

New Guidelines Ensure Sustainable Use of Forest Biomass for Renewable Energy

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Santa Fe, NM—The Forest Guild’s new, groundbreaking work, “Biomass Retention and Harvesting Guidelines for the Northeast,” is co-authored by Forest Guild Northeast regional director Bob Perschel and Forest Guild research director Dr. Zander Evans. It offers the first regional targets for sustaining the ecological health and value of forests by preventing the removal of too much forest biomass - whole trees or harvest residues (tree tops or limbs) - when harvesting forests for renewable fuels. It also marks the first time the concept of sustainability in harvesting guidelines includes managing forest carbon to mitigate climate change.



“In addition to serving the needs of the Northeast, the release of our guidelines is perfectly timed to provide a template for national climate and energy legislation,” explains Mike DeBonis, Forest Guild Executive Director. “The Kerry-Lieberman American Power Act now being discussed in Congress should include assurances that biomass is harvested sustainably. These guidelines demonstrate how that can be accomplished.”

Rapidly increasing interest in biomass harvesting presents a potential threat to wildlife, biodiversity, water quality, long-term soil health, and forest productivity. Although, there are state-based guidelines to protect water quality, few states have guidelines in place to protect essential ecological values when harvesting for biomass.

“Not all forest biomass is created equal.” explains co-author Perschel. “It can be damaging or supportive of ecological values; it can be beneficial to climate change mitigation or make things worse. The new Forest Guild science-based guidelines identify measurable and verifiable targets for trees, limbs, and woody material that must be left in the forest to assure forest health.” The scientific background for the guidelines is summarized in an accompanying document titled [*Ecology of Deadwood in the Northeast*](#).

Moreover, the facilities that use forest biomass for energy often procure their supply from several states. The Forest Guild guidelines offer a consistent approach across state boundaries by covering the major forest types for New England and New York and have applicability to other states as well.

Recent reviews by noted scientists point out the fallacy of current carbon accounting systems that fail to count emissions from biomass because all forest biomass is considered carbon neutral. The Forest Guild guidelines are the first to acknowledge that carbon accounting systems must differentiate emissions from forest biomass based on the type of forest harvested, harvesting method, management approach, and ecological guidelines that are followed.

Richard Campbell Forest Manager for the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies praises “the broad range of scientists and professionals involved in the project,” adding, “This report is a thorough and rigorous examination of all the ecological aspects involved in biomass harvesting and represents a great step forward on a growing and important issue for forestry throughout New England.”

“The Forest Guild guidelines are just the kind of common sense, effective sustainable approach we are looking for” says Markus Bradley, a forester with Redstart Forestry in Corinth, Vt. “We will begin adopting them for our Forest Stewardship Council client pool right away.”

HIGHLIGHTS FROM “BIOMASS RETENTION AND HARVESTING GUIDELINES FOR THE NORTHEAST”

1. Provides definitions of sustainability, biomass, and downed woody material.
2. Sets specific targets for retention of critical forest structures, including retention of tops and limbs, standing dead trees, and large trees for wildlife.
3. Provides guidelines for water quality, riparian zones, harvesting, and operations.
4. Outlines approaches for determining the carbon impact of biomass harvesting.

Download the new guidelines and accompanying reports:

- Forest Biomass Retention and Harvesting Guidelines for the Northeast
www.forestguild.org/publications/research/2010/FG_Biomass_Guidelines_NE.pdf
- Ecology of Deadwood in the Northeast
www.forestguild.org/publications/research/2010/ecology_of_dead_wood.pdf
- Revised Assessment of Biomass Harvesting and Retention Guidelines
www.forestguild.org/publications/research/2009/biomass_guidelines.pdf
- Forest Biomass Policy Statement
www.forestguild.org/publications/policy/Policy_biomass.pdf

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The Forest Guild, headquartered in Santa Fe, New Mexico, is a national organization of more than 700 foresters, allied professionals, and supporters who manage forestlands in the United States and Canada and advocate for ecologically sound forest practices. The mission of the Forest Guild is to practice and promote ecologically, economically, and socially responsible forestry as a means of sustaining the integrity of forest ecosystems and the human communities dependent upon them. The Guild maintains a presence nationwide with a Northeast regional director and volunteer coordinators in 12 states and nearly all major forest regions of the country.