

Robert Kean

North Star Chapter
2300 Myrtle Avenue, Suite 260

St. Paul, MN 55114

March 25, 2021

To: Representative Long
Members of the **Committee on Climate and Energy Finance and Policy**
From: Sierra Club North Star Chapter, Forests and Wildlife Stewards

RE: Comments on H.F. 1486: Wood pellet production financial incentives program established, and money appropriated.

Dear Representative Long , Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments on H.F. 1486. The Sierra Club North Star Chapter is a nonprofit environmental organization representing over 20,000 members and 80,000 supporters across Minnesota. The Sierra Club works to safeguard the health of our communities, protect wildlife, and preserve our remaining wild places.

We agree that any energy-based biomaterials derived from wood in Minnesota should be focused on "Forest and Wood Mill Residue" and **only** these "Residual materials" as defined in this legislation. Our considerable concern comes from the direction this legislation is leading us by having the state incentivizing pellet making for the burning of wood for energy.

Research has shown that burning wood, even if carefully controlled to only allow forest residuals, residual materials, and wood mill residue, is the wrong direction if we are to address rising GHGs and carbon emissions.

Recently 500 experts (including University of Minnesota Prof. Lee Frelich) have sent a letter laying out this threat. This letter was submitted to world leaders in February of this year.

*Quote (emphasis added): "More than 500 scientists and economists implored world leaders last week to stop treating as emissions-free the burning of wood from forests to make energy and heat, and to **end subsidies now driving the explosive demand for wood pellets**. Both actions, they write, are causing escalating deforestation in the Southeast US, Western Canada, and Eastern Europe. "*

Please see the news coverage and linked letter below. Again, our main concern is the potential destruction of Minnesota forests for production of fuel. We request that IF we

allow wood pellet making companies in Minnesota, pellets MUST be limited to residues and never be allowed to use whole trees, or bole wood.

Further, if the manufacture of pellets from residuals is economically feasible, we feel that this should be financed through private investments and bank loans. Given that Minnesota is far off track in meeting its GHG goals, subsidizing the production of wood pellets for fuel is an inappropriate use of state resources.

Thank you for your consideration of our concerns and the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Lois Norrgard, Robert Kean

Volunteer member, Sierra Club North Star Chapter Forests and Wildlife Stewards Team.

lnorrgard@comcast.net, keantrees@gmail.com

Full article with Letter linked:

500+ experts call on world's nations to not burn forests to make energy

<https://news.mongabay.com/2021/02/500-experts-call-on-worlds-nations-to-not-burn-forests-to-make-energy/>

by [Justin Catanoso](#) on 15 February 2021

- *Last week, more than 500 top scientists and economists issued a letter to leaders in the US, EU, Japan, South Korea, and the UK, urging them to stop harvesting and burning forests as a means of making energy in converted coal burning power plants.*
- *The burning of forest biomass to produce electricity has boomed due to this power source having been tolerated as carbon neutral by the United Nations, which enables nations to burn forest biomass instead of coal and not count the emissions in helping them meet their Paris Climate Agreement carbon reduction targets.*
- *However, current science says that burning forest biomass is dirtier than burning coal, and that one of the best ways to curb climate change and sequester carbon is to allow forests to keep growing. The EU and UK carbon neutrality designations for forest biomass are erroneous, say the 500 experts who urge a shift in global policy:*
- *“Governments must end subsidies... for the burning of wood.... The European Union needs to stop treating the burning of biomass as carbon neutral.... Japan needs to stop subsidizing power plants to burn wood. And the United*

States needs to avoid treating biomass as carbon neutral or low carbon,” says the letter.

More than 500 scientists and economists implored world leaders last week to stop treating as emissions-free the burning of wood from forests to make energy and heat, and to end subsidies now driving the explosive demand for wood pellets. Both actions, they write, are causing escalating deforestation in the Southeast US, Western Canada and Eastern Europe.

The [letter](#) was received Feb. 11 by US President Joseph Biden and European Union President Ursula Von der Leyen, as well as Charles Michel, president of the European Council, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga, and South Korean President Moon Jae-in. The document is expected to soon be sent to UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

“We the undersigned scientists and economists commend each of you for the ambitious goals you have announced... to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050,” the two-page letter begins. “Forest preservation and restoration should be key tools for achieving this goal and simultaneously helping to address our global biodiversity crisis.

However, “We urge you not to undermine both climate goals and the world’s biodiversity by shifting from burning fossil fuels to burning trees to generate energy.”

In the EU alone, nearly 60% of renewable energy already comes from forest biomass, amounting to millions of metric tons of wood pellets burned annually. The United Kingdom, The Netherlands and Denmark are among the [leading consumers](#) of biomass for energy and heat, while Japan and South Korea are now converting coal-fired power plants to burn wood pellets.

Under the EU’s second Renewable Energy Directive (REDII) — tolerated by the United Nations under the Paris Climate Agreement — emissions from burning forest biomass are not counted at all. This significant carbon accounting loophole underreports emissions data at a time when global temperatures are rising fast, causing accelerating drought, devastating storms, destructive wildfires and sea-level rise nearly everywhere on earth.

Rather than being a carbon neutral climate solution, the scientists write, cutting forests and burning wood pellets is more polluting than coal, and “emits more carbon up smokestacks than using fossil fuels,” while sacrificing the carbon-sequestration capacity of growing trees which is lost to produce wood pellets.

“Overall, for each kilowatt hour of heat or electricity produced, [burning] wood initially is likely to add two to three times as much carbon to the air as using fossil fuels,” says the letter, refuting the policy and industry claims of biomass zero emissions.

For its part, the biomass industry claims it uses forest management to selectively log trees from forests and tree plantations, avoiding clearcutting and preserving carbon stocks. It also claims that replanted trees quickly reabsorb the carbon released from

burned wood pellets. Both assertions are undermined by NGO-observed clearcutting and accumulating science showing mature forests absorb and hold far more carbon than seedlings and young trees