

Tennessee Has Bright Green Potential

Green industry has the potential of pulling Tennessee up by its economic bootstraps, according to a state report making a timely entrance as a newly-inaugurated president looks to energize the troubled U.S. economy. Released by the Tennessee Department of Labor and Workforce Development last month, "Growing Green: The Potential for Green Job Growth in Tennessee" doesn't really say anything new. Instead, it represents a collection of data from a number of state and nationwide studies and spells out specifics for job creation in renewable- and energy-efficiency-related fields.

"What this is in many ways is a reflection of national numbers," said Department of Labor spokesman Jeff Hentschel. "This report is a snapshot of what's possible. "With the loss of 60,000 jobs across the state between December 2007 and December 2008, we do need more jobs to be created", said Martha Wettemann, statistical analyst supervisor with the Department of Labor, who developed the report.

Pulling from another report issued by the University of Massachusetts last September, the study estimates that, bearing in mind the state's existing industries and expertise, more than 40,000 green jobs could be created with a \$1.9 billion investment in energy efficiency, mass transit and freight rail expansion, smart grid development and the evolution of renewable energy alternatives. Federal- and state-funded research and development efforts in cellulosic biofuels and more energy-efficient buildings at Oak Ridge National Laboratory and the University of Tennessee give the state an edge in green job development, Wettemann said.

So does the presence of the Tennessee Valley Authority, which is expanding energy efficiency efforts and partnering with Nissan to develop a charging network for plug-in electric vehicles that the automaker plans to introduce in 2010, she said. "We've always had low-cost energy because of TVA, but I think because TVA is an area wide entity, it could take on additional initiatives that could be an advantage to businesses," Wettemann said.

"We anticipate that there will be funding in these areas in the stimulus package. If you're going to use this money, you have to do your planning ahead of time," Wettemann said.