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Biomass Plant Partners Pledge Commitment
By Ryan Bonham

During a public meeting held on Thursday, Jan. 12, at the Elks Lodge, nearly 70 partners involved in Lakeview's biomass plant project signed a pledge of commitment to the facility's development. Several of the key players in the project's development described the occasion as a major step in the right direction for the proposed biomass plant.

Representatives from the state's capitol as well as other agencies that ranged from wildlife advocacy groups to the Forest Service were on hand to witness what town and county officials called a historic moment for the Town of Lakeview.

"This project is a very significant step in a problem we have to eventually have a lot of support in resolving," said Lake County Commissioner JR Stewart.

Stewart cited a number of reasons for the need for efforts to improve the health of the surrounding forests in Lake County, providing the catastrophic damage and resulting insect infestation and disease that followed the Winter Rim and Toolbox fires in 2002.

"This is what I call an integrated solution to a multi-faceted problem," Stewart said.

The county commissioner said that among the benefits of such a plant would be an increase in jobs as well as promote the preservation of forests and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Keeping the Fremont Sawmill steadily supplied with fuel sources for the biomass plant is also important, he said, and to this end the conservation groups also play an important role.

Along with Stewart, OSU's College of Forestry dean, Hal Salwasser, served as a convener for a series of meetings that brought the various partners together. Salwasser agreed with Stewart's comments, noting that bringing forth the partners involved and formally signing their commitment to the biomass effort is a strong start to what could prove to be a long road ahead.

"This gets us out of the starting gate," he said.

Governor Ted Kulongoski's representative, David Van't Hof, was also present to inform the large audience of the governor's full support of the project, noting that not only is the project innovative for the state, but for the rest of the country, as well.

"This Oregon Solutions project is probably one of the leading opportunities for the state," he said. "We're committed to trying to make sure this project succeeds, and determining what barriers stand (in the way of) achieving it."

Van't Hof also noted that the strong bipartisan support for the project was also a positive aspect, pooling together the interests on both sides of the political fence.

Following Van't Hof's address, the formal signing of each partner's commitment to the Lakeview Biomass Project ensued, with some who were unable to attend the public meeting having a secondary party sign for them or else speak on their behalf, for those who elected to sign at a later date. Representatives from the BLM Lakeview District, Collins Companies, DG Energy Solutions LLC, and the Wilderness Society—all took place in the formal signing, providing a few words about the project, as well.

John Wood, vice president of national sales for DG Energy Solutions, expressed favorable thoughts on the efforts, noting that gathering such a large show of backers early on is a good sign.

"This is an opportunity to invest in earnest the development of such a project," he said. "We are very excited. We think the support here is something to be proud of."

Ryan Temple, representing Sustainable Northwest, was among the environmental interest groups that was impressed with the project's development and the issues that it addressed, especially with respect to the environment.

"I am extremely enthusiastic of the impact on the Pacific Northwest," he said. "You guys are doing it right, here, and mainly that collaboration (with environmentalists) is not only necessary but wise."