

Community effort results in acquisition of woody biomass grant

The Situation

Clearwater County leaders and economic development professionals have been working on developing a woody biomass energy facility in Orofino since 2005. Since that time three feasibility studies have been conducted to look at both a woody biomass heating facility as well as a combined heat and power facility. Community meetings were held and there was widespread support for developing such a facility in order to provide jobs, bolster the wood products industry, provide a market for forest biomass that was not currently being utilized, increase the incentive for forest treatments that would improve forest health, and to provide a dependable and affordable heat source for public facilities in Orofino, especially the state prison, which the state was considering closing due to high utility and maintenance costs.

The gist of the feasibility studies was that a combined heat and power facility (a facility that generates electricity as well as provides heating) was marginally economical to build, due to the lack of demand for all the heat generated in the production of power, making the facility very inefficient. In other words, the heat demand from potential clients in Orofino was not great enough to justify the scale of facility that would be required to produce electricity. However, a heat-only biomass facility looked feasible.

Our Response

In the winter of 2012 it came to the attention of the Clearwater County Extension office and the Clearwater Soil and Water Conservation District that the USFS was offering grants for the production of engineering designs for the financing and construction of woody biomass facilities. Community leaders and economic development professionals were notified,



Source: <http://www.timberexchange.com/img/wood-chips.jpg>

information about the requirements for the grant was gathered, and planning meetings were held to coordinate the work required to pursue this grant opportunity.

While the grant was formally run through the Clearwater County Soil and Water Conservation District, several entities collaborated and worked side-by-side to write the grant, compile the information required, and edit the final product, they included U of I Extension-Clearwater County, U of I Extension—Moscow Campus, Clearwater County Economic Development Association, Nez Perce Tribe staff, Wisewood (a woody biomass engineering consulting firm in Portland), and staff of the Clearwater County Soil and Water Conservation District.

Clearwater County Extension partnered with others in planning the work required to get the grant written, gathering the data to support the grant request, and writing and editing the grant. Clearwater County

Extension had major responsibility for writing sections of the grant request that dealt with the economic feasibility of the project and its expected economic impacts, as well as editing the final proposal prior to submission. Extension also worked closely with the Clearwater County Economic Development Director on preparing sections of the grant request dealing with the economic impact of the project, and obtaining economic data from the Idaho Department of Labor.

Program Outcomes

As a result of this community effort, the parties were successful in obtaining the grant from the US Forest Service as well as a matching grant from the Idaho Department of Commerce. The total award was \$110,000 from the US Forest Service, plus a \$40,000 Gem grant as part of the required match along with \$6,000 in in-kind contributions from members of the advisory committee. Clearwater County Extension sits on the advisory committee for the grant and along with the other advisory committee members has developed a scope of work and timeline for deliverables, and a commitment to work together to keep the community informed as the work progresses. The committee is also having discussions regarding approaches to finding financing and investors to build the facility once the design work is completed.

This project has implications beyond the immediate facility that is being designed. This project is seen by members of the advisory committee as a beginning for what is hoped will be a trend in the establishment of other woody biomass heating facilities in the county, that over time will provide an economic boost to the county, provide additional markets for forest products, and promote forest management practices that improve forest health.

Implications for Extension Programming

Based on preliminary results from the county needs assessment conducted by Extension in 2012, the collaborative community effort that came together to achieve the woody biomass grant is seen as a model for a role that Extension can play in rural development in the county. For the last three years there has been no one in the county charged with writing grants for rural development projects. One role for Extension would be to facilitate community efforts to identify projects and grants, acquire funding, and follow up with administration and evaluation of community projects.

Such a program could increase community capacity and build on the strengths and cooperation already evidenced by the acquisition of the woody biomass facility grant.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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