



Biomass Initiative

Goal of the biomass initiative

The goal of the biomass initiative is to provide the leadership needed to forge public-private partnerships between forest biomass suppliers, biomass purchasers, and energy producers to allow the state and local communities to utilize biomass materials to create renewable energy.

Washington's forests have an abundant supply of woody biomass. Using some of the renewable woody biomass for heat, power, and fuel will play an important role in Washington's emerging green economy and help to address climate change. Removing biomass from forests in ecologically sustainable ways may provide income for forest landowners while improving forest health, creating jobs in rural parts of the state, and reducing wildfire risk and greenhouse gas emissions.

This initiative seeks to synchronize forest biomass demand and supply. In authorizing and promoting this initiative, the Washington State Legislature envisioned securing federal and/or private funding to assist with project planning and to address cost barriers to potential partners' participation.

Current situation

Washington is already home to centralized electricity and heat co-generation facilities that utilize commercially viable technology to convert woody biomass into heat and power. Current combined heat and power facilities in Washington State fueled by wood waste include the 7.2 MW plant at the Hampton Timber Mill in Darrington, the 18.5 MW plant at Grays Harbor Paper in Hoquiam, and the 28 MW plant at the Sierra Pacific Mill in Burlington.

Going beyond heat and power, liquid transportation fuels can also be created from woody biomass. The technology to do so is approaching commercial viability, although not as mature as that for heat and power technology. We anticipate that this initiative will help to demonstrate the state of the technology. Mobile biomass conversion equipment can help to overcome geographic and material transport challenges.

Washington State (through the Department of Natural Resources) and other forest landowners have the knowledge needed to make reliable woody biomass feedstock byproducts from ongoing forest practices available to this emerging market. The costs of feedstock harvest and transportation are critical supply economics issues. Technology and market challenges remain obstacles to realizing significant demand. As a budding industry reliant upon emergent technology and venture capital, nearly all biofuels firms are suffering from the current economic downturn.

(more)

Recently passed law, HB 2165

The 2009 State Legislature passed HB 2165 which was recently signed into law by the Governor. The law:

- Authorizes DNR to implement two pilot demonstration projects, one each in eastern and western Washington, through formal partnerships among biomass suppliers, researchers, conversion facility owners/investors, tribes, labor, and others.
- Envisions securing federal or other financial assistance.
- Directs the Commissioner of Public Lands to encourage the participation of federal land managers.
- Requires a progress report to the legislature by December 2010.

Implementation status

In June 2009, the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) will invite interested organizations to submit letters of interest to participate as partners in the implementation of biomass pilot projects. The solicitation will also be broadly advertised. The solicitation will outline the requirements for the ideal partner and the ideal biomass energy project types. DNR intends to identify project partners by end of July or early August.

Anticipated funding challenges

It is anticipated that the initiative will need seed money to get the projects underway in the form of grants or loan guarantees. All of the federal funding sources currently being investigated are competitive grant programs are therefore uncertain.

Funding provided to support this initiative will help to revitalize the economy of Washington State's rural communities, provide income for forest landowners while improving forest health, creating jobs in rural parts of the state, and reducing wildfire risk and greenhouse gas emissions.