



Economic Use of Woody Biomass from the National Forests

The National Association of Forest Service Retirees supports the harvest and economic use of woody biomass in need of removal from National Forest Lands following the criteria established in approved Forest Plans. The benefits are numerous and have the potential to contribute positively to the economy, to the health of the forest, to public and community health and wealth, and to aid in mitigating the potential for global warming. In supporting use of this material, we also recognize that a certain amount of forest biomass, when left on the forest floor, can contribute positively to the forest in ways such as nutrient cycling and habitat for wildlife. We believe that active, well-informed management of these forests is the best way to make the proper decisions on biomass removal, and we support the necessary focus of research and management within the Forest Service in order to make these decisions.

Forests have an important role in sequestering carbon. They also contribute many of the more traditional benefits such as wood, water, recreation, and wildlife habitat. With careful management the carbon sequestration role can be enhanced even as other benefits are provided. For example, wildfires have swept through millions of acres of dense, overstocked forests in the **West**. When that happens the carbon, along with other, often dangerous chemicals, from burned material is released into the atmosphere. Removal and use of some of this material can **sequester carbon** in long-term products, provide energy to replace energy dependence on non-renewable fossil fuels, and enhance the remaining forest's health and growth to further provide for carbon sequestration. If done correctly, traditional benefits of the forest, community vitality, public health, and economic opportunities will also be expanded.

Woody biomass management on the National Forests should also strive to minimize taxpayer costs. Economic use of forest biomass can provide returns that exceed, or at least partially offset, the costs of management. Managers should seek to move biomass into the highest value use, and to send lower value material to uses such as energy, which can readily use this material. In this way, both higher value uses and energy uses can help offset the cost of all biomass removal.

The national burden on taxpayers will be further reduced because the woody biomass-using industry will provide jobs, **taxes** and income to local communities, reducing the need for unemployment payments and economic stimulation programs. Some of these communities are in areas that have been the hardest hit by the current recession, and will gain from the economic stability and employment that come from new industries. Finally, the high cost of forest fire fighting is borne by the taxpayer. Removal of woody biomass will reduce the occurrence of catastrophic wildfires, and the associated community impacts, resource damage and fire suppression costs.

Decreasing wildfire damages and related suppression costs is only one forest health incentive for woody biomass removal. Widespread insect attacks, such as the current outbreak of mountain pine beetle, call for management strategies that include removal of affected trees. This is also true for outbreaks of tree diseases; invasive and undesirable plant species, and improvement of wildlife habitat.

Successful implementation of programs to remove and use woody biomass from National Forests will also benefit private forestlands. Private forestland owners will have access to the same woody biomass markets, and can economically remove undesirable biomass from their lands. Private forestland owners also can target the markets by focusing management in other ways, such as growing short rotation trees for energy. Having an available market to provide a return on their investment is often critical to private forestland owner decisions to retain their forests and to keep it in a healthy biological condition. Further, where private forests (or private residences) are adjacent to currently fire-prone National Forests, the potential for catastrophic fire losses will be significantly reduced. We support the Forest Service's State and Private Forestry Program in cooperation with State Foresters in providing leadership on these lands.

Finally, we stress that woody biomass is not limited to small diameter, overstocked stands of trees. Harvest in larger diameter forest stands for traditional wood products also results in substantial amounts of small woody biomass, and to the extent that its removal makes ecological sense, this material can also be used economically and productively. We note that the American Clean Energy and Security Act of 2009 (ACESA) would exclude much of this material and thereby limit an important source of woody biomass for energy and other uses, as well as allowing increases of fuel for wildfires. Biomass processing facilities must be sited based upon the realistic long-term supply available from national forests as determined by National Forest Management Plans, and similar plans for private forests.

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"The National Association of Forest Service Retirees is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan, private organization whose members believe in the U.S. Forest Service Missions. Members have dedicated their careers to protecting and managing National Forest System lands and advising, researching and cooperating on natural resources matters throughout the United States and around the world."