The Appalachian basin, spanning parts of Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, West Virginia, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, has been a major source of coal production in the United States. Despite its vast reserves, production has been declining in recent years due to increased competition from other regions and changes in energy demand.

**Figure 1.** Graph showing percent of U.S. coal production by region.

**Figure 2.** Graph showing peak coal production in the Appalachian basin.

**Year of Maximum Coal Production by County**

The Appalachian basin has historically produced coal for various reasons, including its proximity to major markets and the abundance of resources. The map below illustrates the year of maximum coal production by county within the basin.

**Introduction**

Although coal mining and production have been ongoing since the early 1800s, the Appalachian basin has seen three distinct production cycles. These cycles are characterized by different economic, socio-political, and technological conditions.

1. **Pre-Industrial Cycle** (1800s-1860s): This period is marked by the earliest coal mining activities in the region, driven by the geographical distribution of coal and its utility as a fuel source for grist mills. The production was limited and sporadic due to the lack of infrastructure and transportation networks.

2. **Depression and World War I Cycle** (1870s-1910s): This period witnessed a surge in coal production due to the industrial boom caused by the widespread adoption of coal as a fuel for steam engines. Economic factors, such as the expansion of steel mills and the demand for energy, fueled this increase. The production continued to grow despite the onset of World War I, driven by the need for energy during the war.

3. **Depression and Post-WWII Cycle** (1920s-1960s): After World War I, the production experienced a decline due to the economic downturn, followed by another surge during World War II, driven by military needs. Post-war, the coal industry faced competition from other energy sources, such as natural gas, and the demand for coal decreased. However, the basin has continued to produce coal, albeit at a reduced rate.

**Bituminous Coal Production in the Appalachian Basin—Past, Present, and Future**

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