

Community Wood Energy Meeting Summary

Twenty-one community residents gathered at Mt. Abe Union High School during the evening of August 2nd to celebrate a successful first year of operation of Mt. Abe's woodchip boiler, acknowledge what it takes to supply Mt. Abe with woodchips, and to explore the potential for sourcing the woodchips from local, sustainably-managed, family forests. In order to ensure a sustainable supply of wood chips, the ecological, social and economic challenges and opportunities need to be acknowledged and addressed. This meeting set the stage for continuing this dialogue.

Over the course of the past six weeks, Vermont Family Forest Intern, Caitlin Cusack, has talked with many of the players important to getting wood from the forest to Mt. Abe's boiler, including landowners, foresters, loggers, woodchip producers, students, teachers and community residents interested in heating their school. Thursday night she had an opportunity to share with them what she heard in terms of constraints and opportunities to supplying Mt. Abe with woodchips.



Caitlin presents her findings to the community.

The group discussion that followed emphasized the following as critical constraints to address:

1. It is not economical to remove low grade wood at a small scale;
2. The physical and social capital exists but it requires collaboration between many different players;
3. There are many ways to define sustainability as well as measure whether it is being achieved or not;
4. There are many logistical considerations for tracking where the wood comes from that goes to Mt. Abe;
5. The amount of rotting wood needed by the forest to repair itself is unknown and makes it difficult for determining how much to leave;
6. There is still misunderstanding around the goods and services provided by carefully tended forests.

While there are many challenges to overcome, there are significant opportunities to collaborate. For example, the community is fortunate to have two producers of woodchips, Jim Lathrop and A. Johnson Lumber, located right here in Bristol. Both Jim and Bill Sayre from A. Johnson participated in Thursday's meeting.

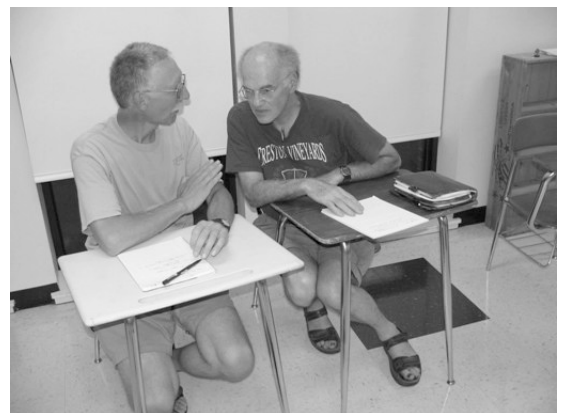
Even though the project we are proposing is very small compared to the level of production of these two producers, there are potentially many tangible community benefits. Procuring sustainable local chips for the school will provide significant educational opportunities for students. It also provides an interactive laboratory for exploring the ecological, economic, and social implications of the increased use of our forests for energy. This project is also an opportunity to engage family forest landowners and other members of the community in meaningful conservation of forestland, the rural economy and other traditional values.

For our next steps we will work on a couple of pilot projects- one involving an upcoming timber sale on a private parcel in Lincoln where the landowners are enthusiastic about sending the low grade wood to Mt. Abe UHS. Students will be involved in the pre- and post-harvest monitoring to ensure their continued involvement and to inform the on-going discussion.

The August 2nd meeting will be broadcast on Middlebury Community Television the week of August 13th and Northeast Addison Television in the near future. We will be posting progress reports on the Community Wood Energy Pilot Project on the Vermont Family Forest website at <http://www.familyforests.org/research/WoodEnergy.shtml>. **May the forest be with you!**



Bob Perschel, Chris Casey, Jim Lathrop and Bill Sayre chat after the meeting.



Robert Turner and Mischul Brownstone deep in discussion.