

Biomass hits the masses

Loggers and smart forestry entrepreneurs are seeing the advantages of sustainable and renewable forestry practices, and many projects are underway thanks in part to the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, also known as the "stimulus package." In fact, the \$787-billion bill dedicates \$500 million to forestry funding, including \$250 million for state and private lands, and \$50 million for competitive biomass grants.

Partnerships among loggers, environmentalists, and the federal government are driving bioenergy projects nationwide. In Minnesota, for example, biomass from urban wood waste is now heating some 80 percent of downtown St. Paul. District Energy St. Paul Inc.'s Combined Heat and Power (CHP) plant is fueled by clean wood waste from industrial processes and construction and yard waste that would otherwise be put in landfills or burned in the open air. Successful ongoing projects like this one are advancing biomass energy across North America.

One green project currently under consideration is a biomass-fueled 13-megawatt electric plant in Lakeview, Oregon, that will generate 150 construction jobs. After completion, the project will require 75 new forestry jobs to harvest a steady flow of woody biomass from federal forests. This biomass plant will generate enough juice to power every home in Lakeview, with enough spare energy to sell to the greater energy grid.

Meanwhile in rural Montana, the communities of Darby and Victor are benefiting from the Fuels for Schools project that heats school buildings using woody biomass. In its first year, Darby's new biomass boiler reduced the school's heating bill by \$35,000 and consumed 640 tons of wood chips that would otherwise have been burned in slash piles.

Even prisoners are getting into the green-energy act. The Northern Nevada Correctional Center in Carson City is replacing electric power with a wood-fired biomass boiler, a move that is expected to eliminate some 75 percent of the prison's utility expenses. The Sierra Pacific Power Company will purchase excess energy generated by the new biomass plant.

An early biomass plant in Canada

In the James Bay area of Northern Quebec is the Oujé-Bougoumou Cree Nation community. Back in 1992, these industrious people built an energy plant that utilizes waste from the nearby Barrette-Chapais sawmill to provide heat to a community of some 600 local residents. All told, former wood "waste" turned cost-efficient biomass heats and generates domestic hot water for some 160 homes and public buildings.

A model of community sustainability for more than 18 years, the Oujé-Bougoumou Cree Nation project delivers inexpensive energy, reduced CO₂ emissions, and jobs to this Canadian community.

CONGRESS IS TURNING UP ACES

The American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (ACES), passed by the House of Representatives, aims to make biomass projects an increasingly important part of the United States' energy future. The bill contains language that requires energy companies to replace some fossil fuels with renewable resources.

"Under ACES, forest biomass from private and public lands will be used by power and fuel companies to meet national renewable energy and fuels standards," says John Deere Construction & Forestry's Director of Public Affairs Nate Clark. "While it's unclear (at press time) whether the Senate will take the same approach as the House in addressing energy and climate change, one thing is clear — forest biomass will have a more significant part in United States energy policy going forward." Stay tuned.

ENSURING YOUR PLACE IN THE NEW GREEN ECONOMY

Clark says the American Loggers Council (ALC) played a key role in representing the logging industry during the congressional debate on

the ACES bill. "ALC made our voice heard in a powerful way on Capitol Hill. They shared personal stories about the impact of the economic recession on loggers and forestry communities across the country. By doing so, the ALC was able to not only highlight our nation's forest resources as one way to meet our green-energy and climate-change goals, but to also reveal forest biomass as a source of economic opportunity and job creation for a ravaged logging industry."

ALC Executive Vice President Danny Dructor is bullish about biomass harvesting and sustainable forest management as a boost to the economic health of our industry. "By harvesting biomass, the nation's federal and private forestlands will experience huge benefits in the prevention of catastrophic forest fires, the preservation of wildlife habitats, and the protection of critical water resources," says Dructor. "A sustainable biomass industry will keep our forests healthy and provide clean energy and green jobs."

The new green economy has arrived, and many smart loggers have begun carving out their niche supplying woody biomass to a growing number of green-energy plants. And between the stimulus package and ACES, there's much opportunity being laid on the table in our inevitable eco new deal. ■

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— Nate Clark, Director of Public Affairs,
John Deere Construction & Forestry