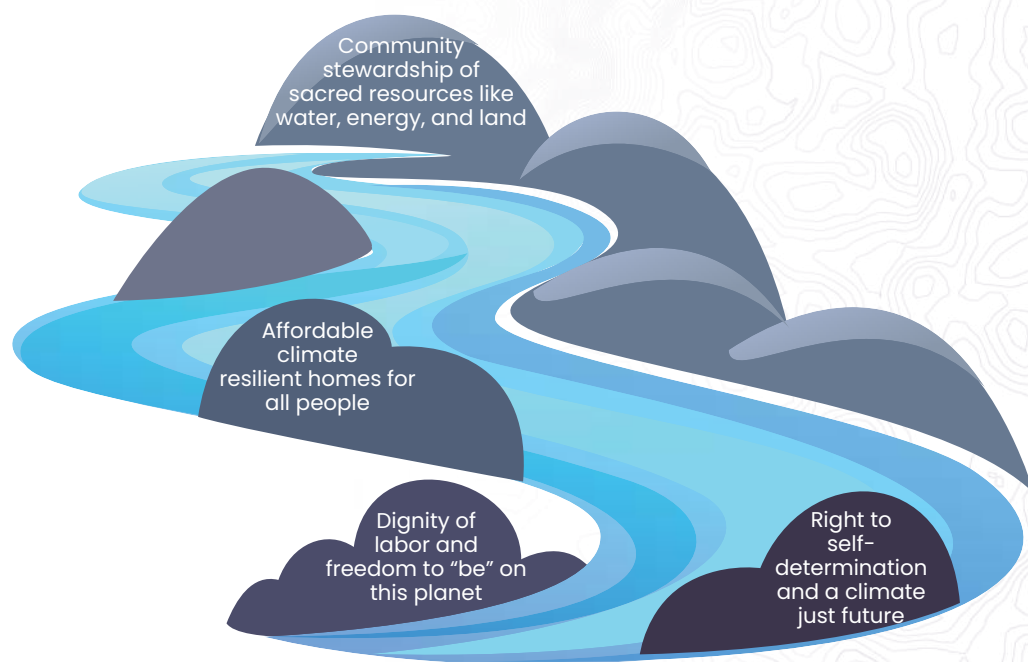
"We want labor to be..."

Our Visions and Solutions

“Politicians come and go from decade to decade, but we are the ones who are here – our families have been here for centuries before and will be here for centuries to come. We’re the ones that can hold this change, can hold this knowledge, and can paint this vision forward.”

– Veronica Coptis, Center for Coalfield Justice

Four vision alignments resonated so strongly across frontline communities from Texas to Pennsylvania. These alignments presented the most potential to leverage existing opportunities and are considered key in charting our river’s path towards climate justice:



Taproot Earth – Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) New Orleans, LA 2022

The PMA process guided policy research conducted by the [Climate and Community Project to clarify the political landscape of Climate Justice Pillars in each state \(TX | LA | KY | PA\)](#). This participatory research led to the creation of seven key intervention areas to be advanced at the local, state, and regional levels to address the climate reality.

Interventions

We deserve safe and affordable energy to live and support ourselves and families.

Challenges:

We see massive energy grid failures and exorbitant bills due to extreme weather, alongside eviction risks for failure to pay skyrocketing fees. Current primary energy sources (fossil-fuel combustion) come with chronic public and environmental health risks. We must reimagine our energy systems for equity and sustainability.

Intervention:

Make the energy grid reliable, sustainable, and publicly accountable

Policy Model:

1. Develop a multi-state public grid
2. Democratize energy cooperatives and utility boards
3. Prioritize alternative pricing

We must honor the Earth as our ancestor and home.

Challenges:

Environmental degradation and pollution continues to impact Black, Indigenous, and poor communities hardest. From Cancer Alley in Louisiana to the building of the Permian pipeline across the sacred lands of the Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe in Texas, our land has been ripped apart and violated for profit and gain. We must work to restore this land and this harm –to be in right relationship to the Earth.

Intervention:

Restore the land and repair legacies of harm

Policy Model:

1. Investigate land titles for abandoned fossil fuel leases and work towards
2. Expand mine/well impact radiuses for more thorough environmental remediation
3. PPrioritize abandoned well and pipeline decommissioning

Interventions

We deserve the right to dignified labor and fair opportunities to support ourselves and families.

Challenges:

For many communities in the Gulf and Appalachia, the most lucrative financial paths are fossil fuels, military, or drugs. Future generations deserve more opportunities. We need solutions that move us away from labor that is extracted and exploited, to labor that is fulfilling and life-giving.

Intervention:

Create sustainable, dignified employment opportunities

Policy Model:

1. Repurpose fossil fuel infrastructure for renewable energy economy
2. Build a mine/well reclamation or fossil fuel transition workforce
3. Develop state Civilian Climate Corps and expand existing environmental job training programs

We all deserve to live free.

Challenges:

In Louisiana, the use of prison labor to clean up oil spills puts people at undue risk, undermines democracy, and most of all violates the right to live and breath free. We need solutions that begin to end the exploitation of prison labor and move towards abolition

Intervention:

End prison labor exploitation

Policy Model:

1. Divert prison industry expenditures towards investments in community infrastructure
2. End carceral fines and fees
3. Divert state and federal disaster funding away from building new carceral infrastructure



Interventions

We deserve healthy, safe, clean drinking water.

Challenges:

Many frontline residents across the Gulf and Appalachia face depleted aquifers, saltwater intrusion, water privatization, disinvestment in municipal water infrastructure, and other threats to our access to clean, safe, affordable drinking water. Water is life – we deserve better.

Intervention:

Ensure equitable residential access to clean water and energy

Policy Model:

1. Establish free, residential access to clean water as a human right through remunicipalisation.
2. Shut-off moratorium by Public Utilities Commission.
3. Repeal PA's Act 12 and other policies that privatize utilities like water.

We deserve to live and rest in a safe and healthy home.

Challenges:

No one should live in fear of getting sick, harmed, or being displaced from their home. From climate gentrification where white, wealthy residents move into disinvested communities of color displacing traditional residents, to forced displacement of coastal Indigenous communities due to sea level rise and extreme weather, to the fact that 1 in 3 kids live in homes that have problems such as lead paint, mold, and leaky roofs, and over 33% of all US homes are at high risk for climate impacts. If home is where the heart is, we deserve safe, healthy, secure homes.

Intervention:

Make whole repairs for safe, affordable, and climate resilient housing

Policy Model:

1. Replicate PA whole home repairs across region
2. Offer holistic whole home upgrades for multifamily and single-family homes
3. Invest in climate resilient community infrastructure to address mounting risks from extreme weather and rising seas

Interventions

We deserve to live in the places we love and call home, knowing that public investments are made to plan and protect against major climate disasters.

Challenges:

Residents most impacted by climate risks have the wisdom and lived experience to know what is needed to mitigate the risks and damages from climate disasters like hurricanes and floods. We must prioritize climate preparedness efforts and frontline community leadership in developing disaster plans.

Intervention:

Fund community-led climate planning and ensure fair disaster response

Policy Model:

1. Advocate for FEMA disaster preparedness stipends for residents in high-risk climate disaster areas
2. Assess communities for all disaster-related vulnerabilities and communicate findings with language justice and accessibility prioritized
3. Fully fund a public disaster response workforce, ending the use of incarcerated people in unpaid high-risk labor



Taproot Earth – Peoples Movement Assembly (PMA) New Orleans, LA 2022

Exhibit 1

"What keeps me going is imagining what the alternatives can be when we lock arms and work together as a community."

- Denise Fairchild, Emerald Cities Collaborative

After visioning new climate realities of just futures for energy, democracy, labor, and economy, the PMA then addressed the question of: what is blocking us from our visions of the future? How do we put these visionary transformative actions into work?

Many of our communities on the climate frontlines have been "workshopped to death" by external forces aiming to secure community buy-in for a policy or project that has already been fast tracked without prior and informed consent. Instead of prescribing a "top down" solution to our mounting climate risks that fits a predetermined goal, the Gulf to Appalachia Peoples Movement Assembly collectively honed in on key transformative actions that aligned across the regions, garnered community consensus, and met people where they're at.



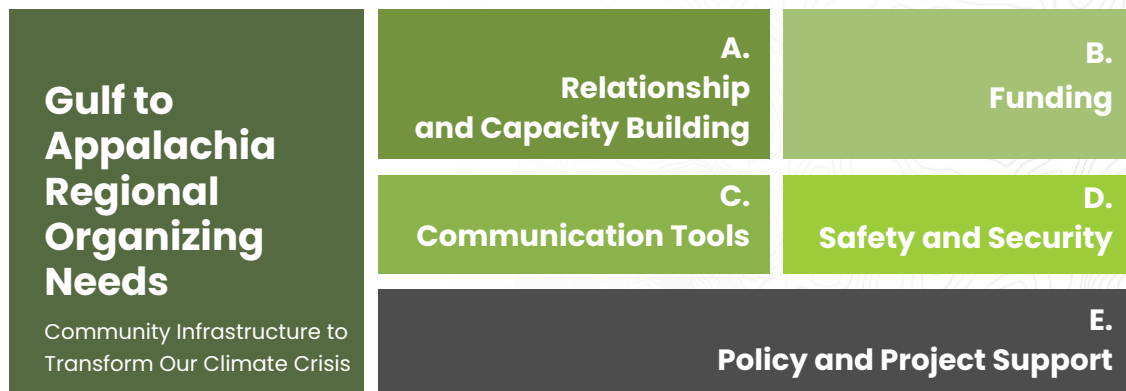
"I see it as an invitation in the noise and chaos of this moment in our nation's history to not be distracted, but to accept this invitation to redesign our nation."

- Ashleigh Gardere, PolicyLink

Together we analyzed the roots of our intersectional crisis that warranted the interventions outlined above, assessed opportunities for strategic actions that can be replicated across locales and states, identified challenges to change and collective strengths to help us overcome, and mapped regional alignments that can connect and inform our work.

Diving deep, the Gulf to Appalachia PMA identified critical organizing infrastructure needed to strengthen frontline movements and advance just climate solutions. The assembly affirmed the following five sectors of work for further regional collaboration:

Exhibit 1



A. Relationship and Capacity Building

From healing together in the aftermath of disaster to sharing successful strategies for change, frontline residents need more community spaces to exchange ideas, resources, and stories. By building fellowship and sharing replicable climate solutions, our communities can grow stronger together. To strengthen our regional movements and address a lack of investment in organizing capacity, the Gulf to Appalachia PMA is building a peer to peer network to foster mentorship, skillsharing, and cultural healing for frontline communities.

B. Funding

While the Gulf and Appalachia have been targets for significant philanthropic investment and federal funding through the Inflation Reduction Act, Investment in Infrastructure and Jobs Act, and other programs, there is limited funding prioritized for community-led climate justice work. The Gulf to Appalachia PMA is working to bring together frontline communities, aligned organizations, and allied funders to invest proactively following frontline leadership.

C. Communication Tools

The Gulf to Appalachia PMA agreed that our movements need new ways of communicating to people within and beyond our networks to build collective power across different experiences. We know we must signal boost solutions rooted in accountability, abundance, and love over the noise of communications rooted in fear and othering. The PMA is co-creating regional narratives and communication tools to share our stories and transformative solutions with wider audiences.

D. Safety and Security

The climate crisis threatens our access to water, energy, and land, which triggers a scarcity mindset in many and a desire to control or profit off these essential resources. As a people facing growing economic and social challenges, we must resist by creating community systems of harm reduction, protection, and care. Investments in safety and security are critical for this movement. The Gulf to Appalachia PMA is committed to growing our collective resilience through skill sharing and training.

E. Policy and Project Support

From legal aid to policy research, engineering skills to capital flow awareness, policy and project implementation support are key to advancing frontline climate solutions. The Gulf to Appalachia PMA is working with existing and emerging formations to connect end-users to specialized expertise and put agency, data, and knowledge in the hands of frontline leaders.

In collaboration with Taproot Earth, Gulf to Appalachia PMA leaders are advancing these five organizing work streams to strengthen our individual and collective power across the region.

Exhibit 2: Our Commitments Together

Based on the frontline solutions elevated in the Gulf to Appalachia PMA process, Taproot Earth in co-production with Gulf to Appalachia leadership is advancing this regional movement infrastructure through the following #WeChooseNow initiatives:

1. Frontline Organizing Retreat

Taproot Earth has been honored to convene several sacred pilgrimages and healing events grounded in ancestral traditions and frontline community. Cultural celebration and spiritual resilience are critical to our success as organizers, therefore, the Gulf to Appalachia movement will hold space where regional frontline leaders can gather in fellowship, heal together, develop trust, build collaborative strategies, and strengthen movements.

2. Leadership Activation Fellowship

To address the need for a “deeper bench” and a new generation of skilled frontline organizers who can build movements across sectors, geographies, and identities, Taproot Earth will establish a leadership cohort that links emerging leaders to the Gulf to Appalachia PMA network to grow our capacities, expand our audiences, and build broader power. The first Leadership Activation Fellowship cohort will include PMA participants beginning in 2023.

3. #WeChooseNow Communication Toolkit

To counter climate crisis messaging that centers scarcity and fear, Taproot Earth is advancing our [Liberation Horizon](#) narrative to encourage people to build the world we all want to live in. Working with radical communication teams like [We Make the Future](#), Taproot Earth will facilitate processes to co-develop and share messaging tactics and materials to support Gulf to Appalachia civic engagement and community power-building.

4. Resource Exchange Portal

Taproot Earth is developing a safe and secure Gulf to Appalachia Resource Exchange Portal rooted in shared principles and agreements. This will be a space for leaders and members to share opportunities, stories, strategies, and support. This portal will also be a means to share skills, technical assistance, specialized knowledge, and implementation resources.

5. Frontline Aligned Funding

In the coming months, Taproot Earth will convene a cross regional working group composed of grassroots leadership to influence how philanthropic dollars and federal funding are invested in this region. This working group will build a community consensus to help ensure funds are dispersed and implemented in ways that are accountable to the frontlines.

“We can’t do this alone and we don’t want to. We’re not alone. Let’s gather our people, find out who we are, find out what we’re up against, and let’s build the world that we deserve. That’s the basics of organizing and anyone and everyone can do it. That’s the rise up we’re talking about. Come together and build it. It’s not just right but possible and necessary.”

– Stephanie Guilloud, Southern Movement Assembly

“There’s a well-organized force trying to prevent us from taking collective action. But at the very base level, connecting our stories, understanding that we have many different experiences, cultures, languages, but are actually unified by a shared vision for our future and the things that we most desire and want for our own families, that’s a shared dream.”

– Miya Yoshitani, Asian Pacific Environmental Network

Sign up for the #WeChooseNow newsletter for updates on Gulf to Appalachia work.

Appendix I : People

The following participants participated in part or all of the PMA process, including deep state-specific research with ccp. We recognize the time, energy, and value these participants shared in different stages of this process to create the vision, solutions, and strategies shared in this report. We hold deep gratitude for the collaboration that went into this document and the ideas behind it. We could not do this work alone and we would like to honor the individuals from our Gulf to Appalachia Peoples Movement Assembly.

NOTE: Being named here does not indicate endorsement by an individual or their organization, but simply documents a person's presence and participation in this process.

PMA Pillar States

Kentucky

- Lisa Abbott (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth)
- Lane Boldman (Kentucky Conservation Committee)
- Ivy Brashear (Mountain Association)
- Cara Cooper (Kentucky Just Transition Coalition)
- Jamieson Deamer (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth)
- Shana Goggins (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth)
- Dana Kuhnline (Relmagine Appalachia)
- Donielle Lovell (Western Kentucky University)
- Elisa Owen (Kentucky Interfaith Power and Light)
- Lydia Pelot-Hobbs (University of Kentucky)
- Elizabeth Sawyer (Hood to the Holler)
- Jessie Scaggs (Kentuckians for the Commonwealth)
- Meredith Scalos (Appalshop)
- Rebecca Shelton (Appalachian Citizens' Law Center)
- Cara Stewart (Kentucky Voices for Health)
- Molly Updegrove (Relmagine Appalachia)
- Amanda Woodrum (Relmagine Appalachia)
- Chris Woolery (Mountain Association)
- Marcia Dinkins (Black Appalachian Coalition)



Louisiana

- Miriam Belblidia (Imagine Water Works)
- Bette Billiot (United Houma Nation)
- Christine Brown (Who's Coming With Me)
- Logan Burke (Alliance for Affordable Energy)
- Kanitra Caston-Hill (Green New Deal Network)
- Emma Collin (Gulf Coast Center for Law and Policy)
- Jamie Dardar (Taproot Earth)
- Devin Davis (Voice of the Experienced)
- Jesse George (Alliance for Affordable Energy)
- Norris Henderson (Voice of the Experienced)
- Robert Henig Bell (Committee For a Better New Orleans)
- Ashley Herad (Taproot Earth)
- Court Holden (Voice of the Experienced)
- Klie Kliebert (Imagine Water Works)
- Zach Kopkin (Sierra Club)



Appendix I : People

Louisiana cont.

- Kellyn LaCour-Conant (Taproot Earth)
- Ivy Mathieu (St. John the Baptist Parish)
- Kelly Orians (The First 72+)
- Jan Patton (Center for International Environmental Law)
- Colette Pichon Battle (Taproot Earth)
- Bruce Reilly (Voice of the Experienced)
- Justin Solet (United Houma Nation)
- Vanessa Spinazola (Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition)
- Robert Desmarais Sullivan (Greater New Orleans Interfaith Climate Coalition)
- Grace Treffinger (Taproot Earth)
- Maria Victoire (Taproot Earth)
- Tricia Wallace (New Orleans for Lincoln Beach)
- Nziki Wiltz (Voice of the Experienced)
- Logan Wolf (Voice of the Experienced)



Pennsylvania

- Rob Altenburg (PennFuture)
- Jena Baka (Penn State)
- Cecilia Behgam (Action Center on Race & the Economy)
- Amy Laura Cahn (Taproot Earth)
- Michael Canning-Badges (Better Path Coalition)
- Veronica Coptis (Center for Coalfield Justice)
- Kipp Dawson (United Mine Workers of America)
- Lisa DePaoli (Center for Coalfield Justice)
- Alex Dews (Institute for Market Transformation)
- Akira Drake Rodriguez (Climate and Community Project)
- Nora Elmarzouky (Emerald Cities Collaborative)
- Caitlin Fritz (215 PA)
- Anthony Giancatarino (Taproot Earth)
- Julie Greenberg (Power Interfaith)
- Young Grguras (Post Landfill Action Network)
- Debra Huntley (Pittsburgh United)
- Ella Israeli (Sunrise Philly)
- Yusef Jonas (Coalition to End Death by Incarceration)
- Esteban Kelly (Climate and Community Project)
- Sonia Kikeri (Emerald Cities Collaborative)
- Arielle Klagsbrun (Action Center on Race & the Economy)
- Jana Korn (Philly AFL-CIO)
- Tracey Lewis (Public Citizen)
- Sarah Martik (Center for Coalfield Justice)
- Briann Moye (PA Climate Equity Table)
- Steve Paul (One PA)
- Sharon Pillar (PA Solar Center)
- Shawmar Pitts (Philly Thrive)
- Carly Pourzand (215 PA)
- Carol Saalbach (Green Party of Allegheny County)



Appendix I : People

Pennsylvania cont.

- Heaven Sensky (Center for Coalfield Justice)
- Mohan Seshadri (Asian Pacific Islander Political Alliance)
- Zach Shrewsbury (Common Defense)
- Tonyehn Verkitus (Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania)
- Kearn Warren (OnePA)
- Elected Officials



Texas

- Andrew Barley (West Street Recovery)
- Chris Battle (Taproot Earth)
- John Beard III (Port Arthur Community Action Network)
- John Beard Jr (Port Arthur Community Action Network)
- Alex Birnel (MOVE Texas)
- Stevie Dunning (American Gateways)
- Miguel Escoto (Earthworks)
- Eli Hilbert (Permian Basin for Future Generations)
- Marsha Jackson (Southern Sector Rising)
- Cozetta LaMore (Choices Interlinking)
- Alice Liu (West Street Recovery)
- Christa Mancias (Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe)
- Michael McKenzie (Taproot Earth)
- Carolyn Rivera (Northeast Action Collective)
- Deanna Santiago (Carrizo Comecrudo Tribe)
- Robin Schneider (Texas Campaign for the Environment)
- Becky Selle (West Street Recovery)
- Sheila Serna Rio Grande International Study Center
- Brenda Tijerina (West Street Recovery)
- Sharon Wilson (Earthworks)



Gulf to Appalachia

Alabama

- Nina Morgan
(People Against Neighborhood Industrial Contamination)

Florida

- Sage Ponder (Climate and Community Project)

Mississippi

- Aton Bridges (Mississippi Rising Coalition)
- Lea Campbell (Mississippi Rising Coalition)
- Jessica Carter (Taproot Earth)
- Jonathan Green (Steps Coalition)
- Gordon Jackson (STEPS Coalition)
- Bridgeet Imani Olugbala (Cooperation Jackson)
- Catherine Robinson (One Voice MS)



Appendix I : People

Gulf to Appalachia cont.

Ohio

- Ardath (“Ardie”) Griffin (Emerald Cities Collaborative)

Puerto Rico

- Teresa Ramos (Taproot Earth)

Virginia

- Kendall Dix (Taproot Earth)
- Lyndsay Tarus (The Alliance for Appalachia)

West Virginia

Lakiesha Lloyd (Common Defense)

Allies cont.

California

- Selena Feliciano (Energy Democracy Project)
- Crystal Huang (People Power Solar Cooperative)
- Shaina Nanavati (Local Clean Energy Alliance!)
- Isaac Sevier (Peoples Utility Project)
- Maria Stamas (People’s Utility Commons/Climate and Community Project)
- Al Weinrub (California Alliance for Community Energy)
- Pete Woiwode (Reclaim Our Power)
- Yasminn Zaerpoor (Policy Link)

District of Columbia

- Al-Jalil Gault (Climate and Community Project)
- Ben Goloff (Center for Biological Diversity)
- Malini Ranganathan (American University)
- Precious Rideout (Institute for Market Transformation)
- Jean Su (Center for Biological Diversity)
- Olufemi Taiwo (Climate and Community Project)

Georgia

- Preye Cobham (Women Watch Afrika)
- Andrei Greenwood (Taproot Earth)
- Stephanie Guilloud (Southern Movement Assembly)
- Glory Kilanko (Women Watch Afrika)

Maine

- Johanna Bozuwa (Climate and Community Project)
- Collin rees (Oil Change International)

Maryland

- Patrick Bigger (Climate and Community Project)



Appendix I: People

Allies cont.

Minnesota

- Jothsna Harris (Change Narrative)
- Fayola Jacobs (Climate and Community Project)

Montana

- Sriram Madhusoodanan (Taproot Earth)

New Jersey

- Meishka Mitchell (Emerald Cities Collaborative)

New York

- Donald Anthonyson (Taproot Earth)
- Adam Flint (Network for a Sustainable Tomorrow)
- Batul Hassan (CCP)
- Randy Jackson (It Takes Roots)
- Oren Kadosh (Labor Network for Sustainability)
- Han Lu (National Employment Law Project)
- Amy Paul (Taproot Earth)
- Seth Prins (CCP)
- Patrick Robbins (NY Energy Democracy Alliance)
- Anthony Rogers-Wright (New York Lawyers for the Public Interest)
- Adrien Salazar (Grassroots Global Justice Alliance)

Oklahoma

- Mana Tahaie (Taproot Earth)

Oregon

- Lisa Hubbard (New Economy Network)
- Anthony Levanda (Center for Climate Action and Sustainability)

Virginia

- Shantell Bingham (Climate Justice Alliance)

Washington

- Anastasia Christman (National Employment Law Project)

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- Lynette Kaid

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- Andrei Greenwood



Appendix II: Definition Gulf to Appalachia

A Note on “Gulf to Appalachia”

The places we call home have deep meaning for us and help shape our identities. These places are sources of grounding and power for many. But our geographies have also been used to stereotype, shame, and divide people across regions and backgrounds. When Taproot Earth convened this group, we brought together communities from states within both the Gulf and Appalachia regions that have been impacted by chronic extraction and share histories of resistance. For Taproot these regions are political as much as geological, geographic, or cultural.

In discussing the Gulf and Appalachia, there are a variety of definitions of varying contexts:

- Appalachia (Geology): defined as the mountain range formed roughly 480 million years ago that starts in Canada and ends in northern Alabama and Mississippi.
- Appalachia (Government): defined by the Appalachian Regional Commission as the 423 counties across 13 states from southern New York to northern Mississippi.
- Gulf South (Movement): After the 2010 BP oil drilling disaster, GCCLP convened Peoples Movement Assemblies with community leaders from Texas to Florida to discuss the impacts of extractive energy systems. It was clear that state and federal policies impacted these outcomes, and that dividing communities by “coastal” or “non-coastal” regions only worsened the status quo and extractive power structures. The Gulf South as defined by the Gulf South for a Green New Deal formation encompasses the five states along the Northern Gulf of Mexico, and Puerto Rico. For more information on this formation, visit: <https://www.gulfsouth4gnd.org/>

The reality is that through racialized colonization driven by white supremacy and exploitative economies, many existing political boundaries were drawn to privatize natural resources and divide people from working collaboratively with one another. But as water flows it does not respect man made political lines and neither should we as we envision new models of community governance. To strengthen community stewardship we must look at our regions as biosheds and draw wisdom from the connections we see within our ecosystems.

“Gulf to Appalachia” (OH, PA, WV, VA, TX, TN, NC, AL, TX, MS, LA, FL, PR) means frontline communities from Texas to Pennsylvania who bear the heaviest cost from extractive economies, including generational poverty, and/or are directly impeded from advancing climate justice in their states due to the economic and political control extractive industries wield in these two regions. As a result, Taproot Earth’s definition is more expansive and includes people and communities who may not culturally or geographically identify as Appalachian or as a coastal resident. For example, in some states industries profit from extraction and control the power dynamics for the entire state, like in Pennsylvania and Kentucky – these state level influences impact communities in places like Philadelphia or Louisville, outside the bounds of conventional “Appalachia” definitions, from advancing climate solutions. To bridge our movement efforts to reach our shared liberation, we see these expansive frameworks as necessary.

Appendix III: Resources

CCP State Pillar Reports – LINK TO REPORTS

- Democracy – [Louisiana: Report](#)
- Economy – [Pennsylvania: Report](#)
- Energy – [Texas: Report](#)
- Labor – [Kentucky: Report](#)

Democracy Resources

- [Incarceration Transparency](#): data and research on incarceration to address significant harms from conditions of incarceration in Louisiana.
- [Climate and Punishment](#): mapped climate risks for 6,500 carceral facilities.

Economy Resources

- [Cancel Wall Street!](#): the nuts and bolts of public banking, and what communities have to gain by lending to themselves instead of relying on Wall Street Banks. Features an introduction to city-level public finance, and how better federal policies could improve the economic outlook for cities.
- [State of Environmental Justice in Pennsylvania](#): one hour video of an event hosted by Chester University features speakers from across the Commonwealth discussing environmental justice problems, including water and fossil fuel extraction with a focus on racial and economic dimensions..
- [State of Working Pennsylvania 2022](#): report from the Keystone Budget Center on the Pennsylvania economy and how trends reflect national trends. Focus on employment issues, especially wages and collective bargaining.

Energy Resources

- [Carbon Impacts of Reinstating the U.S. Crude Export Ban](#): report shows that reinstating the U.S. crude oil export ban could reduce global emissions by the equivalent of closing 19 to 42 coal plants.
- [FracTracker Pennsylvania Map](#): interactive map of oil and gas drilling across Pennsylvania, including every code violation issued to a driller since 2008, plus info on fracking impacts and policy options to reign in fossil fuel production.
- [People's Utility Justice Playbook](#): primer on utility justice and how to achieve it.
- [Permian Climate Bomb](#): six-part series exploring the ongoing oil, gas, and petrochemical boom in the Permian Basin and Gulf Coast.
- [The Power of Community Utilities](#): evaluates existing public or cooperative utilities to understand how they could become “anchor institutions” in their community to accelerate the just energy transition.

Labor Resources

- [Distributed Solar Good Jobs](#): this article from the UC Berkeley Labor Center provides recommendations to create jobs within distributed solar projects,
- [High Road Training Partnerships](#): primer from the California Workforce Development Board (CWDB), which invested in eight High Road Training Partnerships (H RTP) to model industry-led workforce development that addresses equity, job quality, worker voice, efficiency, and sustainability.
- [Just Transition Listening Project](#): developed by the Labor Network for Sustainability, centering people affected by economic transitions to create recommendations to make communities and workers whole.
- [Repairing the Damage](#): report by Ohio River Valley Institute on cleaning up land, air, and water damaged by coal industry before 1977 in relation to the Abandoned Mine Land program. See also: “[Repairing the Damage – the costs of delaying reclamation at modern-era mines](#)” by ReImagine Appalachia
- [How to Clean Abandoned Mines with New Federal Investments](#): article from Ohio River Valley on leveraging Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding through Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) to clean up the environmental damage of abandoned mines. See also: [Coal Mine Cleanup in the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Explained](#)
- [A Big Civilian Climate Corps is Vital for Economy and Appalachia](#): report from Ohio River Valley Institute on the prospects of a CCC to reduce carbon emissions, grow jobs, and restore the environment.

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Gulf to Appalachia Climate Action Strategy

2022 - 2023

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