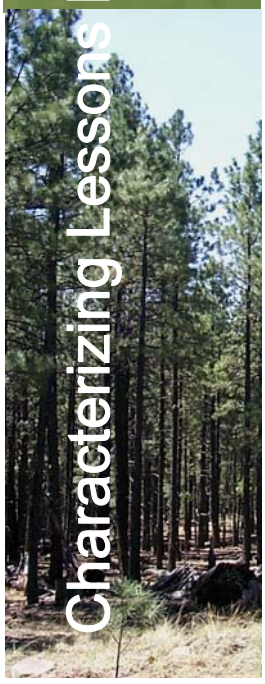
Study Focuses on Biomass Utilization for Hazardous Fuel Reduction

Characterizing Lessons Learned from Federal Biomass Removal Projects



The idea of offsetting the cost of hazardous fuel reduction treatments by selling the biomass removed is appealing. The challenge in some regions of the country afflicted with high wildfire risk is that the capacity of the existing wood products industry to utilize the volume of biomass being removed is insufficient, driving up the costs of treatments. In other regions, inconsistent supply limits investment, the available resource may be of low quality, or there is a lack of consumer markets.

Federal agencies, states, Tribes, local governments, industry associations, NGOs, community groups, and citizens are working together to facilitate creation of new biomass markets and infrastructure to expedite fuels treatments. However, uncertainty exists regarding the characteristics necessary to stimulate biomass utilization, effectiveness of agency and local efforts, and the role of partnerships in building the types of capacity necessary to expedite biomass removal.

Scientists from the University of Minnesota, USDA Forest Service, University of Oregon, and Michigan Technological University are studying community and industry efforts to stimulate biomass utilization for hazardous fuel reduction. The study will inventory and assess biomass utilization strategies in key regions of the country including California, Colorado, Minnesota, Montana, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and South Carolina. Information will be collected on project planning, implementation, operations, and efforts to build industry, community, and market capacity. The research is intended to be completed in the spring of 2009.


Dennis Becker

Project Objectives

The objectives of the project are to:

1. Examine the local social and physical context in which biomass utilization strategies have developed in each of 10 case studies located in regions of the country with varied resources and wildfire risks.

2. Identify the types of utilization activities accomplished in each case, focusing on agency, industry, and community factors contributing to project accomplishment.

3. Characterize key challenges to biomass utilization experienced in each case and the strategies employed to overcome them and achieve local objectives.

4. Assess the roles of collaborative partnerships in facilitating hazardous fuel reduction planning, implementation, and capacity building for biomass utilization.

5. Capture and share “lessons learned” about the approaches used to implement biomass removal projects and how they accommodate utilization objectives.

Biomass is defined in this study as the by-product of management, restoration, and hazardous fuel treatments, including trees and woody plants (limbs, tops, needles, leaves). ***Biomass utilization*** is the use of biomass resulting in the production of a full range of wood products including timber, engineered lumber, pulp and paper, bioenergy and biobased products like plastics, ethanol, and biodiesel.

This project is funded by the Joint Fire Science Program (JFSP) and the home institutions of the investigators. The JFSP is a partnership of six Federal wildland fire and research organizations, and was established in 1998 to provide scientific information and support for fuel and fire management programs.

For more information, visit the JFSP website at: **http://www.firescience.gov/**

For project updates, visit our project website at: **http://www.forestguild.org/biomass/**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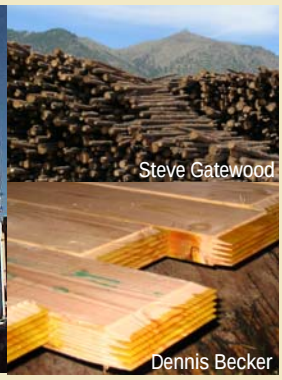
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