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## Placer proposes wood-fueled power plant near Tahoe forests

Wood waste would be burned to power proposed sheriff's substation

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Celia Lamb](#) Staff Writer

Placer County wants to build a small power plant in Tahoe City that would burn wood chips to produce electricity and heat for a proposed sheriff's substation.

The idea comes hot on the heels of the Angora fire, which burned 3,100 acres and destroyed 254 homes near Lake Tahoe. The county would use wood chips and brush thinned from forests for fire protection to fuel the plant, said Brett Storey, the county's biomass project manager.

The county hopes to partner with Sierra Pacific Power Co., the electric utility serving that area. The company could receive excess power that the sheriff's building doesn't need.

The power plant would probably cost about \$7 million to \$8 million to build and would produce one to three megawatts of power, equivalent to the amount used by 1,000 to 3,000 homes. The county has discussed the idea with state and federal officials and the power company.

The project could be built by 2010 if the county can arrange funding. A request for \$3.5 million included in Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger's state budget proposal was removed during budget revisions, but the county said it will try again next year.

The county would provide some money and possibly ask for more from Sierra Pacific Power and technology companies that supply equipment and build the power generating system, Storey said. In exchange, the county might share ownership of the plant.

On July 19, the county said the U.S. House of Representatives Appropriations Committee approved \$500,000 in federal funding for the project as part of a federal energy and water bill. If that money comes through, the county would use it to study technical issues, such as the effects on air pollution.

The project has potential if the county can obtain air pollution credits needed to offset emissions and if obtaining wood waste isn't too costly, said Bryan Jenkins, a University of California Davis biological and agricultural engineering professor who coordinates UC Davis' California Biomass Collaborative.

County officials believe it should receive emissions credits for removing wood and brush that would otherwise be burned through controlled burns or wildfires. Building a power plant near the forests might also reduce emissions from trucks that would otherwise haul it to plants farther away, Storey said.

"There's a substantial amount of biomass that needs to be handled one way or another," Jenkins said. "One of the issues is getting the biomass out of the forest."

The county has contracts with local waste haulers who take wood waste from residences, state parks and

private forests to three biomass power plants: Sierra Pacific Industries' plants in Lincoln and Loyalton, and Constellation Energy Group Inc.'s Rio Bravo Rocklin plant. Sierra Pacific Industries is not affiliated with Sierra Pacific Power.

A California Energy Commission report this month said a web of regulatory policies and a lack of standards for measuring the environmental benefits of biomass power plants stand in the way of meeting a state goal for increasing biomass power generation. It also criticized U.S. Forest Service policies limiting forest thinning.

"Without federal statutory change, proper forest management is being hampered, and the risk and cost of catastrophic wildfires, such as the recent Angora ... fire in Tahoe, continues to rise," the report said.

Employees of the Forest Service and Sierra Pacific Power who have discussed the project with Storey did not return phone calls Wednesday.

Sierra Pacific Power is a subsidiary of Reno, Nev.-based Sierra Pacific Resources (NYSE: SRP). It provides electricity to 1.2 million people in Nevada and the Lake Tahoe area.

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