



U.S. Department of Agriculture: Biomass fuel project is waste

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The U.S. Department of Agriculture is wasting \$10 million trying to apply a crop-based biomass utilization model to our rugged and remote national forests! While Cool Planet Energy Systems' turning of farm waste into gasoline and biochar may have merit, it does not apply well to dead trees on remote public lands.

In a [Dec. 24, 2013 Missoulian article](#) reprinted elsewhere, Montana State University's Peter Kolb, who also teaches at the University of Montana, gets it wrong by calling dead trees "carbon waste." Dead trees are not corn stalks. They continue playing a crucial role in maintaining forest ecosystems, from providing critical wildlife habitats to returning carbon and nutrients to the forest soil. While Kolb points out the economic problems of getting dead trees to a biomass facility, he wrongly implies that ecological concerns are merely "policy issues" to be overcome.

Cool Planet's website indicates that, by applying heat to biomass in the absence of oxygen, one-third of the carbon is released into the air, one-third is bottled up in biofuels, and one-third is sequestered in biochar returned to the soil. Cool Planet claims its process is "carbon negative" and implies the more we drive our cars using its biofuels, the more we are helping cool the planet – by essentially burying its plant life as biochar.

Last November, 41 scientists warned the Environmental Protection Agency that using trees as biomass energy is harmful and quite different than using farm crop waste. In October, 250 scientists told Congress dead trees in burned forests are "one of the most ecologically important and biodiverse habitat types in western conifer forests."

How much of the USDA's \$10 million will go to scientists finding forest ecosystems are capable of recycling their own carbon? How much will go to silence them as massive federal subsidies are created to grind those ecosystems up?

Keith J. Hammer, Chair, Swan View Coalition, Kalispell