



**WESTERN  
GOVERNORS'  
ASSOCIATION**

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August 10, 2010

Carol Browner  
Climate Change and Energy Advisor to the President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W.  
Washington, DC 20006

Dear Ms. Browner:

On behalf of the Western Governors, we are writing to express our concern about the absence of a clear and cohesive federal policy on the use of biomass for energy production. Without such a policy, decisions made by an array of competing federal authorities could negatively impact efforts to improve forest health, as well as local and state investments in renewable energy projects that utilize forest residues and other biomass materials.

Biomass energy holds great potential for new markets in the forest products and energy sectors by creating demand and value for material derived from activities related to forest health and hazardous fuels reduction. Private investments associated with these new markets could help offset a clear and growing deficit of public financial resources needed to pursue urgently needed forest treatments.

More than 21 million acres of Western forests have been killed by pine bark beetle, posing a safety threat to communities, the environment, local and regional economies, and the health of our forests. Millions of more acres are in poor condition and declining faster than our ability to respond with available public resources and existing markets. Biomass utilization represents one of the most viable new means available to address this ecological crisis, while decreasing fossil fuel usage and stabilizing a depressed lumber and forest-product market.

The WGA has worked with a number of federal agencies and other stakeholders to develop and implement a workable forest health policy and to identify key elements of a comprehensive national energy policy, both of which are attached. We have written numerous letters supporting sound ideas intended to correct inconsistencies in our nation's biomass utilization policies, including how biomass is defined by the federal government. Unfortunately, many of the issues presented remain unresolved, consequently impeding our efforts to protect our citizens and forests, promote renewable energy and reduce America's dependence on foreign oil.

As one example, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recently published a Title V Greenhouse Gas Tailoring Rule, which could have a dramatic effect on public and private efforts to improve forest health and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires. We are encouraged that EPA has taken a step back and is soliciting ideas and information on how to account for greenhouse gases from biogenic sources and would like to thank them for making an effort to brief the states on a July 30 teleconference. We share EPA's commitment to clean air and firmly believe that sensible approaches to reducing emissions and protecting human health can be achieved with well-controlled biomass boilers while not diminishing opportunities for renewable energy and forest health.

As a start, we would encourage a more quantitative assessment of the environmental benefits (e.g. air quality, water, wildlife) of forest management against the alternative, which could be catastrophic wildfire. In that spirit, we encourage all federal agencies to work with us to develop a clear and unambiguous federal biomass policy that reflects a fuller understanding of the benefits of utilizing forest residues for bioenergy at both the national and regional levels.

We encourage the Administration to make the resolution of this issue a top priority so the nation does not lose a unique opportunity to achieve the equally important goals of healthy forests, clean air, productive economies and clean energy.

Sincerely,



C.L. "Butch" Otter  
Governor of Idaho  
Chairman



Christine O. Gregoire  
Governor of Washington  
Vice Chair

Attachment: WGA resolution 9-7 *Improving the Health of Western Forests and Rangelands*

cc:

The Honorable Tom Vilsack, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Agriculture  
The Honorable Ken Salazar, Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior  
The Honorable Steven Chu, Secretary of the U.S. Department of Energy  
The Honorable Nancy Sutley, Chairman of the President's Council on Environmental Quality  
The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency