

“Open Space” Break-out session – Biomass in Southern NE (Tom Degnan – group leader)

1. Issue – Why is biomass use for energy not being utilized in Southern New England?

2. Discussion

- Southern New England cannot support large-scale biomass facility because the supply and infrastructure is not up to that size facility.
- Wachusett Community College facility is less than 1 megawatt market. Russell, MA is a larger.
- Land clearing is a big portion of the supply in southern NH and will likely be in southern NE. This will not be a sustainable supply. Secondly, development makes woodlots that remain more difficult to count on because of the neighbor issue.
- In southern NE, providing for a roundwood market makes it easier for the small woodlot to have access to the market.
- A supplemental supply of fuel would be construction and demolition debris – need to get pollution control devices to burn this cleanly.
- Why aren't there more proposals for biomass facilities like Russell proposals in southern NE.
- Can't some of these plants replace coal plants in Connecticut?
- A lot of proposals are coming forth in the region due to Renewable Portfolio Standards – but the RPS in the states are regional in nature that's why a lot of plants are being retrofitted in northern NE for southern NE RPS requirements.
- Burning wood for electricity generation is inefficient relative to fossil fuels – if fossil fuel prices come down, generation will switch back to fossil fuels.
- Supply of wood – much more complex compared to fossil fuels. Complexity scares investors.
- Sustainability issues – Vermont is the only state with regulatory requirements for the biomass plants at Burlington and Ryegate. But in Southern NH, it hardly matters because a woodlot where good silviculture is being practiced will likely be converted to house lots.
- Can future small-scale plants allow for pre-commercial work to improve woodlots? Current chips price increases are being caused by increased production costs (fuel etc.). Woodlot owners don't get any of this increased price. Where the market is available, the ability to improve woodlots is possible with a chip market – but only as a supplement to cutting logs and etc.
- There are concerns about nutrient loss from whole-tree harvesting.

3. Conclusion/Findings

- Transportation – many railroads (class I) not interested. Some of the short-lines and regional rails are starting to look at chips as a possible market. Rail may be helpful in transportation to mills in Southern NE. Trucking more difficult.
- State RPS policies are driving this but they are regional and not necessarily going to result in a new wood market in that states. These are driving the large wood energy plants – southern NE will need to encourage incentives so that small heating plants at hospitals and schools are the local markets created.
- Concerns exist about the sustainability of use of wood for energy. Need regulations or state policies requiring sustainable practices for chip harvesting. Very important to satisfying public concern over poor management– Vermont as a model?
- Higher wood prices to the landowners for biomass harvesting could be an incentive to better silviculture – small heating plants may be able to afford to pay more than electricity markets so that landowners get more for stumpage for chips.