

Forest Practices Biomass Workgroup

Concurrent to the statewide biomass supply assessment, in May 2011, a change to the Forest Practices rules was adopted to include “forest biomass” in the definition of a regulated forest practice.

"Forest practice" means any activity conducted on or directly pertaining to forest land and relating to growing, harvesting, or processing timber or forest biomass, including but not limited to:

- Road and trail construction;
- Harvesting, final and intermediate;
- Precommercial thinning;
- Reforestation;
- Fertilization;
- Prevention and suppression of diseases and insects;
- Salvage of trees; and
- Brush control.

"Forest practice" shall not include: Forest species seed orchard operations and intensive forest nursery operations; or preparatory work such as tree marking, surveying and road flagging; or removal or harvest of incidental vegetation from forest lands such as berries, ferns, greenery, mistletoe, herbs, mushrooms, and other products which cannot normally be expected to result in damage to forest soils, timber or public resources. (WAC 222-16)

As a result of this rule change, the harvest and collection of forest biomass must comply with all existing Forest Practices Rules. Questions have been posed by some stakeholder interests as to whether the existing forest practices rules are sufficient in ensuring that biomass harvest and collection, at present and future-projected levels, will not negatively affect the productivity of working forests in Washington or harm public resources, including fish and wildlife habitat, erosion control, and noxious weed control.

To respond to these concerns, Commissioner Goldmark, in May 2011, requested that a multi-stakeholder group be convened to evaluate the efficacy of the existing Forest Practice Rules at protecting Washington’s working forest land base in the context of the harvest and collection of residual forest biomass.

The charge of the Forest Practices Biomass Workgroup is to determine whether the existing rule change was sufficient, or if additional changes to the Forest Practices Rules are necessary to protect the state’s valuable public resources.

(1) The legislature hereby finds and declares that the forest land resources are among the most valuable of all resources in the state; that a viable forest products industry is of prime importance to the state's economy; that it is in the public interest for public and private commercial forest lands to be managed consistent with sound policies of natural resource protection; that coincident with maintenance of a viable forest products industry, it is important to afford protection to forest soils, fisheries, wildlife, water quantity and quality, air quality, recreation, and scenic beauty (RCW 76.09.070).

The group was asked to evaluate the latest science related to the effects of biomass collection on forest ecosystem functions and ecological sustainability, gain a deeper understanding of best

management practices (BMP's) for biomass collection being implemented in other parts of the country, and bring to the Forest Practices Board a recommendation for moving forward.

A group comprised of representatives of the following organizations was convened to do this work:

Department of Natural Resources	Washington Forest Protection Association
Northwest Indian Fisheries Council	NOAA Fisheries
Department of Ecology	Biomass Facility Operators
Conservation Caucus	Biomass Collection Operators
Washington Dept. of Fish & Wildlife	Washington Farm Forestry Association
Private Forest Landowners	Small Forest Landowners

A Charter was approved on June 30, 2011 that describes the group's purpose as (Attachment A):

“Educate ourselves on the science/policy and available technologies related to biomass harvest, the Forest Practices rules that apply to such harvest and biomass harvest BMP's. Discuss and determine if specific BMP's and/or Forest Practices rule and/or rule revisions related to biomass harvest are needed in Washington. If so, identify a path toward identifying what is needed.”

The group also developed a work-plan that was designed to ensure all relevant issues are evaluated to the satisfaction of participants and contain a strategy for evaluating each topic (Attachment B).

Workgroup members heard presentations about the coverage of current Forest Practices rules and about forest biomass BMP's used in other parts of the country. Members prepare and give presentations about the coverage of current Forest Practices rules and about forest biomass BMP's used in other parts of the country on each of the following:

- Soil Health and Productivity;
- Silviculture;
- Roads;
- Disturbance (Pest, Disease, Fire);
- Conversion;
- Dead Wood, Slash Disposal, and Carbon Storage;
- Water Quality, Riparian Zones/Unstable Slopes, and Water Infiltration;
- Wildlife, Biodiversity, and Cultural Resources.

A separate meeting devoted to each topic is preceded by gathering and sharing what group members believe to be the most relevant scientific reports, journal articles and research papers. No comprehensive literature review has been attempted, although some workgroup members believe that should be included as it would be very useful in the near future, particularly pertaining to the restoration or sustainability of ecological functions referred to in SHB 2481.

The legislature finds that the utilization of forest biomass materials located on state lands will assist in achieving the purposes of the forest biomass energy demonstration project under RCW 43.30.835, facilitate and support the emerging forest biomass market and clean energy economy, and enable the department to encourage biomass energy development on state trust lands for the trust land's potential long-term benefits to trust beneficiaries. The legislature finds that biomass utilization on state

forest lands must be accomplished in a manner that retains organic components of the forest necessary to restore or sustain forest ecological functions (SHB 2481).

Topics that emerge from each meeting as needing more attention later in the process are ‘flagged.’ These are the items that the group will return to for further discussion when developing recommendations to the Forest Practices Board.

The topics that have yet to be addressed include Carbon Storage, Water Quality, Riparian Zones and Unstable Slopes, Water Infiltration, Wildlife, Biodiversity and Cultural Resources.

To date, the group has determined several topics are sufficiently covered by existing Forest Practices rules, several topics are awaiting final conclusions until we can tour eastside forests (see below), and some topics have been ‘flagged’ for further discussion.

In addition two field tours have already been conducted to look at biomass harvest operations, and more are planned, including a site where biomass was harvested too aggressively.

During the first field tour, the group visited biomass collection activities occurring on DNR managed trust lands where the group was able to see the newest advancements in technology for biomass removal, including chippers and hauling equipment and also visited a site where biomass had already been removed (on Merrill and Ring property). During the second field tour, to a site near Matlock, impacts to long term soil productivity and resulting vegetative responses from varying levels of biomass removal were observed.



Photos taken of a DNR managed sale. First picture shows the slash piles brought to the landing. The second two pictures demonstrate how slash is often processed to be transported off site.



Photos taken of biomass harvest on Merrill & Ring property. First two pictures are an example of a forest health treatment. The third picture is an example of what remains on-site after biomass has been collected on a steep slope.



Photos taken of the Matlock site in the Fall River Study. Site showed different rates of regeneration and species composition after different degrees of biomass harvest.

The Forest Practices Biomass Work-group hopes to bring recommendations to the Forest Practices Board at the May 2012 meeting. All meeting agendas, notes, and resources can be found on the DNR website:

http://www.dnr.wa.gov/ResearchScience/Topics/OtherConservationInformation/Pages/em_forest_practices_biomass_work_group.aspx.

Attachments:

- A. Forest Practices Biomass Work-group Charter
- B. Forest Practices Biomass Work-group Work Plan