



Statement in support of SB0590 /HB0718

Reclaim Renewable Energy Act

February 27, 2023

Thank you for this opportunity and a special thank you to Senator Lewis Young for addressing the RPS system.

My name is Sonia Demiray. I am a Frederick County Resident and the co-founder of the Climate Communications Coalition. I am also deeply involved in local forestry and alarmed by the fuzzy definitions and current industrial and commercial forestry goals across the State.

I am here today to oppose the subsidies for wood or woody biomass for energy. Wood composes 3.4% of the current Renewable Energy Portfolio and I respectfully ask you to remove it, because it is not green, clean, renewable, or sustainable. By the way: everything in the field of forestry is being called 'sustainable' and 'renewable' while many activities clearly are not.

1. The outdated 2009 Sustainable Forestry Act wrongly defines biomass as clean & green energy: Woody biomass (better known as wood) is not a clean source of energy. When burned, it releases decades or centuries of stored pollution back into the atmosphere. Where there is fire, there is smoke which by definition is pollution- the origin of the word smog. But it gets worse: producing woody biomass for energy (usually in the form of pellets) adds pollution from logging the trees, transportation, processing, manufacturing, and of course the final burning of wood. In fact, burning wood for electricity produces as much or more pollution as fossil fuels, including coal. [Biomass facilities emit high levels of particulate matter](#) (PM), nitrogen oxides (NOx), carbon monoxide (CO), sulfur dioxide (SO₂), lead, mercury, and other hazardous air pollutants. In addition, the dust from the pellet manufacturing facilities produce dangerous air pollutants including [particulate matter and volatile organic compounds](#).

2. Renewable: The biomass energy industry likes to state that it is renewable because trees grow back. Trees (especially integral forest ecosystems) as they grow, are the single most effective and currently working mechanism we have available to scrub our air clean and sink the pollution back into the soils. This is why we are planting one trillion trees worldwide by 2030. However, it will take these trees decades and centuries to be as effective as the ones being cut down for burning. So are they truly renewable? NO- not in the time-frame we have available to us in this climate emergency – i.e. Maryland has 12 years to reach Net Zero, not the centuries we need for forest ecosystems to reintegrate.



In fact, the easiest and best way to draw down pollution is by protecting existing forests. This [proforestation is also what the International Panel on Climate Change IPCC](#) is advocating for. A mature tree is far better at drawdown, sequestration and storage than a new seedling. And integral forest ecosystems are far more effective than newly afforested fields for carbon sinks (let alone biodiversity, water, soils, etc.) So don't cut down the best tool we have, mature trees and forests, and pretend that the newly afforested field is just as good. A tiny seedling cannot absorb the same as an old oak.

3. Industry: the 2009 Sustainable Forestry Act states that "Sustainable Forestry produces woody biomass" that is correct. There is waste wood involved in sustainable forestry practices such as invasive species removal, thinning for fire breaks, etc. The resulting waste wood must be encapsulated and stored- i.e. building material, cellulose, etc. but we must refrain from burning it to release stored pollution back into the atmosphere, which worsens climate change. Sustainable forestry practices are relatively small in scale and very well managed by experts. They are important and much needed, mainly in forests that are close to developed and built up areas. Forest products are also important: we use timber and furniture, and Maryland's forest product industry is bound to organically and slowly grow with the increased afforestation and increased storm damage.

That said, there is a current concerted effort to dramatically expand the Maryland forest product industry to a much larger scale. Current afforestation goals and maturing forests have drawn the attention of timber trade which is being fostered among local organizations and government agencies. A major part of this is biomass energy due to its profitability -especially for export. When you invite woody biomass energy industry, the byproduct quickly becomes the product – as we have seen across the South East (a comprehensive documentary about this can be watched [for free online here](#)) and anyone who has visited the Carolinas or Florida lately knows about the damage. So let's not invite a polluting and destructive industry to settle in among us and syphon away important investments that should go to truly renewable energy.

Some may think that the Climate Communications Coalition is being alarmist, but the facts paint a picture: The [Sustainable Forestry Council](#), supported by the MD DNR, wants to see 2-3 of biomass energy operations across Maryland; the Maryland Forestry Economic Adjustment Strategy ([MFEAS](#)) is recommending that industry establish their polluting plants in Opportunity Zones (p.21, MFEAS.); the strategy highlights the Port of Baltimore for its easy access to international trade (p. 18 MFEAS); the strategy calls for "all wood and wood residue to be qualified as renewable biomass" (p. 97 MFEAS); the MD Clean Energy Center invited DRAX – one of the biggest clear cutters highlighted in the above mentioned documentary – [to host webinars](#) about the benefits of biomass for Maryland audiences; etc.



Providing subsidies for woody biomass not only adds unwanted pollution and encourages logging of the only effective mechanism we currently have to draw down pollution. It also opens the door to industrial scale devastation and pollution at a time where the world, including Maryland, must move quickly to stop emitting pollutants to the atmosphere.

We urge you to withdraw any subsidies to woody biomass for energy. We also hope that you take a good look at MFEAS and at the 2009 Sustainable Forestry Act.

