

**Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative (RMRI)**  
**April 20, 2020, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM**  
**RMRI Biomass Utilization/Workforce Capacity Subcommittee**  
**Meeting Summary - FINAL**

*Attendance:* Nate Beckman, Angela Boag, Cindy Dozier, Jamie Nogle, Molly Pitts, Mike Preston, Tim Reader, Kelle Reynolds, Mark Shea, Garrett Stephens, and Laura Wolf

*Facilitation:* Heather Bergman and Samuel Wallace

**ACTION ITEMS**

<b>Mike Preston</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share the outline for a biomass energy workshop with Heather Bergman to distribute to the Subcommittee.</li> <li>• Identify a representative from RMRI-Southwest Colorado (RMRI-SW) to attend the workforce capacity meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>Molly Pitts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Convene a separate meeting with Kelle Reynolds, Tim Reader, Jamie Nogle, Cindy Dozier, and a RMRI-SW representative to discuss strategies to address workforce capacity.</li> <li>• Reach out to Ellen Roberts to discuss barriers she faced when trying to establish a biomass energy facility.</li> </ul>
<b>Tim Reader</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Send a link to the map that displays sawmills and other facilities across Colorado to Heather Bergman to distribute to the Subcommittee.</li> <li>• Send Angela Boag any relevant research on biomass energy policy and legislation.</li> </ul>
<b>Angela Boag</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate with Molly Pitts to connect the Workforce Capacity Team to a representative from the Office of Just Transition.</li> <li>• Contact representatives from the Colorado Energy Office (CEO) to organize a meeting between the Subcommittee members and the CEO staff.</li> <li>• Gather information on the relevant statutes in Colorado's Renewable Energy Standards policy and send a summary on the policies to the Subcommittee.</li> </ul>
<b>Laura Wolf</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect information about the specific quantity of timber supply needed for the Longmont and Keenesburg biomass facilities.</li> <li>• Reach out to US Forest Service (USFS) Regional Office in California and national USFS representatives to collect data on biomass energy strategies in different states.</li> <li>• Collect information on the number of National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)-cleared acres on USFS land in the Upper South Platte and what trees are on those acres.</li> <li>• Send Angela Boag relevant research on biomass energy policy and legislation.</li> </ul>

**BIOMASS UTILIZATION/WORKFORCE CAPACITY SUBCOMMITTEE GOALS DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed the goals and objectives of the Biomass Utilization/Workforce Capacity Subcommittee. Their comments are summarized below.

- One goal for this Subcommittee could be to convene a conference or workshop. Mike Preston has already begun to work on an outline for a potential conference that he can share with the Subcommittee with the understanding that the outline is a draft and has not

been vetted by local partners. Although the Subcommittee is not ready at this time to host a workshop, this event could be something they pursue when they have gathered enough information. There could be two workshops, one on biomass utilization with a subtopic on employee training and another on workforce capacity with a subtopic on the challenges of biomass utilization.

- The Subcommittee should recognize and improve access to already existing resources on biomass utilization and workforce programs. The Subcommittee should learn from other efforts occurring at the state and local level across the Western United States.
- The Subcommittee should have the goal of implementing biomass utilization strategies on the ground by identifying and removing the barriers to implementation to tangibly increase the pace and scale of forestry treatments.
- Meeting participants discussed whether they should approach biomass utilization and workforce capacity at the statewide level or on the priority area level. There are logistical and policy barriers at the statewide level that disincentivize the use of woody biomass for energy production, so there needs to be changes in policy incentives at the statewide level to promote woody biomass for energy production. Biomass utilization and workforce capacity is a statewide issue, so the Subcommittee should identify who else across the state is engaging in efforts to increase biomass utilization and workforce capacity. Another idea is to identify the programs in place and gaps related to biomass utilization and workforce in the three priority areas and then begin to tackle statewide issues after developing an understanding of the local challenges.

#### **SUBCOMMITTEE FOCUS DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed whether the Subcommittee should focus on biomass utilization and workforce capacity at the same time or if they should split the Subcommittee into two teams for each topic. Their comments are summarized below.

- There should be one subcommittee to address both biomass utilization and workforce capacity. Biomass utilization and workforce capacity are inherently related even though they may have different goals and objectives. If the Subcommittee were to break into two teams, the Subcommittee as a whole should stick together because of this interconnection.
- Biomass utilization and workforce capacity should be addressed in two different teams because the topics were identified as cross-cutting issues separately. There are also local areas that have challenges with either biomass utilization or workforce and not both.
- Subcommittee members indicated whether they would be interested in discussing both topics or if they would be willing to choose one of the topics to discuss. Based on the results, Molly Pitts will convene a separate meeting with Kelle Reynolds, Tim Reader, Jamie Nogle, Cindy Dozier, and a representative from RMRI-SW to be identified by Mike Preston to discuss workforce capacity in a separate conversation.
- The specific tasks for the Workforce Capacity Team are to identify existing industry and training programs and connect with the Colorado Office of Just Transition to determine if there are any available resources to support training programs and industry (e.g., low-interest loans for companies, etc.). Angela Boag can connect the Workforce Capacity Team to a representative from the Office of Just Transition.

#### **BIOMASS UTILIZATION DATA GAPS AND EXISTING RESOURCES DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed data gaps and existing resources related to biomass utilization. Their comments are summarized below.

- The Southwest Western Ecological Restoration Institutes (SWERI), which is composed of institutes from Colorado State University, New Mexico Highlands University, and Northern

Arizona University, recently received a Wood Innovations Grant. The funding will support technical assistance and workforce training.

- A document with information on biomass utilization, the pros and cons of different biomass utilization methods, and what efforts have worked in the past to promote biomass utilization would be helpful for those who are not as well informed on the topic. This document could also help create institutional knowledge when there is turnover. The Colorado State Forest Service (CSFS) website has helpful information and research on biomass utilization on their website. The Forest Utilization Network, a research group out of Colorado State University, has produced emerging market reports for biochar and mass timber, and they are working on a report on wood energy this year. Researchers have submitted grant proposals to compile biomass studies and research into a centralized database in the past, but the grants were not funded.
- There is an opportunity to talk to representatives from places where they are implementing biomass utilization strategies to learn from their success and challenges. The Subcommittee members could learn from Arizona's Four Forest Restoration Initiative (4FRI) or from California where they are moving away from biomass energy. Laura Wolf will reach out to the USFS Regional Office in California and national USFS representatives to collect data on biomass energy strategies in different states.
- There are two biomass energy facilities being developed: one in Longmont and the other in Keenesburg. The facility in Longmont is in the early stages of development, and they are in process of applying for a permit. One of the biggest concerns for both the Longmont and Keenesburg facilities is a lack of supply. The Longmont facility wants a long-term contract with the USFS to guarantee supply, and the USFS are in early conversations with them. The Upper South Platte Partnership (USPP) has met with the Keenesburg facility to discuss supply, but the supply from the USPP likely would not reduce their costs. The status of any power purchase agreements between the facilities and energy provider is unknown by members of the Subcommittee. Laura Wolf will collect information about the specific quantity of timber supply needed for the Longmont and Keenesburg biomass facilities and serve as a connector between the USPP and the biomass facilities if needed.
- There is a third timber facility that is operating in Golden that is working on exporting wood to Asia. That facility is interested in roundwood and not slash. The facility has been conducting feasibility analyses to determine if there is enough material on non-federal lands to support their business. That facility will need to obtain an export waiver from the USFS as it is normally illegal to export whole logs off of federal lands.
- A map that shows the location of biomass facilities and their proximity to cities would be a helpful tool to understand where biomass facilities are operating and their proximity to a potential workforce. It would also be important to know where there might need to be power substations to collect and distribute biomass energy. The CSFS hosts a map on their website with information on the location of sawmills and other facilities across Colorado. Tim Reader will send a link to the map that displays sawmills and other facilities across Colorado to Heather Bergman to distribute to the Subcommittee.
- Governor Ritter, who is at Colorado State University's Energy Institute, knows about previous efforts to establish biomass energy in Colorado and would be a good source of knowledge on what has and has not worked in the past and why. Molly Pitts can also reach out to Ellen Roberts to discuss barriers she faced when trying to establish a biomass energy facility in Southwest Colorado
- There are data gaps on available wood supply in the Upper South Platte in particular. Knowing what data exists and identifying data gaps would be helpful for the USPP partners.

Laura Wolf will gather information on the number of NEPA-cleared acres on USFS land in the Upper South Platte and what trees are on those acres.

### **BIOMASS ENERGY AND SCIENCE OF CARBON IMPACTS DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed the scientific aspect of biomass energy and the impacts of biomass energy on the carbon cycle. Their comments are summarized below.

- The relationship between biomass energy and the carbon cycle is a topic the Subcommittee should address. As the State of Colorado pursues the Greenhouse Gas Pollution Reduction Roadmap, it is important to consider how natural working lands impact the carbon cycle.
- There needs to be talking points based on research that clarifies the short-term and long-term carbon impacts of biomass energy. It is important to contextualize the carbon impact of biomass energy in comparison to wildfires, broadcast burning, pile burning, and other energy sources like coal and natural gas.
- An absence of scientific clarity on the carbon impacts makes it difficult for decision-makers to make clear policy around biomass energy, which in turn creates an uncertain market for industries to make long-term business decisions. Businesses and energy providers need to produce value to shareholders and other beneficiaries, so it is a large ask of energy providers to invest in new forms of energy when there is uncertainty in the market and long-term viability.
- The Subcommittee will develop action items to develop scientific clarity around the carbon impacts of biomass energy at a later time, and for now, they will focus on understanding the regulatory and policy framework around energy in Colorado.

### **BIOMASS ENERGY STRATEGY DISCUSSION**

Meeting participants discussed strategies to develop biomass energy use in Colorado. Their comments are summarized below.

- Strategies around biomass utilization should focus on supporting already existing markets and products rather than trying to invent new products.
- Biomass energy is a cost-effective way to utilize biomass because it is cheaper to transmit electricity than it is to transport biomass products, like industrial pellets. From the statewide perspective, it is important to consider how woody biomass energy fits into the renewable energy portfolios of energy providers; if biomass energy cannot compete with other types of energy, then energy providers do not have the incentive to develop it.
- Energy providers and electric cooperatives have their own interests, challenges, and incentives; for example, they are rate sensitive and cannot pass increased costs onto the consumers. There are other considerations when working with energy providers around power generation, tax credits, the power grid infrastructure, and regional power markets. One potential interest of energy providers and electric cooperatives is the protection of the power grid. There may be an opportunity for RMRI and energy providers to jointly reduce the risk of ignition from power infrastructure, which could then increase participation from energy providers to develop strategies to increase biomass energy.
- Subcommittee members do not have expertise in the energy system, and Subcommittee members should learn more about the interests, challenges, and incentives of energy providers. It is important to talk to energy providers, like Tri-State, but the Subcommittee should also be mindful of how they approach that discussion. It would be better to take an open approach and demonstrate that the Subcommittee partners are interested in pursuing biomass energy strategies as partners with energy providers. One step could be to engage electric cooperatives first as many of the electric cooperative leaders compose the Tri-State board. Having a preliminary call with state officials from the Colorado Energy Office (CEO)

may be helpful to gain a better understanding of the existing regulatory framework before engaging with energy providers.

- Subcommittee members agreed to set up a meeting with state officials from the CEO. Angela Boag will contact representatives from the CEO to organize a meeting between the Subcommittee members and the CEO. The Subcommittee members should approach the conversation as a joint exploration of the feasibility of biomass energy in Colorado. Potential topics to discuss with Colorado Energy Office officials are:
  - Power purchase agreements
  - State Renewable Energy Standards
  - Power mandates for energy providers
  - Tax incentives
  - Role of biomass energy in the State's energy portfolio
  - Carbon impacts of biomass energy
  - Formal positions of the State on biomass energy
- Once they gain a better understanding of the regulatory framework for energy providers, the Subcommittee can reach out to energy providers to organize a workshop during which the Subcommittee members can engage with energy providers broadly and openly, lay out the issues and interests from all perspectives, define parameters, and then begin to develop strategies to develop biomass energy. Potential organizations and people to invite to this workshop include:
  - Electric cooperatives
  - Tri-State
  - Colorado Association of Municipal Utilities (CAMU)
  - Guzman Energy
  - Governor Ritter and Colorado State University's Energy Institute
- The Subcommittee should understand the policies that govern Colorado's Renewable Energy Standards. Angela Boag will gather information on the relevant statutes in Colorado's Renewable Energy Standards policy and send a summary to the Subcommittee. Tim Reader and Laura Wolf will send Angela Boag any relevant research they have on biomass energy policy and legislation.

#### **NEXT STEPS**

- The Biomass Utilization/Workforce Capacity Subcommittee members will meet next with the CEO state officials to gain information to potentially organize a workshop with energy providers and other relevant organizations.
- The next Biomass Utilization/Workforce Capacity Subcommittee meeting is tentatively scheduled for the afternoon of May 19.