

USDA Awards Funds to Promote Development of Rural Wood to Energy Projects *Partnership agreement part of the administration's 'All of the Above' energy strategy*

WASHINGTON, Sept. 11, 2013 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced a partnership agreement to expand wood energy use, which will help improve the safety and health of our nation's forests. The new partnership includes USDA, the Alliance for Green Heat, the Biomass Power Association, the Biomass Thermal Energy Council, and the Pellet Fuels Institute.

He also announced more than \$1.1 million in grants are being awarded to five organizations to form state-wide teams that will stimulate development of wood energy projects.

"Today's announcements will help us find innovative ways to use leftover wood to create renewable energy and support good jobs in rural America," Vilsack said. "Wood to Energy efforts are a part of our 'all of the above' energy strategy. Appropriately scaled wood energy facilities also support our efforts to remove hazardous fuels and reduce the risks of catastrophic wildfires."

Deputy Secretary Krysta Harden joined leaders from the Alliance for Green Heat, the Biomass Power Association, the Biomass Thermal Energy Council, and the Pellet Fuels Institute today in Washington for the announcement of the new partnership agreement.

The partnership agreement focuses on promoting wood energy nationwide as a means to address fire risk, bolster rural economic development, improve air quality and help meet the Obama Administration's renewable energy and energy efficiency goals. These organizations support the use of wood energy across the scale of users – from residential users, to commercial and institutional facilities, to industrial production of heat and/or electricity to drive businesses and feed the electrical grid.

Under the terms of the five grants announced today, private, state and federal organizations will work together to stimulate the development of additional wood energy projects in their states. Collectively, \$2.9 million will be spent on this effort – \$1.1 million in federal funds and \$1.8 million in non-federal funds. Grant recipients are:

- Idaho Governor's Office of Energy Resources, Boise
- The Watershed Research & Training Center, Hayfork, Calif.
- Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Saint Paul
- North Country Resource Conservation & Development Council, Gilford, N.H.
- The Alaska Energy Authority, Anchorage

For more information on the cooperative agreement program, visit <http://na.fs.fed.us/werc/wood-energy/>.

The announcement supports President Obama's plan for rural America, which has brought about historic investment and resulted in stronger rural communities. Under the

President's leadership, these investments in housing, community facilities, businesses and infrastructure have empowered rural America to continue leading the way – strengthening America's economy, small towns and rural communities. USDA's investments in rural communities support the rural way of life that stands as the backbone of our American values. President Obama and Secretary Vilsack are committed to a smarter use of federal resources to foster sustainable economic prosperity and ensure the government is a strong partner for businesses, entrepreneurs and working families in rural communities.

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