

The Massachusetts Chapter of The Nature Conservancy Position Statement on Woody Biomass Energy

Climate change is a threat to people, animals and habitats around the world. Our collective challenge is to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and strengthen our natural areas in order to limit climate change's disruptive effects.

Sustainably harvested woody biomass is a renewable fuel that can replace fossil fuels and help us achieve this reduction. When done as part of a long-term management plan, timber harvests that include harvest of woody biomass are an option for private landowners interested in keeping their land forested and managing it for the sustainable production of high-quality timber and other values. Trees removed as part of restoration of scrub oak barrens, coastal shrubland/heathland, and sandplain grassland can also be used as woody biomass. **Therefore, The Nature Conservancy supports the use of *appropriately sized, sited, and operated* biomass energy facilities.**

Inappropriately sized, sited, and operated biomass energy facilities may actually have adverse impacts on wildlife and habitats by consuming biomass at an unsustainable rate. This practice can destroy important natural habitats by reducing the amount of nutrients and woody debris available in the forest. In addition, with unsustainable biomass consumption, the remaining and regenerating trees cannot eventually sequester the same amount of carbon emitted by the facility.

The Nature Conservancy's vision for Massachusetts is a network of large, intact forest reserves, buffered by other forests managed for multiple purposes, including wood products. These forests would host free-flowing rivers and all native plants and animals, including trees of all species and ages found across the different soil types and landforms of Massachusetts.

Based on current examples, small-scale biomass energy facilities which directly convert wood to heat (sometimes with co-generation of electricity) come closest to being compatible with this forest vision.

All facilities, however, can help align with this vision by:

- Avoiding, minimizing, and if necessary, mitigating impacts to forests and streams;
- Ensuring that fuel used by biomass plants is harvested sustainably, using principles and guidelines such as those developed by the Northern Forest Biomass Energy Initiative in 2007 and the Forest Guild in 2009-10, and accounting for the impacts of biomass harvests in the aggregate that may not be captured in looking at individual harvests;
- Fully counting their carbon when analyzing net carbon balance. This includes a life-cycle analysis of carbon released from harvest, processing, transport, production, and transmission;
- Considering siting a facility near both their fuel source and consumers to minimize transportation and transmission impacts;
- Using technologies such as dry cooling that avoid or minimize impacts to rivers that are caused by traditional evaporative cooling;
- Recognizing that both public and private conservation lands have been protected to safeguard a range of public benefits; many of these lands are inappropriate for biomass facility siting and biomass energy harvest.