



## Western Governors' Association Policy Resolution 11-2

### *Using Forest Biomass for Energy Production*

#### **A. BACKGROUND**

1. Western forests provide raw materials for wood products and, as a by-product, wood bioenergy. Biomass is an important source of the nation's renewable energy capacity. Wood is the largest component of bioenergy, followed closely by conversion of grain to liquid transportation biofuels.
2. Although residential heating remains a significant use of the energy stored in wood, most wood bioenergy is used in the industrial sector, using residues from timber processing into lumber, other wood products, and paper industries. These mill residues are already almost fully utilized.
3. Biomass is any organic material; woody biomass includes the valuable stem of a tree as well as branches and tops that have little or no market value. "Forest biomass" (sometimes called "forest residue") is material unsuitable for manufacturing into solid wood and paper products, and consists of a) the branches and tops left after timber harvesting ("logging slash"), and/or b) the small-diameter material removed during thinning operations to reduce hazardous fuels or improve forest health conditions. Western forests have a substantial amount of unutilized forest biomass that could be a renewable energy feedstock.
4. There is an absence of a clear and cohesive federal policy on the use of biomass for energy production. Without such a policy, definitions and decisions made by an array of competing federal authorities have negative impacts on efforts to improve forest health. The lack of clear federal policy hampers private sector investments in renewable energy projects that utilize forest residues and other biomass materials.
5. More than 21 million acres of Western forests have been killed by pine bark beetle, posing a safety threat to communities, local and regional economies, and the environment. Millions more acres are in poor condition and declining faster than the ability to respond with available public resources.
6. Large-scale forest restoration efforts are vitally important to the environmental, social, and economic fabric of the Western states. Pursuing forest restoration will generate tremendous environmental and social benefits, create much needed jobs and revenue for rural economies, and significantly reduce the long-term cost of wildfire, including its negative impacts to watersheds, ecosystems, infrastructure and local economies. In addition, restoration efforts could provide forest biomass as renewable energy feedstocks.
7. Wood-based industries provide many benefits. Carefully planned harvest operations, not only provide raw materials for manufacturing consumer products and feedstocks for energy production, but also can improve fish and wildlife habitat, stabilize soils,

and protect infrastructure investments such as roads, bridges, and recreational facilities. By reducing hazardous fuel loads and modifying wildfire behavior, biomass removal reduces smoke and air pollution. Benefits from avoided costs of wildfire suppression and post-wildfire site rehabilitation can be substantial. Economic benefits from additional jobs in the woods, on the roads, and in the mills can help revitalize rural communities.

8. Federal and state funds available for forest management are insufficient to get the restoration work done at the scale needed to restore resilient forest conditions. Sales of timber and forest biomass from public lands to wood-based industries produce revenues that can help reduce the costs of fuels treatment so that the benefits of forest restoration can be realized.
9. Large-scale forest restoration and management provides industrial raw materials and energy feedstocks. The collection and conversion of forest biomass diminishes forest fuel loads and is an ecologically and economically sustainable practice.

## **B. GOVERNORS' POLICY STATEMENT**

1. Western Governors believe that the use of wood bioenergy can be part of a clean, diverse, reliable, and affordable energy supply that moves us toward greater energy security.
2. The Western Governors think that a federal biomass policy needs to be developed, which reflects a fuller understanding of the benefits of utilizing forest residues for bioenergy at both the national and regional levels and includes a definition of biomass based on the actual material, not the location of feedstock, such as from federal lands.
3. The Governors support and encourage market-based approaches to biomass utilization, including appropriate changes in federal policies that provide equitable treatment of all potential uses of biomass to produce energy.
4. The WGA encourages formal assessment and analysis of the environmental impacts on air quality, water quality, and wildlife habitat of forest management against the no-action alternative, which could include stand-replacing wildfire and more severe post-fire effects of not doing active forest management.
5. Federal agencies that have developed national level biomass inventories should review current supply data to ensure the inclusion of biomass located on federal lands.
6. Western Governors believe that forest biomass should be used for energy production recognizing that there are many other benefits from forest biomass removal, such as improving forest health and reducing negative impacts of smoke.
7. The Governors support and encourage federal agencies to collaboratively plan large scale restoration-based fuels reduction treatment projects that include judicious

removal of marketable-sized trees in order to make projects economically feasible. Large-scale restoration can also provide predictable supplies of commercial timber, as well as small-diameter trees and forest biomass that have little value in most markets. These predictable supplies are necessary to build and maintain the infrastructure, which includes manufacturing and energy production facilities and personnel needed to implement forest restoration treatments.

**C. GOVERNORS' MANAGEMENT DIRECTIVE**

1. Western Governors direct WGA staff to:
  - a) promote public understanding that woody biomass utilization can help reduce the costs of restoring desired forest conditions and also revitalize rural communities by providing jobs.
  - b) work with the USDA Forest Service, US Department of Interior and other federal agencies, such as EPA, to create a clear and unambiguous federal biomass policy and to implement this policy resolution.
  - c) work with state forestry departments and other organizations to update inventories of the types of woody biomass available from federal, tribal, state and private forests. This information would be a resource for all parties interested in the potential for developing wood bioenergy production facilities.
  - d) promote the sustainability of biomass-to-energy facilities and recommend public involvement during the planning phase for selecting and permitting locations for such facilities.
  - e) work with federal agencies to align land and resource management planning efforts with fire management planning.
  - f) work with the states in communicating to federal agencies the importance of reliable long-term supplies of woody biomass to sustain wood product manufacturing and bioenergy production facilities.
  - g) post this resolution to its web site to be referred to and transmitted as necessary.
  - h) continue to monitor this issue and to report to the Governors as necessary.