

North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance

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U.S. Federal Government Pauses to Scrutinize Biomass Power¹

Many industries are complaining of regulatory uncertainty these days, and the troubled biomass power industry has now suffered a blow that could impact a decade or more of planning and development. As the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced that it will embark upon a three-year study of the carbon impacts of burning biomass for electricity, the beleaguered industry officially moves onto uncertain ground. Industry groups had lobbied extensively last year to avoid such regulation and scrutiny.

Burning biomass shares the same status and access to subsidies and tax incentives as wind and solar power in many states. Over 40 states have renewable portfolios mandating that utilities sell customers “green energy,” and none of them count the carbon dioxide emissions from biomass (<http://www.dsireusa.org/>). While most people think of windmills and solar panels as the primary renewable energy source, biomass burning currently generates roughly half of the power considered ‘renewable’ in the United States. In many cases, that includes the burning of whole trees and chemically contaminated waste.

Until recently, the assumption of both industry and government had been that biomass burning is “carbon-neutral” – that is, it adds no net greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. EPA has now ruled that this presumed carbon neutrality deserves a second look, emphasizing that hard science will be the arbiter of the outcome. Recent respected scientific studies indicate that carbon neutrality is not supported by the facts, so the industry is likely to face increased regulation and scrutiny.

A 2010 study commissioned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts demonstrated that burning biomass over decades puts more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere than burning coal (<http://www.manomet.org/node/322>). Massachusetts thus announced in July 2010 that it would put stricter conditions on biomass under the renewable portfolio standard. Also, a comprehensive study published by the Environmental Working Group, “[Clearcut Disaster: Carbon Loophole Threatens U.S. Forests](#),” demonstrated that biomass power increases atmospheric carbon dioxide, while calling for government accounting. (<http://www.ewg.org/clearcut-disaster>)



¹ Manomet Center for Conservation Sciences Study commissioned by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Energy Resources, June 10, 2010

According to Biomass Accountability Project spokesperson Meg Sheehan, "EPA has sound scientific grounds for challenging the conventional and scientifically unsupported view of biomass as carbon-neutral. We trust that the agency is setting a new course that will close the 'biomass loophole.' Governments must stop ignoring the carbon dioxide emissions from biomass." The head of the Biomass Power Association, Bob Cleaves, has said that regulation of biomass through the tailoring rule would effectively stop the industry in its tracks.

Evidence is in on Tahoe Biomass Plant “partnerships”

Last month NTCAA exposed a deceptive use of the term “partnerships” in an official Notice of Preparation (NOP) recorded with the State of California. The document gives formal notice to all government agencies and the public of a specific project and the applicant’s intent to prepare and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The document describes the project and solicits comments on the scope of the EIR.



NOP’s are carefully prepared and reviewed prior to release because numerous official bodies and individuals depend on the information as written since most readers do not have any local knowledge of the facts. To claim a relationship that does not exist for the specific application is Placer County’s attempt to leverage conceptual support into support for the specific project proposed in the NOP. We believe this is deceptive and does not account for the facts on the ground.

Every agency described as having partnerships share only general conceptual support for using woody biomass as a “renewable energy” resource and for forest fuels reduction activity to “reduce the impacts of catastrophic wildfires. The EPA qualified even this support with “as long as the alternative is beneficial for the environment.”

NTCAA and nearly everyone in California and Nevada would support renewable energy and activity to reduce the threat of catastrophic fire. But these concepts have only a remote abstract connection to the proposed biomass power plant in Kings Beach because the concepts are already satisfied under existing conditions. Fuels reduction activity occurs to the maximum extent that public subsidies will directly support, and the woody biomass is already removed from the Basin, processed at Cabin Creek, and burned at the Loyalton biomass plant.

A new power plant in the Tahoe Basin adds nothing that is not already being done. What it does is shift the combustion from Loyalton (42 miles from Cabin Creek) to inside the Tahoe Basin at Kings Beach (17 miles from Cabin Creek). The 25 mile difference costs about \$5 per ton and does not materially affect the economics. Any woody biomass generated within Placer County from fuel reduction activity in the Basin must be taken to Cabin Creek first for processing (drying, screening, storing) into a fuel ready product.

Current clean combustion technology cannot burn green material of any size. Fuel specifications require the freshly produced material to be processed. The most common misperception is that the woody biomass can be taken directly to the power plant in Kings Beach for immediate combustion. This is not true. We will discuss this further in the next NTCAA newsletter.

Governor Brown's Bid to Kill Redevelopment Agencies²

One of California Governor Jerry Brown's budget proposals calls for eliminating municipal redevelopment agencies, which would take billions of dollars out of city coffers and send it instead to school districts, counties and the state. Though little understood by the public, the state's nearly 400 active redevelopment agencies run on about \$5 billion each year in property taxes generated in the project areas for economic development — money that would otherwise go to schools and counties. It would do so, however, by taking away one of the most potent tools officials have to improve blighted areas by building housing and commercial projects. Redevelopment agencies collect billions of dollars in property tax revenue and dole out hundreds of millions annually in contracts, making them a significant source of power for the city officials who control them.

The governor's office responded crisply, saying Brown hoped the Community Redevelopment Agency was not planning on "squirreling money away for the indefinite future when our schools, police and firefighters are in need of this funding."

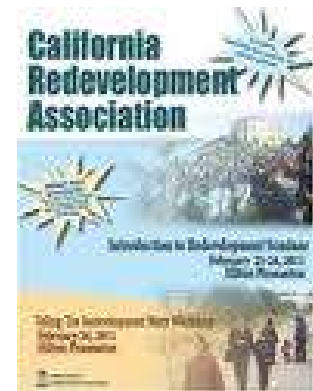
Supporters praise redevelopment agencies for reviving downtrodden neighborhoods across the state and creating thousands of jobs. But many of the agencies have also been criticized for mismanagement, favoritism and misplaced priorities.

No one apparently foresaw a governor seeking to abolish redevelopment agencies altogether. It's part of Brown's plan to radically redefine the state's relationship with city and county governments, to give it more flexibility as it seeks to fill a \$25.4-billion hole in the budget.

The California Legislature authorized redevelopment agencies more than half a century ago as a mechanism to help cities clean up slums in neglected urban cores. But the number of agencies exploded after Proposition 13 limited city officials' ability to raise money.

Forming a redevelopment agency was a relatively easy way for cities to get their hands on cash, especially compared with persuading two-thirds of voters to raise taxes. It involved declaring certain areas blighted and selling bonds to be repaid with increased tax revenues from rising property values.

Statewide, redevelopment has been largely unregulated, with little to ensure that money is properly spent. This week, the nonpartisan state Legislative Analyst's Office, which provides finan-



² For the complete article, see Los Angeles Times "[Jerry Brown's bid to kill redevelopment agencies sets stage for fierce battle](#)", January 15, 2011

cial advice to lawmakers of both parties, said Brown's plan "makes sense," citing "no reliable evidence" that redevelopment betters the state's overall economy.

Homewood Mountain Resort (HMR) Ski Area Master Plan DEIR/EIS Released

Homewood Village Resorts, LLC, the Project Applicant, has prepared the to develop and upgrade mixed-uses at the North Base area, residential uses in the South Base area, a lodge at the Mid-Mountain Base area, and support facilities in the ski area. The HMR Ski Area Master Plan is a mixed-use project developed under the guidelines included in the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's (TRPA) Community Enhancement Program (CEP) in August 2007.



A 60-day public comment period for the Homewood Project Draft EIR/EIS commenced on January 21, 2011 and will conclude on March 21, 2011. Comments will be solicited during this period and will be incorporated into the Final EIR/EIS document along with responses to comments.

You are encouraged to view the Draft EIR/EIS on the Placer County web site at

<http://www.placer.ca.gov/Departments/CommunityDevelopment/EnvCoordSvcs/EIR/Homewood/drafteir.aspx> and submit your comments to the addresses shown.

6731 TAHOE Redevelopment Project

This project is a new construction of timeshare/fractional ownership duplexes on 5.6 acres in Tahoe Vista, across from Tonopalo, its previous owner. There will be ten individual duplex units, utilizing 20 Tourist Accommodation Units (TAU's), with "related infrastructure and workforce housing". The developer also specifies "Some TAU's will have kitchenettes and multiple beds and bedrooms, and two residential units of use, along with 914 square feet of commercial floor area". Obviously, this means that one TAU will be used for units having more than one bedroom. (The definition of how many bedrooms per TAU is still under review by the TRPA) Proposed amenities include a pool, spa, sauna and outdoor spaces. There will be four workforce housing units.

Building heights will be two-to- three stories depending on grade. A one-way loop road surrounds the housing units. Each duplex unit will have a garage. Some old-growth trees will be removed.

Within one-half mile on S.R. 28, there will be four major timeshare/fractional ownership developments, Tonopalo, Tahoe Sands, Sandy Beach, and 6731TAHOE. It is anticipated that environmental studies will be made available shortly.

Did You Know?

"There is a concern that by changing a single room motel unit to a larger two, three, sometimes four bedroom condominium - if you will is creating greater environmental - negative environmental impacts to transportation facilities, etc. And while it seems intuitive that that would be the case, actually because of the different trips that people take when they use those kinds of units whether it's a small hotel or a large condo, that there actually fewer trips associated with those facilities that have more bedrooms and kitchens in them, than the old 50s, 60s style motel units. So it sounds that it would create that, but in fact it really doesn't. And the environmental impacts are limited by the other limiting factors that TRPA has on land coverage, height, and density per acre." Statement by Jennifer Merchant of the County Executive Office, at Placer County Board of Supervisors Meeting, May 18, 2010.

Upcoming Events/Key Dates

Agendas for TRPA Governing Board and APC, and also Placer County BOS are not available until a few days before the meeting. Therefore, it is difficult to provide a meaningful emphasis to the meetings. Other meetings/events not shown here, or changes, will be announced by email.

February 2, Wednesday	NLTRA Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
February 8, Tuesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	10 am, NTEC, Kings Beach
February 9, Wednesday	TRPA APC Meeting	9:30 am, TRPA Stateline Office
February 9, Wednesday	Highway 28 Lane Configuration	4:00 pm, Kings Beach Elementary
February 10, Thursday	NTRAC Meeting	6 pm, NTEC, Kings Beach
February 16, Wednesday	NTPUD Board Meeting	6 pm, TCPUD Board Room
February 23, Wednesday	TRPA Governing Board	9:30 am, North Shore Location
February 18, Friday	TCPUD Board Meeting	8:30 am, TCPUD Board Room
November 23, Tuesday	Placer County BOS Mtg	9:00 am, Brd Mtg Room, Auburn

TRPA – Tahoe Regional Planning Agency
NLTRA – North Lake Tahoe Resort Association
TCPUD – Tahoe City Public Utility District
NTEC – North Tahoe Event Center
BOS – Placer County Board of Supervisors

APC – Advisory Planning Commission
NTPUD – North Tahoe Public Utility District
NTPFD – North Tahoe Fire Protection District
NTRAC- North Tahoe Regional Advisory Council

“Liberty cannot be preserved without general knowledge among people.”

..... John Adams – Dissertation on the Canon and Federal Law, 1765

Contributors to this newsletter: Dave McClure, and Jerry Wotel