

Panel on Optimizing Wood Harvesting in Maine
Notes of January 7, 2009 Meeting
Bolton Hill, Augusta

Attending

Sandy Brawders
Nick Bennett
Bruce Bornstein
Jim Contino
Alex Giffen
Dave Harvey
Nathan Hebel

John Kerry
Kevin McCarthy
Rosaire Pelletier
George Soffron
Patrick Strauch
John Williams

Call to Order

Chairman Giffen called the meeting to order at 9:07 a.m. Panel members briefly introduced themselves.

Review of Notes from December 11, 2008 Meeting

Chairman Giffen asked Panel members if there were any changes needed to the notes from the December 11, 2008 meeting. There were no changes requested by members.

Review of Focal Points

Chairman Giffen briefly reviewed his suggestion for focal points thus far as:

1. Behind the meter RECs,
2. Insuring that landowners are fairly paid for timber, and
3. Promoting sustainable management

Chairman Giffen suggested that the Panel review and prioritize focal points at the conclusion of the meeting. Panel members agreed to take this up at the end of the meeting.

Discussion of RECs

Nathan Hebel provided an informative presentation on Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) to the Panel. Nathan provided Panel members with a copy of his presentation. Highlights of Nathan's presentation included:

1. The REC market in New England calls for 500 megawatts per year for the foreseeable future.
2. Two states (Massachusetts and Connecticut) currently allow for “behind the meter” RECs.
3. Energy produced by biomass in Maine can qualify for RECs in MA and CT.
4. RECs have not increased the demand for wood at Boralex mills.

Panel members discussed whether RECs give biomass generators an unfair advantage over other users of wood. George Soffron commented that laws passed in other states (REC credits) effect how wood is used in Maine. There was a discussion on whether the Panel should take up the issue of promoting the most efficient use of wood as a fuel, e.g., heating rather than electricity generation.

Related to this point, John Kerry told the Panel that Governor Baldacci’s desire is to create a balanced energy policy which reduces Maine’s dependence on petroleum products.

Chairman Giffen pointed out Congressman Michaud’s proposed amendment to the Internal Revenue Code (H.R. 7290) which would extend a tax credit for “behind the meter” use of biomass produced electricity. The Panel also discussed if behind the meter recommendations could be extended to the production of stream. This idea is apparently being explored in New Hampshire and will be researched.

Discussion of Sustainability

Don Mansius reviewed the historical processes which defined sustainability from 1980 to present date. The contemporary definition of sustainability is a balance of Ecological, Social and Economic goals. A copy of Don’s presentation was provided to Panel members (see Don’s presentation for more on these topics).

Pat Sirois of the Maine Forest Products Council gave a presentation on Maine's Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) program which promotes good management of Maine's forestland. The SFI Program is a set of voluntary principles initiated by the American Forest and Paper Association (AF&PA) which calls upon SFI participants to meet market demands while using environmentally responsible practices promoting the protection of wildlife, plants, soil, air and water quality to ensure the future of Maine’s forests (see Pat’s presentation for more on these topics).

Jim Contino gave a presentation on Mill Report Cards and Environmental Paper Assessment Tool (EPAT). Jim emphasized that voluntary standards with a credible 3rd party audit is a necessity for mills doing business in today’s market. He commented that customer demands and surveys are a condition of doing business. Jim urged wood pellet manufacturers and biomass mills to “join pulp & paper at the table” in meeting these sustainability standards. George Soffron responded favorably stating the pellet manufactures are working toward that goal (see Jim’s presentation for more on these topics).

Nathan Hebel gave a shortened presentation on Biomass Plant Practices. He commented that biomass plants are committed to sustainability.

Meeting Conclusion

Chairman Giffen suggested that members participate in a conference call on Monday, January 12, 2009 from 3:00 – 4:00 p.m. to discuss and prioritize the Panel's focal points.