



**COUNTY OF PLACER**  
**Community Development/Resource Agency**

Michael J. Johnson, AICP  
Agency Director

**PLANNING**  
**SERVICES DIVISION**

Paul Thompson, Deputy Director

**MEMORANDUM**

**TO:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Michael Johnson, Agency Director  
**DATE:** April 24, 2012  
**SUBJECT:** UPDATE - PLACER COUNTY BIOMASS PROGRAM AND CABIN CREEK BIOMASS FACILITY PROJECT

**ACTION REQUESTED**

The Planning Services Division is providing an update on the County's Biomass Program and the proposed Cabin Creek Biomass Facility Project. The update includes an overview of the various elements of the biomass program and a discussion on the status of the preparation of the environmental document for the proposed Cabin Creek project. No action is requested.

**BIOMASS PROGRAM**

The Board of Supervisors adopted the Placer County Biomass Program in October 2007. As defined in the Executive Summary, the primary goals of the Program are to:

- Reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires in Placer County.
- Protect Placer County citizens and visitors from the consequences of catastrophic wildfires.
- Find one or more beneficial uses for excess biomass in Placer County.
- Improve air quality in Placer County.

In addition, the Board has determined that a biomass energy facility has emerged as an essential component of the overall Placer County Biomass Program and such a facility is being considered for the Eastern Regional Landfill site on Cabin Creek Road between Truckee and Squaw Valley.

In striving to meet the Program's goals, various programs and projects have been implemented. The current status of various program elements is as follows:

1. Department of Energy (DOE) Congressional Award Advancement and Results: In addition to the background information described in this report, staff will present

information that provides a list of technical accomplishments and relevant findings that will advance the ability to produce a sustainable biomass facility in the region.

Placer County has received a total of nearly \$3,000,000 in DOE funding through an appropriation from U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein and Placer County is supplementing the program with another \$2,000,000 in cost share.

- The project is currently divided into two phases:
    - Phase I, which is nearly complete, is for performing environmental work, intermediate design, land use entitlements, and technology integration leading up to permit approvals, and
    - Phase II is for detailed design, power purchase agreements, system purchase, test, and integration.
  - Several reports have been prepared with vital information regarding where the forest-based material will come from, how much would be used, what type of technology will work, and the status of formulating a proposed project description, which will be presented to the Board. Technical reports have addressed Air/Carbon emissions, a logistics plan, a fuel assessment plan, and a public health risk assessment report. Reports on project economics, air permitting, and the technical requirements for the proposed equipment are anticipated to be available by summer 2012.
  - Collectively, these studies will help determine if a woody biomass facility can be permitted, and sustainably built and operated in the Lake Tahoe region through a public/private partnership.
2. Health Impact Assessment Grant: This grant provides for third-party review of the proposed Cabin Creek Biomass Facility and the effects to the community. A stakeholder group (the Community Collaborative of Tahoe Truckee) is involved with a variety of interaction with the grant team (California Department of Public Health) to assess the many variables of health related issues (both positive and negative) from a biomass facility. The stakeholder group will provide a set of recommendations to the Board, Planning Commission, staff, and a multitude of community organizations by summer 2012. Staff anticipates that this will provide the information needed to provide for a better project proposal.
  3. County Planned Projects for 2012: In its presentation at the April 2012 Tahoe Board meeting, staff anticipates providing additional detail on planned biomass removal projects during the coming year. Projects are anticipated in the Lake Tahoe and Foresthill regions of Placer County. Partners in these projects will include the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit (LTBMU), the Tahoe National Forest, the Placer County Air Pollution Control District, the North Tahoe Fire Protection District, California State Parks, and the California Tahoe and Sierra Nevada Conservancies.

## **CABIN CREEK BIOMASS FACILITY PROJECT**

Placer County is proposing to construct a two-megawatt (MW) wood-to-energy biomass facility at the Eastern Regional Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) and Transfer Station. The entire Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station site is approximately 290 acres and includes four County-owned parcels (APNs: 080-010-031, 080-010-033, 080-070-017, and 080-070-016). The proposed project would be located on a two-acre site in the southernmost area of property and entirely within APN 080-070-016. The site is located approximately two miles south of Interstate 80 (I-80) at 900 Cabin Creek Road, 0.30 miles west of State Route (SR) 89. Site access is via Cabin Creek Road, off SR 89.

The proposed project would include construction of an approximately 10,800 square-foot, two-story structure that would house the power generating and emissions control equipment, and an approximately one-acre material storage area. The storage area would include a 7,000 square-foot open canopy structure to allow materials drying before use in the energy generation process. Additional on-site improvements would include eight parking spaces, a paved vehicle circulation area that includes new driveways on Cabin Creek Road and the access road to Tahoe Area Regional Transit (TART) and County Department of Public Works facilities located on the site, an aggregate base haul road south of the material storage area, storm water treatment facilities (including an infiltration trench and detention basin), retaining walls, and utility improvements/extensions.

Biomass materials (processed woody chips utilized as fuel for the plant) would be processed at the locations from which they are removed (such as U.S. Forest Service fuels reduction sites) and delivered via haul truck to the project site. No additional wood material processing would occur at the project site beyond that which is already occurring in association with current Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station wood waste handling activities. As needed, additional fuel for the plant (potentially during winter months) could include wood waste materials (forest waste biomass) already being processed at the Eastern Regional MRF and Transfer Station.

Planning Services Division staff is overseeing the preparation of an environmental impact report (EIR) prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State CEQA Guidelines, and Placer County's Environmental Review Ordinance. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is contributing federal grant funding for the proposed project. It is anticipated that the EIR will be prepared to satisfy the substantive environmental review requirements of an environmental assessment (EA) pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). If DOE determines that an environmental impact statement (EIS) is required for NEPA purposes, separate and subsequent noticing and scoping will be conducted pursuant to NEPA. If DOE determines that the project, as mitigated, will not have significant effects on the environment, DOE may adopt a finding of no significant impact for the project. Notwithstanding DOE's involvement, the environmental document will be referred to as an EIR.

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the EIR was posted on December 9, 2011. On January 11, 2012, a public scoping meeting was held to receive comments on the project in order to prepare a more complete environmental document. The NOP was sent to all surrounding property owners, the local library, two local newspapers, and various responsible agencies. To date, 13 public comments have been received for the project and additional interested

individuals, groups, and agencies have been added to a project distribution list being maintained by the Planning Services Division.

It is anticipated that the Draft EIR will be available by mid-summer 2012. At that time, the document will be posted on the Placer County website, and a Notice of Availability of the Draft EIR will be sent out to the entire distribution list, adjoining property owners, local newspapers, all responsible agencies, and all parties who submit comments on the NOP. During the 45-day public comment period, a Planning Commission hearing will be scheduled to receive public comments on the environmental document. Also during this time, the County will discuss the project and the Draft EIR with the North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council (NTRAC), the Squaw Valley Municipal Advisory Council (SVMAC), and other groups as requested. At the close of the comment period, staff and the consultant will assemble the comments received and prepare responses to be included in the Final EIR/EIS.

#### Environmental Analysis

The NOP identifies several areas of potential impact that need to be addressed in the environmental document. The public scoping meetings provided further clarity into the full range of issues with the potential to impact the environment and the residents in the vicinity. The ongoing analysis of the environmental impacts will, in the end, identify thresholds of significance for those impacts. All of the required studies prepared by specialists have been submitted to the EIR consultant, but the analysis of those studies and the identification of sufficient mitigation measures for some impacts have yet to be completed.

#### Current Status

The Administrative Draft EIR is being prepared by the County's environmental consultant, Ascent Environmental. It is anticipated that the document will be available for staff review in late April 2012.

#### FISCAL IMPACT

None.

#### ACTION REQUESTED

Staff is providing an update on the Biomass Program and the proposed Cabin Creek Biomass Facility Project, therefore no action is requested.

cc: Holly Heinzen, Assistant CEO  
Karin Schwab, County Counsel