



Granite State Division SOCIETY OF AMERICAN FORESTERS

Representing the forestry profession in New Hampshire

## **POSITION STATEMENT** **Northern Pass Project**

### **Summary**

The Granite State Division of the Society of American Foresters (GSD-SAF) is comprised of over 195 practicing professional foresters in the state of New Hampshire. We are part of a national scientific and educational association representing the forestry profession in the State of New Hampshire. In such capacity, we have been instructed by our membership to comment upon the Northern Pass Project and its potential impacts on the forest resources and forest industry in the State of New Hampshire.

### **Issue**

The Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, as well as numerous other conservation organizations, has already voiced their concerns over the proposed path of the Northern Pass Project. We share their concerns. The project as currently proposed, as well as its alternatives, would cut through the heart of some of our most productive forestlands. Will the owners of this resource be appropriately compensated for lost revenues, including the declining property values? What will be the environmental cost to permanently altering the lands the power line will cross? Where is the economic logic in routing a massive international power line through the spectacular vistas for which many people visit our state. Forest based recreation activities contribute approximately \$1.12 billion to our economy annually (2009 statistics). There are about 11,401 people who are directly employed in forest based recreation and tourism with an annual payroll of \$187 million. How will their jobs be affected by this project? Will there be any objective study to determine the true impact of the power line development?

## **Background**

Our greatest concern is for the impacts on New Hampshire's renewable power sources, namely biomass, and the New Hampshire forest products economy. Since the 1980's New Hampshire had been home to wood fired energy plants which produce power from local resources and provide jobs to residents of New Hampshire. There are currently seven wood fired energy plants in the state producing 144 Megawatts of renewable energy, as well as numerous other smaller combined heat and power facilities at schools and municipalities and two district heating system, including the system that heats the downtown of our capital city, Concord. We should be supporting the retention and expansion of these local, decentralized, renewable power sources rather than importing energy from non-domestic sources, even if it is considered by some to be renewable energy. Proponents of the Northern Pass Project cite the creation of 1,200 jobs during the construction phase of the project. What happens afterward? We have heard projections of 5-6 permanent jobs.

New Hampshire's biomass energy plants currently employ 212 New Hampshire residents with a payroll of \$8 million, plus hundreds of others working in the woods to supply those facilities with wood. If these are displaced by imported power sources, there would also be serious ramifications for the local forest products community, namely these professional loggers and truckers who supply the biomass energy plants, but also to sawmills, and others who depend on these current plants to provide a market for byproducts from the forest.

This impact to the forest products community is most troubling to our membership. The biomass energy plants help underpin a vibrant rural economy that is among New Hampshire's largest industries. There are over 1,200 loggers and truckers hard at work in New Hampshire forests supplying New Hampshire's sawmills, pulpwood markets, and biomass energy plants. Integrated forest-based manufacturing industry contributes an estimated \$1.1 Billion in shipments annually or 7% of the manufacturing economy (2009 statistics). The total employment in the forest-based manufacturing sector is 8,160 with an annual payroll of \$384 million. The biomass energy markets are an important part of this community. They allow foresters, loggers, and landowners to harvest low value, poor quality, and less vigorous trees, thereby allowing healthier, vigorous trees to grow in value, and produce higher value-added wood products. The loss of local "low grade" markets (such as woody biomass) would significantly reduce the ability of our landowners to conduct forest improvement projects. The loss of the biomass markets to imported hydro power would also likely mean the loss of loggers and truckers earning a good living from New Hampshire's forests.

The vast majority of New Hampshire's landscape (76%) is owned by private forestland owners. These lands are the scenic backdrop for our everyday lives. They also provide us with clean water, wildlife habitat, and recreational opportunities. These private landowners depend on these forest products markets to earn income from their lands and to pay their property taxes. The potential loss of productive forest lands and local markets 'low grade' products would reduce their ability to keep their lands and accelerate the loss of forest resources.

Taken at face value the Northern Pass Project seems like a good idea. However, the potential costs to the forest resources, local renewable power sources, the forest products community, and long term job losses, degradation of our states scenic vistas viewed by millions of visitors each year clearly out weigh any benefits. We urge the NH Public Utilities Commission and New Hampshire's political leadership to closely scrutinize the Northern Pass Project and to carefully and fully consider impacts to New Hampshire forests, forests product community, and local sources of renewable energy production, before moving forward. Thank you for your time, attention and consideration

**Expiration: This position will expire five years from the date of acceptance.**

**Accepted May 3.2011**

**Literature Cited:** The Economic Importance of New Hampshire's Forest based Economy 2011 on line:<http://www.nefainfo.org/NEFA%20NH%20Forest%20Econ%20Impor%202011.pdf>