

Energy summit planning under way

By Chuck Stinnett (Contact)
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HENDERSON, Ky. — In what could be an unprecedented gathering here, plans are proceeding for an energy summit in Henderson in early March.

Gov. Steve Beshear and Sen. Mitch McConnell have highlighted the list of those who have been asked to speak at the Illinois Basin Energy Conference at the Henderson Fine Arts Center on March 6.

"We've gotten no hard confirmation at this time" from Beshear or McConnell, said Talina Mathews, executive director of the Kentucky Office of Energy Policy, which is helping sponsor the event.

"But that's pretty typical this far out when it involves the governor and Sen. McConnell," she said.

Mathews expects 150 to 250 attendees, including representatives of the energy industry, government regulators, researchers and public officials.

They will hear presentations about next-generation coal-fueled power plants; coal gasification projects in Western Kentucky; carbon capture and sequestration; research into the use of algae to absorb carbon dioxide and then use the algae as a biofuel; ethanol and biodiesel plants in Western Kentucky; and energy work force development.

If they attend, Beshear and McConnell are expected to address broader issues concerning Kentucky's future in energy production.

The conference stems from efforts by Henderson leaders to promote this area for energy development and research.

"It was Henderson's idea," Mathews said. Her office, which was allocated \$5 million for energy research last year, is helping plan the event.

A shared idea

"It's a combination of people behind the idea of bringing energy experts here," said Henderson County Judge-executive Sandy Watkins.

"The lion's share is Sen. (Dorsey) Ridley and John Dunaway and myself, and Judge Jody Jenkins of Union County and the judge in Webster County, Jim Townsend," he said.

A chorus has been growing in several sectors locally to promote the Henderson area — which has abundant coal, two rivers, several energy companies, the Geological Survey office and other resources — as the site for energy projects.

"We are situated to be a center for energy research and energy projects and energy growth," said Kevin Sheilley, president and CEO of Northwest Kentucky Forward, a regional economic development agency.

"Our hope is to start with a satellite office" for research, perhaps at the Kentucky Geological Survey office here, "and have an opportunity to grow into a full energy research center," he said.