



Vermont's plan misses the forest

Posted: 10/10/2011 10:26:04 PM EDT

Monday October 10, 2011

Chris Matera

As Vermont considers the recently released Comprehensive Energy Plan and the draft air permit just given to a large proposed tree-fueled power plant in Fair Haven, it is urgent that citizens take a close look at just what is being proposed for Vermont's energy and environment future because most Vermonters have no idea what policies are rapidly being cemented in place without much public debate or consultation.

Looking at the proposed Vermont Comprehensive Energy Plan, one quickly notices how adept we humans are at speaking sincerely, in perfect contradiction, out of both sides of our mouth. The plan frets about high carbon emissions that cause global warming (as the floods rage) but then proposes policies and taxpayer subsidies to incentivize tree-burning "biomass" energy which has the highest carbon footprint of all.

Meanwhile, too many so-called "green" groups sit by silently, or even cheerlead, while these plans quickly move forward that would drastically increase cutting and burning of Vermont's golden goose forests, for tiny amounts of energy.

Most people know that we need to protect forests to absorb carbon dioxide, clean our air and water, provide flood control, shelter wildlife and provide the beauty that brings higher quality of life and tourist dollars to New England. So how did increased cutting and burning of forests (called "deforestation" and "pollution" when it occurs

in other countries) get re-branded as "green" energy, particularly considering that burning wood is one of the dirtiest forms of energy that exists.

In addition to the strong influence of vested interests, the serious negative impacts from tree-fueled biomass energy are often glossed over when promoted under the "local" banner which seems to

raise blinders to looking at what local activity is being sold. Vermont Yankee is "local" and coal is local to West Virginians, so just because something is local, doesn't automatically mean it is good. (I do not support either of the above) .

The latest science states the inconvenient truth that tree-fueled biomass electric facilities like the one proposed in Fair Haven are 50 percent worse than coal and 300 percent worse than natural gas for carbon emissions, worse than fossil fuels for most conventional air pollutants including particulates (even with modern air pollution controls and accounting for new tree growth), and will significantly increase forest ecosystem and wildlife impacts on already stressed forests.

Even more efficient combined heat and power (CHP) biomass facilities, which some consider "less bad" than biomass electric production, still emit carbon dioxide at a rate 24 percent higher than oil and 97 percent higher than natural gas. Also, the air pollution profile in CHP biomass is worse than even oil, so think hard the next time you hear it promoted as "good" for the climate, or "good" for heating hospitals and schools with their at-risk populations. New England already has the highest asthma rates in the nation.

Producing tiny amounts of new biomass energy in New England would require drastic increases in cutting and burning of living, green trees. According to the Vermont Biomass Energy Working Group (which is mostly stacked with biomass vested interests), it would require one million additional tons of cutting (a 62 percent increase in logging of

DONATE YOUR CAR!

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation

100% Tax Deductible
Free Pick-Up Anywhere
We're Available 7 Days a Week

Donating is Fast & Easy!

Call Today **877-821-5493**

The Breast Cancer Research Foundation is a classified 501 (c)(3) charity.



Vermont's forests) to provide just 1 to 2 percent of Vermont's heat and electric. Think about that the next time you recycle a "post-it" note to save trees.

Frighteningly, the recently released draft Comprehensive Energy Plan proposes getting 25 percent of Vermont's energy from bio-energy (fueled largely by forests) by 2025, which would mean a drastic increase in forest cutting and carbon emissions, the exact opposite of what we need at this time. Additionally, New England's forests are threatened by serious efforts to export wood pellets to Europe.

Nobody is saying "don't ever cut a tree" or "don't use your home wood stove" (although it is helpful to use cleaner, more efficient models). The intention here is to avoid increasing the cutting and burning of our critical forests. According to the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies, Vermont is already cutting 67 percent of its annual forest growth, and if inaccessible areas like steep slopes are taken into consideration, Vermont is already cutting about all of its available growth.

We have big energy and environmental challenges, but wishful and delusional thinking, such as burning forests is "green" just because it is "local" is no better than West Virginians who want the money provided by dirty energy from their "local" resource. We can and must do much better than burning down the house (our forests) to keep warm for a night.

We are lucky to have our world renown, golden goose forests again in New England. They were almost gone 80 years ago, and could go again. We do not need additional pollution and tiny amounts of energy available from cutting, burning and belching them up dirty smokestacks, but we do need to protect our forests if they are to continue attracting tourist dollars, sheltering wildlife and cleaning up the mess we have already made of our air, water and atmosphere.

Local solar, geothermal, (appropriately scaled and located) wind and hydro energy, along with conservation and efficiency can drastically clean up our energy supply, and help save our environment without destroying it. This is where we need to be putting our energy, so to speak.

Chris Matera is a civil engineer and the founder of Massachusetts Forest Watch, an all volunteer citizen watchdog group formed to protect New

England's public forests and to promote genuinely "clean" and "green" energy solutions. Visit www.maforests.org

Send flowers for any occasion
Bouquets from \$19.99^{+s/h}
ProFlowers
 Offer ONLY available at:
proflowers.com/happy
 or call 1.877.804.1133

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™