



PRINCIPLES FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY: FOREST BIOMASS IS ESSENTIAL & STATE FORESTERS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

April 2009

Summary

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) views forests as a strategic national resource of vital importance to meeting the nation's economic, environmental, and energy needs. The Renewable Electricity Standard (RES) and other federal energy initiatives must fully include a broad renewable biomass definition—such as the one included in the 2008 Farm Bill—if national renewable energy goals are to be met.

Beyond a broad definition, forest sustainability concerns are best addressed through existing and flexible approaches adapted to landowner goals and local conditions. Federal policy should affirm the leadership role of State Foresters in protecting and managing nonfederal forests and commit federal funding to help cover costs associated with new responsibilities assigned to state forestry agencies that involve ensuring the sustainability of biomass harvests.

Core Principles for Renewable Energy Policy

The National Association of State Foresters (NASF) support federal renewable energy policies and renewable biomass definitions that are consistent with six (6) core principles outlined below.

I. Forest biomass must be a part of any solution to meeting the nation's renewable energy goals.

Forest biomass is essential to meeting national goals for renewable energy, particularly in regions where wind, solar, and other renewable energy options are not viable. Forest biomass is one of the nation's most cost effective and readily available renewable raw materials for energy use.

II. Forest biomass from federal lands must be eligible and all sustainably managed forests, public or private, should be equally eligible to supply biomass.

Eligible biomass should not be defined or restricted by land ownership classification. Like all other forest products, biomass will be harvested and supplied based on landowner objectives and existing environmental protection laws, guidelines, and public policies. Restricting the type of renewable biomass should be based on whether it is sustainably harvested and not on the land ownership classification it is sourced from.

III. Ensuring the sustainability of forest biomass removals requires a flexible approach that draws upon the strength of existing mechanisms—adapted where necessary—to meet local conditions.

The environmental, economic, and social challenges posed by growing and harvesting forest biomass for energy production are fundamentally the same as those posed by growing and harvesting woody biomass for other purposes. NASF supports an approach that takes advantage of the strong environmental record provided by the vigorous network of federal and state laws and regulations alongside other voluntary programs that promote sustainable forestry. While specific mechanisms vary from state to state, a strong national sustainability framework exists for removing forest products for biomass energy production as well as for other purposes.



State Foresters support adapting or augmenting policies and programs—where necessary—based on an assessment which accounts for local forest conditions, harvesting pressures, land ownership patterns, and conservation needs in each state. A national, one-size-fits-all approach to forest sustainability will not be effective and cannot reflect the unique context and laws of each state.

IV. Federal policy and funding should support state forestry agencies as the primary level of government for ensuring forest biomass sustainability.

Federal policy should affirm the role of state forestry agencies as the most appropriate level of government to set and implement policies and programs which ensure private forests are managed sustainably. State forestry agencies employ resource professionals in all states to meet public trust responsibilities associated with managing and protecting more than two-thirds of the nation’s forests.

State Foresters, working with other professional resource managers and conservation experts at the local level, are best positioned to monitor, assess, and respond to on-the-ground sustainability concerns and loss of important forest types (i.e. conversion) associated with new biomass markets. Federal funding should help cover costs associated with any new responsibilities assigned to state forestry agencies to ensure adequate and effective capacity for protecting the nation’s non-federal forests.

V. Federal policy should encourage market-based approaches that respect property rights and avoid prescriptive requirements that effectively price biomass out of the range of feasibility.

Sustainability and other requirements for biomass must be feasible in implementation and enforcement, with minimal administrative and “transaction” costs. This will invite investment in new biomass facilities and encourage the growth of a fledgling renewable energy industry. These markets will provide new income sources for families and individuals helping them cover their costs to own and maintain their forests. Keeping forestlands working and sustainable is a primary driver for NASF policy positions.

Further, new markets will provide forest landowners, public and private, with the physical and economic ability to thin forests, improve wildlife habitat, and conduct other activities that protect and enhance the forest resource. Real environmental benefits associated with renewable energy cannot be realized if restrictive requirements limit biomass availability.

VI. Federal policy should not artificially disadvantage one market sector in favor of another.

New biomass markets can most effectively provide new forest management and economic opportunities if they supplement and do not replace existing forest products markets. Federal policy should maintain a level playing field between market sectors and not create artificial competitive advantages. The existing forest products industry should receive equal treatment for utilizing biomass to produce renewable energy. Federal mechanisms such as tradeable renewable energy credits (RECs) and Section 45 tax credits should be available to all qualifying facilities regardless of products produced.

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