

To: Idaho Interim Legislative Committee Drafting the 2012 Idaho Energy Plan

From: Society of American Foresters, Snake River Chapter

Date: October 31, 2011

Subject: Comments on the Draft 2012 Idaho Energy Plan

We applaud the inclusion of renewable energy actions suggested in the Draft 2012 Idaho Energy Plan. We believe the forestry sector in Idaho can make important contributions to all three of the "pillars" described in the plan through the use of forest woody biomass to produce heat, fuel and electricity.

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) supports policies that promote utilization of forest biomass, together with those that assist communities, forest owners, public forest managers, and local entrepreneurs in accomplishing urgent wildfire prevention and forest health improvement projects. In the western states, including Idaho, expanded opportunities to increase utilization of forest biomass are needed to help reduce the accumulation of hazardous fuels and restore healthy forest conditions, particularly on public lands. America's forests provide watershed protection, wildlife habitat, and numerous forest products, as well as employment and recreational opportunities that our citizens depend on and enjoy. Therefore, it is in our national interest to reduce the threat of wildfire, control insect and disease damage, and improve forest health, thereby ensuring that the nation's forests will continue to provide these benefits for generations to come.

Increased utilization of forest biomass will also help improve the nation's energy security by providing an abundant, renewable fuel resource as a substitute for imported fossil fuels in public utility and industrial power generation facilities, as well as a potential domestic source of transportation fuels. Ensuring that the necessary research and technology is provided to develop cost-effective production, delivery and processing systems and new value-added products will lead to increased utilization of forest biomass. Currently, much of the potentially available forest biomass is not economical to harvest because it is distant from existing power generation facilities or other markets. Other barriers that discourage the removal and use of forest biomass must be identified and mitigated to the extent possible. To promote increased utilization of this energy resource, public agency policies must facilitate siting and permitting of biomass-using facilities, encourage long-term power purchase agreements, and authorize contracts to supply forest biomass in dependable quantities sufficient to attract investment in both processing facilities and delivery systems.

SAF supports strategies and policies, including those authorized in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (PL 109-190), that promote development of economically viable forest biomass production, delivery, and processing capabilities in regions where the needs and opportunities are greatest. Public energy and natural resource agencies, and private sector organizations, are encouraged to expand their capabilities and adopt both nationwide and state-specific strategies to increase utilization of forest biomass, including providing support for demonstration projects, funding for targeted research and development opportunities, and inclusion of forest biomass as a qualifying fuel in federal and state renewable energy portfolio policies.

The unhealthy condition of many of the nation's public forests is an issue that is currently being addressed with urgency by forest managers. On western public lands, many of the silvicultural treatments prescribed to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire and improve forest health will

generate large volumes of forest biomass. Increased utilization of this material through investment in processing facilities and development of viable markets for biomass-based fuels would contribute to improved forest health, reduce the costs and risks of controlling wildfire, and augment the nation's renewable sources of energy.

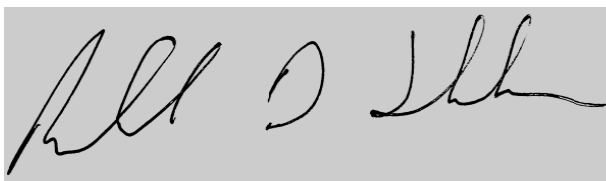
The United States currently utilizes forest biomass to provide about 3% of the nation's total energy needs. Most of this energy generation is accomplished by direct combustion to provide steam for heating and electricity generation. At the same time, the United States has been increasingly dependent on foreign sources of petroleum. The use of renewable energy sources, including forest biomass, has the potential to reduce our dependence on foreign sources of oil. Other uses of forest biomass for energy or energy fuels can augment non-renewable energy sources including conversion to ethanol to replace transportation fuels, partial combustion to produce a synthetic gas similar to natural gas, and co-firing in power boilers with coal, oil, or gas.

Increased utilization of forest biomass will provide forest managers with the ability to alleviate hazardous fuel and wildfire conditions on western public lands, and improve the quality and productivity of forests in the eastern and southern states, while providing a valuable alternative source of energy to help meet the nation's electrical power generation and transportation fuel requirements.

In Idaho, the Idaho Department of Lands has recently adopted the Idaho Forest Action Plan which outlines conditions in Idaho forests and recommends actions that dovetail well with the renewable energy policy contained in the Draft 2012 Idaho Energy Plan.

The Society of American Foresters, Snake River Chapter is dedicated to improving the condition of Idaho forests and is committed to working with other partners to make biomass energy a reality in Idaho. We believe that the further development of renewable biomass energy infrastructure in Idaho will not only improve our energy independence, but it will also improve the health of our forests and the economic wellbeing of our communities. Incorporating biomass energy into the Draft 2012 Idaho Energy Plan is an important first step in making this dream a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature is cursive and appears to read "Rick Tholen".

Rick Tholen
Society of American Foresters
Snake River Chapter Chair

"The Society of American Foresters, established in 1900, is the national scientific and educational organization representing the forestry profession in the United States. The SAF Mission is advance the science, education, technology and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the

profession to assure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society"

"The Snake River Chapter, Society of American Foresters, represents its members in southern Idaho and southwestern Wyoming in pursuing the SAF mission and related activities."