

A Great Week for Biomass in the News

By Rona Johnson
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The woody biomass industry was the topic of several positive news stories and press releases this week, here are some tidbits from a few of them.

In a move that has the potential to add even more legitimacy to the woody biomass industry, The Nature Conservancy and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative have launched a new woody biomass procurement project.

According to a joint press release, both organizations said they realize the bioenergy industry provides new market opportunities for forest landowners and managers, but, of course, they want to make sure that the forests remain healthy

"Woody biomass can be a great source of renewable energy and offers an excellent incentive so landowners can maintain their forests as forests—as long as the forest is managed responsibly," said Glenn Prickett, chief external affairs officer for The Nature Conservancy.

I hope they've come to the realization that when the pulp and paper and housing industries are suffering and forest owners are no longer making money from their investments, they may be tempted to turn to companies who aren't interested in forest sustainability or to developers who want to chop down forests to build shopping malls or grow crops.

I recently came across an excerpt from Greenpeace co-founder Patrick Moore's "Confessions of a Greenpeace Dropout: The Making of a Sensible Environmentalist" that was published in the National Post under the headline "Wood is Good," that best describes the point I'm trying to make. You can find it by clicking here (<http://www.nationalpost.com/news/Wood+good/4525469/story.html>). After reading this excerpt, I now want to read the entire book.

The next step in TNC and SFI's project is to find bioenergy project participants, and learn from each other the best way to responsibly procure forest biomass.

"This initiative has the potential to demonstrate to policy makers that voluntary certification has an important role to play in demonstrating the viability of voluntary measures to address emerging issues related to a growth bioenergy market," said SFI President and CEO Kathy Abusow.

Forest Thinning Reduces Wildfire Damage

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack saw firsthand the benefits of forest thinning when he flew over areas that have been devastated by wildfires.

On June 29, Vilsack flew over the Las Conchas fire in New Mexico and the Wallow fire, which started a month ago in Arizona and has moved into New Mexico, covering more than 500,000 acres.

"I saw for myself the aftermath of the Wallow fire on a stand of trees that had been previously thinned in order to improve forest health," Vilsack said. "Where the Forest Service had worked to remove excess fuel, I saw healthy trees with burned underbrush. In the lands that were untouched by thinning practices, the fire left only scorched earth behind. It is clear that forest restoration work can make a significant impact on reducing the fuel for these fires."

According to the USDA, more than 1 million acres of Forest Service lands have burned in the Southwest this year, as well as another 600,000 acres of federal, state and private lands, costing millions of dollars in fire response and millions more in restoration and rehabilitation going forward.

Vilsack said he is working with the Forest Service to develop a program to manage U.S. forests through partnerships that will perform restoration and conservation efforts in forests whether they are publicly or privately owned.