

A Bill to Change the Definition of Renewable Biomass

Oregonians have a strong interest in tapping woody biomass as a source of renewable fuels. This desire, coupled with how well Oregon grows biomass, creates new opportunities to use carefully selected wood waste as a source for cleaner transportation fuel. If done correctly, this effort will lead to healthier forests, greater carbon sequestration, cleaner transportation fuels as compared to traditional gasolines, while maintaining strong protections for old-growth forests.

Current law excludes the use of biomass from federal lands in the making of renewable fuels to meet the Renewable Fuel Standard (RFS). This bill updates the definition of “renewable biomass” to better capture discarded and low value wood waste for sustainable fuels.

Bill Summary

Private Lands -- The bill ensures private landowners have flexibility to use all slash, thinnings, and low-value logs for credits under the RFS by removing the explicit reference to fiber from tree plantations. Currently, the RFS limits the definition to only biomass from tree plantations, but -- particularly in Eastern Oregon -- low value, invasive trees like juniper hurt groundwater supplies, encroach on sage grouse habitat, and pose wildfire risks. Without market incentives like RFS credits, removing these invasive species simply does not pencil out. This bill aims to make it more cost efficient for private landowners to remove low-value brush, like invasive juniper.

Mill Residuals -- The bill ensures that all mill residuals -- like sawdust and shavings -- can be used for biofuels and count for RFS credits from both federal and non-federal lands. Under current law, mill residuals can only count for RFS credits if the residuals came from authorized trees from private plantations. In the West, however, most mills use trees sourced from both public and private lands, which means sawdust and shavings are commingled and therefore ineligible for RFS credits. This bill fixes that issue.

Federal Lands -- The bill allows biomass sourced from certain federal lands to qualify for RFS credits. This change will help fund projects to reduce dead and dying trees that fuel catastrophic wildfires and helps thin out unhealthy second-growth forests. Importantly, under this new definition, biomass materials harvested from federal lands must be done in accordance with all federal laws, regulations, and land-use plans and designations. In addition, the bill prioritizes biomass removal through projects that aim to address insect and disease-ridden forests and treat areas prone to wildfires. Finally, the bill explicitly restricts the types of biomass materials that can be harvested from federal lands so that old growth trees and stands are protected

With Oregon leading the country in the transition from fossil fuel based energy sources, this bill will generate new opportunities to use small diameter trees, limbs, hazardous fuels, debris, and even sawdust at the mill to create new fuel sources, establish jobs in rural communities, and lower wildfire risks in federal forests.