

Emerging bioenergy Opportunities

BC's emerging wood biomass energy industry—as well as the bioenergy opportunities in other parts of the world—will be front and centre at the BioEnergy Conference & Exhibition being held in conjunction with Forest and Resources Expo 2008 in Prince George, BC, in June.

By Jim Stirling

The use of wood biomass for energy projects is now showing up on the radar screen in British Columbia and across Canada. Bioenergy is migrating from a quaint notion—with a vague warm and fuzzy appeal—into the mainstream. It's becoming recognized as a nascent industry with a considerable upside potential to stimulate economic activity and create jobs when both are sorely needed. That bioenergy can accomplish that in a sustainable and relatively benign manner environmentally means its time has finally come.



“Bioenergy is the flavour on everyone’s minds these days, and that’s probably because of concerns about climate change and the devastation of the mountain pine beetle epidemic in BC,” suggests John Swaan, executive director of the Wood Pellet Association of Canada. These new realities, and their importance, will be dominant factors at the BioEnergy Conference & Exhibition to be held in conjunction with Forest and Resources Expo 2008. The third international

bioenergy conference—it’s held biennially—is slated for June 3 to 5 at the Prince George Civic Centre.

“This conference will highlight the experience and opportunities that are being utilized in other parts of the world, especially Europe,” explains Swaan who is part of the organizing team for the event. “Our target was for 350 delegates. But with the growing awareness of bioenergy and the work of international embassies, I’m willing to suggest participation of 400 to 450,” he adds.

He says European-based embassies and trade commissions have encouraged those involved in the bioenergy field to come to Prince George for a firsthand look at what’s happening in and around central BC.

The delegates may want to help develop the bioenergy industry here and invest in the resource or import there, he adds. Most of the wood pellet plants in production in BC, for example, export much of their output to European countries because it’s widely recognized there as a green, viable energy source. Until recently, large scale Canadian markets have been much slower to develop and grasp the bioenergy potential. “It is time to develop bioenergy use here at home,” believes Swaan.

The first day of the international Bio- Energy Conference & Exhibition, June 3, will explore the issues and opportunities in the global wood pellet industry. It will include a session delivering an overview of biomass and bioenergy sources available in northern BC.

The focus on June 4 shifts to international perspectives on the development of a bioenergy economy. On June 5, discussions and presentations continue, and Forest and Resources Expo begins its three-day stint at Exhibition Park and opens its Bioenergy Pavilion.

Featured and keynote speakers at the BioEnergy Conference include: Christian Rakos, proPellets, Austria; Avrim Lazar, Forest Products Association of Canada; Ernest Kidney, Balca, Ireland; Fernando Preto, National Resources Canada; Merja Strengell, Poyry Forest Industry Oy, Finland; and Rich Coleman, BC's Minister of Forests & Range.

Industry tours are being organized for BioEnergy Conference delegates and integrated with Forest and Resources Expo activities. For example, if plans proceed, delegates will be able to witness a complete bioenergy loop. This includes the harvesting of beetle-killed wood at a site adjacent to Exhibition Park and converting it into clean, measured logs. From there the logs will be transported to the Lakeland Mills sawmill for conversion to studs.

The residues from that process will be shipped to Pacific Bioenergy's upgraded pellet plant. And, in the final stage, the product from there will be shipped across town to Canfor's co-generation plant near its pulp mills where it will be used to produce process energy.

There may also be other opportunities of interest for BioEnergy Conference delegates underway by Forest and Resources Expo time. An \$8 million energy project using wood waste is being proposed by The City of Prince George, subject to probable environmental assessments and public consultation. The project is supported by the provincial and federal governments to the tune of \$5.6 million. It will, in its first phase, pipe hot water energy to municipal buildings downtown. The wood waste—about 4,000 tonnes a year—will be trucked to a boiler for combustion from the city's community forest. For registration and further information on the BioEnergy Conference & Exhibition visit www.bioenergyconference.org.

