

**POSITION STATEMENT**  
**NEW YORK FOREST OWNERS ASSOCIATION**

**Woody Biomass Energy**

**The Situation**

Worldwide increases in oil and gas prices as well as a focus on reducing fossil fuel emissions are spurring research and development of alternative sources of energy, including trees. Woody biomass resources include waste materials derived from conventional forest operations, wood process residues and purpose-grown fuel wood plantations. There are numerous ways to convert these feedstocks into useful forms of energy such as heat, electric power, gaseous fuels and liquid fuels. Cellulosic ethanol is made from plant tissue (woody biomass) by a process that breaks down a fraction of the plant fiber into sugars which are then converted into ethanol. Cellulose materials are the most common organic sources on earth, and can be derived from: forestry and agricultural residues, pulp and paper mill wastes, as well as willow, switchgrass and corn stalks. Since these plants and organic wastes are abundant in New York, their use in making ethanol could significantly increase the volume of ethanol production.

On a global scale, the development of new markets for woody biomass may result in more frequent cutting, the use of environmentally detrimental harvesting techniques, and replacement of forests with monocultures of a single species. This is not the case in New York where our forests are largely composed of native species and the growth rate of our trees is slower than those found in parts of the world, making NY forests less competitive for short rotation monocultures.

New York State woodlots are typically harvested every 20 or 30 years. This is due in part to limited markets for smaller and low-value trees. In these circumstances, only the main part of tree trunk is removed, and only the largest or most valuable trees are cut. This type of cutting typically (aka hi-grading) leaves a residual stand of low-value trees behind, as well as the tops, branches and leaves of trees that have been removed. Though the remaining residual stand and the woody debris left on the ground provides wildlife habitat as well as a source of nutrients, it does not foster stands of high-quality, high-value timber. Strong markets for woody biomass would make it economically feasible to cut more frequently and to utilize small and low-value trees.

Whole tree harvesting is often used when woody biomass is generated from a harvest. This can have negative impacts; such as the loss of productivity for future harvests through soil compaction and changes in wildlife habitat, when poorly implemented. This harvesting technique can also make it economically feasible to remove low-value trees, create seed beds for desirable tree species and reduce the occurrence of hi-grading. Safeguards and careful development of sustainable management plans provide an avenue for the responsible use of whole tree harvesting.

**Our Position**

The New York Forest Owners Association supports the responsible use of woody biomass to produce energy and other products, provided it is done on a sustainable basis with appropriate consideration for protecting other forest values. We support incentives to inspire public utilities and private enterprise to produce electricity, gas, and other forms of energy from woody feedstocks, including the use of low-value trees and woody debris in the production of wood pellets and firewood to replace or

supplement commonly used residential/commercial heat sources of oil and gas. We also support research into the effects of growing and harvesting woody biomass on the soil and forest ecosystem. NYFOA supports the increased use of New York's renewable forest resources to ensure good forest stewardship remains viable and to deter conversion of forests into non-forest uses and supports research and education in environmentally friendly ways of using wood pellets and firewood as heat sources. NYFOA believes that increased use of woody biomass for energy production and other products is consistent with the public interest in: (1) lessening dependence on foreign oil and finite domestic fuel sources; and (2) seeking environmentally friendly means of energy production.

### **New York Forests**

Forests and open spaces cover almost 65% of New York State (19 million acres). Over 200,000 private owners hold 75% of the state's forests. An additional 500,000 private owners have small wooded parcels ranging from 1-10 acres. All wooded areas contribute greatly to the economy and healthy environment of New York and provide essential needs such as wood products, food supplies, wildlife habitat, watershed retention values, carbon sequestration, and more. The forests across New York are also essential to creating a renewable carbon-neutral energy supply through biofuel production, and a welcome natural area free from the bustle of urban living. The future of our woods and forests rests largely with the private owners who sustainably manage these forests while bringing the many forest values to all New Yorkers. Each year, New York forests produce \$10 billion of wood products, provide safe water supply for 16 million people, support an outdoor recreation economy of \$3.8 billion, contain essential wildlife habitat, biodiversity and vital oxygen-producing and carbon sink areas to ameliorate climate change.

### **The New York Forest Owners Association**

The New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA) promotes sustainable forestry practices and enhanced stewardship on privately owned woodlands in New York State. Through local chapter and statewide activities such as woods walks and tours, the bi-monthly *New York Forest Owner* magazine, and cooperation with similar organizations, NYFOA helps woodland owners achieve sustainable management objectives and heightened appreciation of the unique qualities and importance of New York's forests.

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