

ESCOG's Potential Role in Regional Biomass Utilization Development

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The Challenge: Managing Wood Waste for Wildfire Resilience

- Vegetation thinning and fuel reduction projects generate significant wood and green waste (biomass)
- Wood waste emits methane and creates smoke when openly burned
- Waste residue left in place undermines fuel reduction effectiveness



- Need for regional biomass management solution
- Limits prescribed fire activities
- Strains local landfill capacity



ESCOG's Opportunity

Biomass Pilot Program Background

- Early 2025: ESCOG asked to convene biomass utilization discussions
- June 2025: Limited funding to support consultant work for ESCOG through California Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation (LCI) "Biomass Market Enhancement Pilot" Program
- LCI program examined JPA roles in biomass development across Sierra Nevada and state
- Project investigated challenges, opportunities, and potential ESCOG governance role

Project Timeline: June through October 2025



Project Activities

Three Partner Meetings Conducted

June 25, 2025:

- Presentation to ESCOG Board on biomass pilot program
- Partner Meeting 1: Established need for shared understanding of biomass landscape, partner roles
- GC Forest Products project update

August 6, 2025:

- Partner Meeting 2: West Biofuels and TSS bioenergy project update
- Whitebark Institute feedstock assessment (ESCCRP area) confirmed material availability, opportunity beyond project scope
- Inyo NF five-year program of work presentation confirms activity to support feedstock assessment

October 3, 2025:

- Partner Meeting 3: State context from LCI, SNC funding update
- Central Sierra Economic Development District presentation: workforce and business support
- Community Wildfire Defense Grant presentation
- Discussion of ESCOG's potential regional roles



Partner Engagement

Agencies and Organizations Represented at Meetings

- ESCOG staff and board members
- Inyo County, Mono County, Town of Mammoth Lakes
- Bishop Paiute Tribe
- CAL FIRE
- Governor's Office of Land Use and Climate Innovation
- Sierra Nevada Conservancy
- UC Agriculture and Natural Resources
- Inyo National Forest
- Biomass project proponents: West Biofuels, GC Forest Products
- Whitebark Institute, California Deer Association, TSS Consultants





Strategic Alignment

Synergy with ESCOG Programs

- Supports regional wildfire resilience and economic development

- Aligns with existing ESCOG initiatives:
 - California Jobs First

 - Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program:
 - Eastern Sierra Pace and Scale Accelerator

 - Community Wildfire Defense Grant

- Builds on ESCOG's convening authority as regional JPA

3 Step Recommendations

Step 1: Convene Biomass Interests

- Regular updates and discussions build understanding and awareness, strengthen partnerships
- ESCOG well-positioned as regional JPA with wildfire/ecosystem management program
- Biomass convenings integrated into Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance activities with ESCOG leadership

Step 2: Regionalize Biomass Utilization

- Broaden focus beyond ESCCRP to address regional needs and opportunities
- Address biomass from new Community Wildfire Defense Grant implementation
- Strengthen regional bio-economy/stewardship economy
- Root approach in region's history and landscape restoration needs
- Invite Bishop Paiute Tribe partnership and engagement

Step 3: Support Business Development

Data and Mapping:

- Track regional wood residue sources
- Implement state's Biomass Digital Marketplace program

Contracting:

- Provide feedstock supply contract templates
- Assist with contract negotiation and management

Grant Support:

- Seek funding for business start-up/expansion (vehicles, equipment)

Workforce:

- Partner with Central Sierra Economic Development District
- Support biomass/bioeconomy workforce development and training

Funding Needs and Opportunities

Funding Needs

- All recommendations contingent upon additional funding
- Requires support from additional staff or consultants
- Other regions in LCI "biomass pilot" estimate: \$200,000–\$300,000 annually
- LCI grant funding for "biomass pilot" funds not anticipated next year
- No specific biomass grant available today



Opportunity : Prop 4 & Sierra Nevada Conservancy Landscape Grant Program

- Prop 4: \$45 million to Sierra Nevada Conservancy for “regional projects” = likely funding SNC Landscape Grant Program: a new block-grant style initiative to support partnerships serving large, ecologically defined landscapes; included in this year’s state budget
- Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance is one of 16 "ready landscapes" for this funding in Sierra-Cascades region
- ESCOG Biomass utilization role could potentially be funded as part of a regional landscape grant
- **ESCOG’s partnership/leadership in ESWA and biomass utilization could strengthen the region’s position for funding**
- Timing: grant guidelines, process still in development at state/SNC; funding program could open spring or summer 2026

Requested Action

➤ Confirm ESCOG's interest in:

Supporting regional biomass utilization development as part of the Sustainable Recreation and Ecosystem Management Program

➤ Provide staff direction to:

Continue participation in Eastern Sierra Wildfire Alliance regional efforts to pursue future wildfire resilience grant opportunities, including SNC's Landscape Grant Program



Questions?

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