

GUEST VIEWPOINT

Biomass plant a win-win for area

BY JODY JONES

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In 1953, my father, Aaron Jones, founded Seneca Sawmill Co. and focused on making the most of each log to manufacture high-value products. As a result, our mills produce more lumber and fewer chips and sawdust than other mills. Today, I am proud to say, we are recognized as an industry leader in sawmill technology. Seneca owns 24 patents on innovative sawmill processes that have enabled us to become the most efficient lumber manufacturer in the United States.

We apply advanced technology in every aspect of our mills. Our research and development program continually increases the quality and quantity of wood fiber recovered from each log. We analyze, streamline and perfect production through regular collaboration among our work force. We are always looking for ways to improve.

That's why we began investigating renewable biomass cogeneration more than a decade ago. At that time, we didn't feel the technology was advanced enough. Today, it is. So, we are moving forward with plans to build a renewable power facility that replaces natural gas as the heat source for our dry kiln and produces electricity for more than 13,000 homes.

This plant will also contribute to our goal of making the best use of each log we process. Some 75 percent of the woody biomass to fuel our electricity generator will come from bark, sawdust and shavings from our mills, with the other 25 percent from slash that we would otherwise burn in the forest. We can supply 100 percent of our cogeneration project needs.

Some have suggested that we might cut trees and use them to fuel our plant. That is untrue. It would be the equivalent of a fisherman burning his fishing pole for a campfire to cook his fish. How shortsighted that would be. Our forests are a very valuable asset to us, and we harvest only to produce lumber. If there's no market, we don't harvest. We will only create electricity with material that cannot be converted into lumber or studs.

Woody biomass-generated electricity has long been defined as renewable power by federal and state governments. It's also firm power, which means it can be produced regardless of weather conditions. This type of power provides a reliable source of energy. Solar and wind power can be generated only when the weather cooperates. Additionally, when the Eugene Water & Electric Board held a public process on energy sources, its customers identified woody biomass as one of the preferred options.

Erik Silverberg's April 2 guest viewpoint focused quite a bit on forest practices. He clearly doesn't understand forestry, and has no accurate information about our company or our lands. Contrary to Silverberg's assertion, the quality and quantity of timber on our lands has significantly improved over time. We have owned and operated a 165,000-acre tree

farm since 1993. During that time, in addition to maintaining a sustainable harvest level, the amount of timber growing on these lands has increased by 70 percent.

Our foresters are diligent in their efforts to sustainably manage our forests, while protecting and providing habitat for fish and wildlife, clean air and water, soils and recreational opportunities. We take care of the land, because it provides the resource we need to continue to operate our mills, provide jobs and create renewable building materials.

Our cogeneration plant will reduce our community's dependence on fossil fuels. Each year, Seneca burns about 70 million cubic feet of natural gas to produce steam to dry lumber in our kilns. For every 20,000 cubic feet of gas burned, one metric ton of carbon is released. Thus, using fossil fuel currently releases 3,500 tons of carbon per year, which will be reduced to zero once the project begins.

Those charged with the responsibility of designing carbon-regulation programs, such as the Western Climate Initiative and the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative, consider woody biomass carbon-neutral, similar to other renewable technologies.

Woody biomass lessens greenhouse gas emissions when it replaces fossil fuels, because live, carbon-sequestering trees balance the carbon dioxide released when woody biomass is burned. When biomass power offsets carbon emissions from natural gas or coal plants, there is a net positive impact on reducing greenhouse gases. That is the case with our plant.

Bottom line: The more energy we produce locally, the less natural gas and coal we need to import to Oregon.

Currently, the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency is reviewing our air quality permit. Of our project's \$45 million cost, almost \$11 million will pay for pollution control technology. In many instances, we are doing more than is required by current rules. We also will reduce traffic from our mills, because we will be keeping byproducts on-site to fuel the co-gen's boiler.

I'm proud to be a part of a company that can contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases, create firm, local renewable power, and continue to increase the value of each log we harvest. Our co-generation project is a true win-win for our community.

Jody Jones, along with her father and sisters, is a co-owner of Seneca Sustainable Energy.