

# **New agreement will allow more biomass harvest**

## *Agencies to sign deal April 6*

One thousand acres of Wallowa-Whitman National Forest land will be available for potential biomass harvest. That is the agreement within the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) being signed by U.S. Rep. Greg Walden (R-OR), Wallowa Whitman National Forest Supervisor Steve Ellis, State Forester John Buckman, Wallowa County Biomass Group representative Nils Christoffersen and others April 6 during Walden's Wallowa County visit.

The signing of the MOU will be held at 4 p.m. at Tomas Conference Center in Enterprise.

In addition to making those 1,000 acres available, the Forest Service will also commit to examining other options to provide woody biomass product, such as writing in stipulations on thinning contracts favorable to biomass harvest.

"This isn't a hard contract," cautions Christoffersen, "but it is a memorandum about our shared intent to build biomass industry in Wallowa County."

The point of this exercise is to grease the wheels for potential business investors, according to County Commissioner Mike Hayward. "The challenge you have with biomass is that private investors will not spend the substantial amount of money it takes to develop the infrastructure to utilize the biomass unless they have a guaranteed raw materials supply," he said. "Signing the MOU is a step in trying to make that supply more certain."

It is an exercise with precedent.

Lake County signed an MOU about biomass production with public and private agencies last November. A 20-year MOU was signed by private lumber companies, Fremont-Winema National Forests, Lakeview District of the Bureau of Land Management, mill owner Collins Companies of Portland, Marubeni Sustainable Energy of San Diego, Calif., Lake County Resources Initiative (modeled on Wallowa Resources) and other agencies in Lake County moments after the November dedication a \$6.6 million small-diameter mill in Lakeview. The mill processes small logs harvested from private and public lands. In addition, The Collins Companies of Portland, owner of the Lakeview sawmill, plans to erect a \$20 million, 13-megawatt, biomass plant at the sawmill. The plant is expected to supply sufficient energy to power over 10,000 single-family homes.

Even only it's only an MOU it gave Collins confidence in the business. "I don't think the ink was even dry on the MOU and we started working on the first 10-year contract," said Walls. -- a the 10-year stewardship contract only guaranteed \$100,000 worth of work. Environmental groups endorsing the biomass plant and the sawmill gave them confidence.

Inspired by Lake County's success and Wallowa County's own successes with small-diameter wood harvest and biomass furnace construction, the Wallowa County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (NRAC) offered to facilitate the MOU process in Wallowa County. Meetings began in spring of 2008.

The MOU to be signed April 6 will "provide a framework for planning" according to Christofferson.

Private investors continue to show interest in establishing biomass-fueled businesses in Wallowa County, Hayward said. Locally, both Ant Flat Renewables and Community Smallwoods Solutions of Wallowa have continued their interest in and investigation of possible businesses related to biomass harvest and utilization.

