

Biomass plant planned

\$70 million to \$120 million project in Klamath Falls 'on fast track'

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A Bellevue, Wash.,-based company filed documents with the state of Oregon Tuesday to build a 35-megawatt bioenergy plant costing between \$70 million and \$120 million in Klamath Falls.

The project would create about 175 jobs during construction, 30 permanent positions and 100 jobs in the woods, the company said.

Klamath Falls Bioenergy would use wood waste from private lands to generate electricity in the plant, according to a press release. It would be on property owned by Collins Timber Co. along Highway 66.

"This project is a winner for the community," said Bob Jones, president and CEO of Klamath Falls Bioenergy's parent company.

Commissioner Al Switzer and Trey Senn, executive director of Klamath County Economic Development Association, said the county has worked for months to bring the project to the area and it appears to be on the fast track.

"They want to do it this year and I think they'll be able to," Senn said.

The facility would use a state-of-the-art boiler with improved combustion technology to generate enough energy for 35,000 homes. Fuel for the next 20 years would be provided by lands owned by JWTR Oregon, a company owned by Dick Wendt of Klamath Falls-based Jeld-Wen.

Jim Kneeland, a spokesman for the company, said the company wants to build as soon as possible.

"The process in Oregon is pretty straightforward and we don't foresee any significant problems," he said.

Jones said the county was selected for its ample supply of wood waste, Oregon's renewable energy requirements and previous experience with power facilities such as the Klamath Falls Cogeneration Plant.

Slash burns

More than 98 percent of the ash created from burning the wood fuel will be captured before it is expelled into the atmosphere, and the project will reduce pollution from slash burns in the forest, he said.

"We believe that when you consider the virtual elimination of slash burns plus the jobs we create, we will be a very positive economic impact for the community," he said.

Switzer said the project, a year and a half in the making, will be a boon for the county in various ways, from reducing the impacts from poor air quality to providing badly needed jobs.

"We're talking good paying jobs," he said. "We're talking truck drivers, we're talking people working equipment."

While slash from public lands sometimes makes it to bioenergy facilities, Switzer said federal agencies have avoided long-term contracts to provide wood waste for fuel. The goal is to change that, he said.

“Our hope would be that as this develops, the public lands would have a place to take their slash,” he said.

Senn added that the facility will further contribute to the county’s image and reputation for sustainability and its push to become the renewable energy center of the country.

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