



The Forests Dialogue

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Bioenergy from Forests Initiative Concept Note

A multi-stakeholder engagement process for building understanding of potential benefits and challenges related to bioenergy from forests.

This concept note outlines a proposed three-phase dialogue process focused on bioenergy from forests in order to help address key questions while ensuring alignment with environmental and social concerns.



Bioenergy from forests (BEF) is the energy generated from the combustion of wood, wood wastes, or biofuels derived from wood. There is renewed attention around wood based energy, an important energy source for millenia, due to efforts to sustainably scale up its applications to meet energy resilience goals and replace green-house gas (GHG) intensive fossil fuel energy. Current focus on bioenergy from forests covers three broad dimensions:

In recent years, debates have played out in global climate forums and policy discussions both at the national levels and in industry and NGO forums. While many see a strong role for bioenergy from forests to reduce GHG emissions and achieve net zero GHG emissions, others question narratives that BEF is a “carbon neutral” energy source when the full life cycle of emissions is taken into consideration. Some forestry stakeholders raise concerns over potential negative environmental impacts of biomass sourcing while others see a strong market for BEF as a tool for managing forests for health and fire resilience as they can incentivize the removal of excess forest fuel loads. There are particular concerns over industrial scale BEF pointing to the potential negative impacts for communities and the environment.

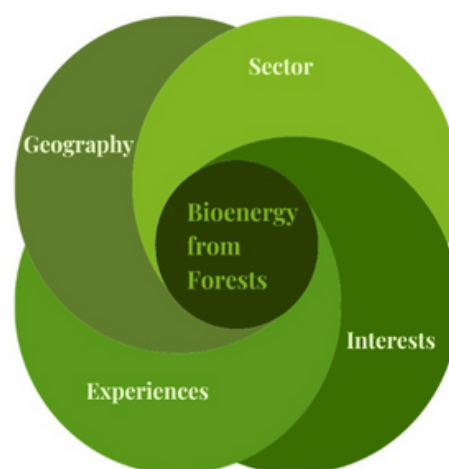
With the US Southeast being the largest wood pellet-producing region in the world, the United States plays a significant role in the sourcing of biomass. Historically, the majority of wood pellets have been shipped to Britain and the EU, which have been leading energy policy and technological investment for industrial-scale biomass energy. However, the Biden Administration’s emphasis on climate change has inspired renewed conversations in the United States over

a full suite of energy technology and natural climate solutions, including biomass energy. Recent developments includes \$178 million from the Department of Energy to advance bioenergy technology at large (September of 2021) and an allocated \$1.8 billion to hazardous fuels reduction projects for national forests from the Inflation Reduction Act. In the Western US, there is a growing focus on utilizing bioenergy from forests as a key market to address forest health and enhance fire resilience by reducing fuel levels caused by diebacks from insects, disease or storms.

As commitments to net zero energy pathways are solidified, we are at a crucial juncture to engage in discussions around the potential impacts of BEF, as well as shaping implementation in response to environmental and social concerns. While actions, mechanism, and investments to scale up BEF for climate change mitigation are moving forward at a rapid rate, confusion and disagreement remains over when, where, and how BEF can deliver climate benefits as well as the potential negative impacts to climate or communities that this rapid buildup could entail.

THE ROLE OF DIALOGUE

There is an urgent need for a more open and deliberate dialogue to understand BEF impact and concerns while building coalitions for collaborative actions that respect and integrate all voices. One of the key dynamics of BEF is that it intersects a wide range of entry points based on expertise, experiences, geography and interests. Stakeholders now engaged in conversations around BEF may hold widely different concerns and motivations based on their entry point (climate, forestry, environmental justice) and geography. Understanding this range of entry points helps illuminate various perspectives on what is in and out of scope of conversation, motivations for engaging in a dialogue process, and solution framing.



The Bioenergy from Forests Dialogue, an initiative convened by The Forest School at Yale School of the Environment, is planning a Scoping Dialogue as well as Field Dialogues to engage all of the above range of perspectives, priorities, and concerns related to Bioenergy from Forests. The Initiative will use The Forests Dialogue’s (TFD) stakeholder engagement principles and methodology, refined over 20 years of successful dialogues, and will be led by a diverse Advisory Group. Grounded in TFD’s approach, the initiative is structured as a broad, collective effort in which no one stakeholder group leads the process and participants feel a sense of ownership over dialogue outcomes. Marginalized and other groups typically excluded from these conversations will be included and dialogue conversations will occur in places directly impacted by BEF.

BEF INITIATIVE GOALS

BEF Initiative goals include:

- **Gaining a Deeper Understanding of Stakeholder Views:** The initiative seeks to facilitate open and deliberate discussions to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse perspectives, interests, and concerns held by stakeholders in the bioenergy from forests sector.
- **Creating Larger Learnings for Informed Policy:** The initiative aims to distill insights from regional dialogues, providing valuable recommendations for sustainable bioenergy from forests that can shape local practices and inform policy decisions within the United States.
- **Generating Global-Scale Insights:** Recognizing the interconnected nature of the global bioenergy sector, the initiative endeavors to generate insights with global relevance, exploring how global trends and demands intersect with the bioenergy landscape for a more comprehensive understanding of the sectors involved.
- **Catalyzing Stakeholder-led Action and Collaboration:** Regional dialogues will be conducted to identify and learn from specific issues and opportunities in various geographic locations and catalyze action.

KEY QUESTIONS

Key questions that help frame the dialogue initiative include:

- What are the various advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of bioenergy from forests and how do they differ across various contexts and geographies in the US?
- What are the considerations and possible actions to ensure biomass for BEF is produced sustainably?
- How do the different priorities and interpretations of sustainability within BEF affect environmental, social, and economic outcomes?
- What are appropriate scales and contexts for BEF as a nature-based solution to climate change?
- How can effective community engagement be conducted around BEF production so that concerns are heard and adequately addressed?
- How do various stakeholders understand bioenergy from forests in the larger contexts of energy options and tradeoffs, net-zero emissions pathways, forest health and fire resilience, and forest product supply chains?
- How can policymakers adopt an integrated approach to BEF-related policies, avoiding silos and therefore helping ensure that vulnerable populations are included?

THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

Engage

BEF Advisory Group: For over a year TFD has engaged individuals reflecting diverse interests and expertise related to BEF to form an Advisory Group (AG). The AG has been working to identify key needs, opportunities and challenges related to a multi-stakeholder engagement process on BEF. This group of stakeholders serves to inform the dialogue process, foster understanding across their diverse perspectives and expertise, and build synergies with other efforts related to BEF, sustainable biomass, environmental justice, nature based solutions, and actions to achieve net-zero emissions.

Focus Group Discussions: TFD organized four focus groups between April-August 2023 to discuss Bioenergy from Forests specifically in the United States. Stakeholder groups included Forest Owners and Managers, members of Civil Society organizations, individuals working in Research and

Academia, and groups working in the Wood Pellet and Energy sectors. Each focus group session centered around understanding stakeholders' priorities, concerns and areas of agreement and disagreement regarding Bioenergy from Forests in the United States and interest in engaging in a multi-stakeholder dialogue process.

Scoping Dialogue: The BEF initiative will begin with a Scoping Dialogue designed to elevate stakeholder perspective on the potential for forest bioenergy to serve as a climate mitigation tool and draw out key areas of disagreement referred to as “fracture lines”, informed by a background paper. The initiative will be focused on the United States context, while bringing in key global debates and impacts. The Scoping Dialogue will aim to identify areas of disagreements and gaps in information, build trust and shared understanding amongst stakeholders, and catalyze future collaborative action.

Explore

Field Dialogues: Following the Scoping Dialogue, the initiative will draw out region-specific challenges, opportunities, and drawbacks through a series of field dialogues. This step in the process takes the discussion to areas and people impacted by these issues directly. Each field dialogue has its own advisory group, co-chairs, and resulting co-chair summary, mobilizing actionable results at subnational as well as national level. Field dialogue locations within the US Northeast, Southeast and Pacific Northwest will be chosen to highlight how stakeholder perspectives, knowledge gaps, and potential solutions vary across geographic contexts.

Change

Writing Workshop and Collaboration with Key Partners: The initiative will conclude with a writing workshop amongst key stakeholders, advisory group members, and dialogue hosts resulting in a TFD Review publication. This publication presents key recommendations, learnings and outcomes from the dialogue process to inform and mobilize action by stakeholders, decision makers, and researchers.

TIMELINE AND OUTPUTS

We anticipate this initiative will take two years. We propose a Scoping Dialogue to take place Q1 or Q2 2024 with the potential for a hybrid scoping and field dialogue model grounding discussions in on the ground developments, concerns, and opportunities. We expect at least three field dialogues to take place Q4 2024 and Q1 2025 in the Southeast, Pacific Northwest and Northeast United States. The initiative will result in the following outputs:

- Background Paper on the baseline understanding of the current state of knowledge and potential gaps.
- Individual Dialogue Co-Chair Summaries of the Scoping Dialogue and Field dialogues capturing major discussions, synthesizing learnings, and identifying actionable steps generated with broad stakeholder agreement.
- Yale Forest Forum Speaker Series fostering public engagement and highlighting stakeholder perspectives, key dialogue outcomes, and opportunities for action.
- Future Collaborative Efforts Identified building on synergies and interests identified through dialogue including research efforts to enhance knowledge on the topic.
- TFD Review Publication synthesizing dialogue learnings and recommendations.

INITIATIVE HOSTS

The Forests Dialogue



The Forests Dialogue (TFD) provides a neutral platform for dialogue where diverse stakeholders feel welcome and empowered, leading to outcomes that are made durable by the sense of ownership shared by all participants. TFD's process ensures broad participation that enables strong uptake of dialogue outcomes.

The Forest School at Yale School of the Environment

Yale SCHOOL OF THE ENVIRONMENT
The Forest School

The Forest School at the Yale School of the Environment is the oldest continuous professional graduate forestry school in the nation. The Forest School has been at the forefront of developing approaches to the practice of forestry, generating knowledge about forests, and promoting the values they bring to people's livelihoods. Our core mission is to train foresters as well as forest policy makers, non-profit leaders, and land stewards throughout the world.