

Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)
June 22, 2023, 9:00-11:00 AM
RMRI Biomass Utilization Subcommittee
Meeting Summary – FINAL

RMRI BIOMASS UTILIZATION SUBCOMMITTEE

ATTENDANCE: Todd Gardiner, Sheryl Gunn, Derek Lowstuter, Molly Pitts, Tim Reader, Rebecca Samulski, and Nathan Van Schaik

ACTION ITEMS

Todd Gardiner, Molly Pitts, and Tim Reader	Discuss and plan a USFS grants webinar to help prepare potential applicants for the upcoming grant writing cycle.
Tim Reader and Derek Lowstuter	Follow up on connecting Platte Canyon School District to other biomass heating programs.
Tim Reader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reach out to Audrey Miles-Cherney about using the Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP)’s network to find viable biomass producers and chipper for PCSD. Contact nearby fire departments regarding sourcing for biomass heating projects.
Peak Facilitation	Send out a Doodle poll for the next Subcommittee meeting and provide an agenda for this meeting.

MEETING SUMMARY

DISCUSSION TOPIC: Action Items Update from Last Meeting

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tim Reader, Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS), and Molly Pitts, Colorado Timber Industry Association (CTIA), researched grant writing resources for timber operations after the last Subcommittee meeting. The United States Forest Service (USFS) Region 9 office employs a grant writing specialist. There are also several professionals in the area in the San Luis Valley and Front Range regions of Colorado and several online resources, including the USFS database of grants and the Grants.gov website, where applicants can search a list of existing grants to find ones that will apply to their projects. Laura Wolf, USFS, has also compiled a spreadsheet containing a list of USFS grants and their respective funding cycles. The next round of Wood Innovations grants will open in October. Hosting a webinar or a similar event beforehand could help potential applicants begin to prepare for the grants they wish to apply for before the requests for applications are released. Information from a national USFS webinar can be used to narrow the scope and provide insight for this event. Renewable energy grants could be worth looking into if biomass companies can demonstrate that wood is a renewable energy source. 	<p>Decisions/Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Todd Gardiner, Molly Pitts, and Tim Reader: Discuss and plan a USFS grants webinar to help prepare potential applicants for the upcoming grant writing cycle.
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DISCUSSION TOPIC: 2024 Colorado USDA Wood Innovation Awards

<p>Discussion Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ten Wood Innovation Grants were given out this grant season, with several recipients being Colorado-based companies. The webpage for Wood Innovation Grants, including updates and press releases, can be found here and a full list of grant recipients can be found here. Two Wood Products Assistance Grants have been awarded, and the USFS expects to process 14 more applications in the coming months. 	<p>Decisions/Action Items:</p> <p>None</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Last year, the CSFS piloted a small grants program in which they were able match federal grant contributions for timber operations. The funding will not be available this year. • A list of upcoming grant programs in 2023 can be found here. 	
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DISCUSSION TOPIC: Platte Canyon School District Update on Adopting Biomass Heating for their Aging Natural Gas Boilers

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CSFS and Colorado Energy Office (CEO) representatives met with officials from Platte Canyon School District (PCSD) officials to discuss the district’s heating needs and infrastructure. Biomass chips were discussed as an option for replacing their natural gas-fueled boilers. • There are many biomass projects on public and private lands statewide, but infrastructure for the production and transportation of fuel chips is lacking. Many contractors have chipping capacity, so connecting these projects to biomass harvesting projects could be a key step in providing heating infrastructure to PCSD and other areas. • PCSD expressed interest in connecting with other programs that have used biomass heating across the State, including Boulder and Gilpin Counties and the Fairplay High School. • It would also be beneficial to connect PCSD with local fire departments. Below are several points of contact. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Shelby Edwards, Platte Canyon Fire ○ Ben Yellin, Elk Creek Fire ○ Matt White, Evergreen Fire and Rescue • There are several hurdles to establishing biomass heating programs. Firstly, biomass heating requires larger boiler rooms than other methods. Additionally, many potential clients do not view wood fuel as a renewable resource. 	<p>Decisions/Action Items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tim Reader and Derek Lowstuter: Follow up on connecting PCSD to other biomass heating programs. • Tim Reader: Reach out to Audrey Miles-Cherney about using the Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP)’s network to find viable biomass producers and chipper for PCSD. • Tim Reader: Contact nearby fire departments regarding sourcing for biomass heating projects.
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DISCUSSION TOPIC: Biomass Related Bills and Legislative Updates

<p>Discussion Points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new workforce bill passed by the State Senate (SB23-005) aims to support sawmills and other timber industry operations. CSFS staff are working to develop a summary of the bill to assist parties in understanding it. • Another new bill (HB23-1069) establishes a scientific committee with the objective of researching the viability of creating biochar operations at abandoned oil wells. This presents an economic opportunity for RMRI partners. • CSFS has hired a new legislative specialist. • SB23-005 appropriated funding to establish a new forestry program or expand an existing one in institutions of higher education. Pueblo Community College (PCC)-Bayfield is interested in using these funds to establish a forestry program. • Fire Adapted Colorado (FACO) is interested in working across institutions of higher education to developing a statement of conditions and needs of the forestry industry across the state to strategically collaborate on curriculum and program development. Additionally, FACO has been communicating with Department of Natural Resources (DNR) representatives to develop a webinar on recent legislation relevant to forestry and what it means for implementers across the state. • PCC’s simulator project presents an opportunity for collaboration between interested parties and agencies throughout the state. 	<p>Decisions/Action Items:</p> <p>None.</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subcommittee members are encouraged to attend the next RMRI Workforce Subcommittee meeting on June 30 to learn more about the opportunities for workforce support presented in the new legislation. 	
<p>DISCUSSION TOPIC: Golden West Pine Mills EGAR Process</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subcommittee members watched a video about the timber operations at Golden West Pine Mills, CSFS's 2022 partner of the year. • Golden West's operations represent a viable strategy for approaching the increased use of smaller-diameter trees in timber operations. • Andy Hinz, owner of Golden West, is currently presenting on the operation in California. • Facilitating a partnership between Golden West and Timber Age Systems could present an opportunity to combine timber product design and construction work on Timber Age's affordable housing project on the Southern Ute Reservation. Even small-scale wood engineering applications in the state will be beneficial to the industry 	<p>Decisions/Action Items: None.</p>
<p>DISCUSSION TOPIC: Brief Partner Updates on Biomass Utilization</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Southern Rockies Fire Science Network is hosting an aspen products site visit in Pagosa Springs in August, holding discussions on aspen ecology, management, and utilization. The Network is looking for sponsors to help fund the event, and Subcommittee members are encouraged to explore this opportunity of they see fit. • Han-Sup Han, director of the forest operations and biomass utilization program at Northern Arizona University (NAU), is developing a cost analysis for the thinning of wood products, expected to be complete on July 27. This could be a good resource to circulate on RMRI channels. • The draft of the State Biomass Assessment should be ready for review soon. • One topic of discussion in the biomass utilization community is on the use of 'vaults' where slash is buried instead of burned. A company in La Veta has been using this technique, using below-ground sensors to demonstrate that slash decomposition meets parameters for securing carbon credits. This may present a workable alternative to burning slash for private landowners, and the process creates healthy soil profiles. Potential roadblocks include process costs and difficulty relocating buried slash. • Molly will attend the next Workforce Subcommittee meeting and will remain in contact with RMRI until her position at CTIA is backfilled. 	<p>Decisions/Action Items: None.</p>
<p>LINKS SHARED DURING THE MEETING</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wood Innovations Grant Webpage • Wood Innovation Grant Recipients • Full List of Upcoming Grant Programs • Golden West Pine Mills video 	
<p>NEXT STEPS</p>	
<p>Samuel Wallace, Peak Facilitation, will send out a Doodle poll to schedule the next Biomass Utilization Subcommittee meeting and provide an agenda.</p>	