

Coal plant to try full day of biomass

Company to supply 8,000 tons of material

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
EO Media Group

BOARDMAN, Ore. — Cleaning up forest clutter might be good for more than just curtailing large wildfires in Oregon.

It might just be the answer Portland General Electric is looking for to convert the Boardman Coal Plant to 100 percent biomass.

Later this year, PGE will use only woody debris to power the station for one full day as the utility continues to test alternative fuels at the 550-megawatt facility. A successful test burn was conducted last year at Boardman using a 10-to-1 mix of coal and biomass, which has project leaders optimistic. But this will be the first time the plant is fed exclusively biomass for 24 straight hours, which will go a long way toward determining whether the plan is feasible long-term.

The future remains uncertain at Oregon's only remaining coal-fired power plant. Rather than install expensive



Portland General Electric's coal-fired plant in Boardman, Ore..

EO Media Group File

new emission controls, PGE has decided to either convert the station to cleaner burning biomass, or shut it down by 2020.

Wayne Lei, director of research and development for PGE, said biomass is an intriguing though challenging concept for Boardman. First, to feed biomass into the plant's pulverizers, it must undergo a process called torrefaction — similar to making charcoal, or roasting coffee beans.

The result is a dry, crispy

material that can be ground up and burned as fuel.

"It's about a half-step below making charcoal," Lei said.

At its peak generating capacity, the Boardman Coal Plant blasts through roughly 300 tons of coal every hour. Since torrefied biomass behaves similarly to coal, that means it will take 8,000 tons to keep the facility humming for a full day.

To get that kind of supply, PGE has partnered with a

newly incorporated company called Oregon Torrefaction, which will use small-diameter and beetle-killed trees to create the final product. The full day test burn will be conducted later this year.

Oregon Torrefaction registered as a benefit corporation with the state July 1, incorporating environmental quality into its bottom line.

Its partners include the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, Bonneville Environmental Foundation and

Ochoco Lumber Co., based in Prineville, Ore.

Bruce Dausavage, president of Ochoco Lumber, said their goal is to prove torrefied biomass can become a viable and sustainable commercial business in Oregon, providing rural jobs while also improving forest health.

"There's so much interest in this," Dausavage said. "The technology is already proven."

With the decline of the timber markets, Ochoco Lumber now owns the last remaining sawmill in John Day, Ore. The company was rejuvenated in 2012 by a 10-year stewardship contract with the Malheur National Forest, purchasing wood off federal restoration projects at fair market value.

However, Dausavage said a significant portion of what's harvested from those projects can't be used at the lumber mill. The trees are either too small or too damaged to make boards. They could be chipped, but those markets aren't worth enough for Ochoco Lumber to turn a profit.

On the other hand, if the clutter isn't harvested, it will simply dry out and become nothing more than kindling for explosive wildfires, like last year's Canyon Creek Com-

plex. Torrefaction could be the solution, Dausavage said, especially if biomass can gain traction as a coal substitute.

"It's a really interesting green story," he said.

The majority of biomass for the PGE project will come off national forests, Dausavage said. Oregon Torrefaction is installing a large torrefier at a chipping yard in the Port of Morrow, and from there the material will be trucked eight miles to the Boardman Coal Plant.

It will take approximately 800 truckloads to deliver all 8,000 tons of biomass. Dausavage said they hope to start torrefaction in the next few days. "The idea is to invest dollars back into forest health and rural communities," Dausavage said.

Matt Krumenauer of Salem is the CEO of Oregon Torrefaction. He said the project with PGE is a perfect opportunity to see if the markets for biomass and utilities can match.

"PGE was already planning to cease coal operations," Krumenauer said. "They've been the most progressive and most interested in seeing if this could be a viable alternative energy solution for them."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A grain truck is loaded with wheat early in harvest in American Falls, Idaho, on July 27. A study recently released by USDA's Economic Research Service says approximately 39 percent of farmland in the contiguous 48 states is rented, including more than half of the cropland.

More farmland rented by established operators

By **ERIC MORTENSON**
Capital Press

A survey of U.S. farmland ownership shows much of it is farmed by people who don't own it, young farmers have trouble gaining access to it and 10 percent of it is expected to change hands by 2019.

"Farmland ownership, tenure, and transfer have important implications for land accessibility, particularly for young and beginning farmers," according to a report summary provided by the USDA's Economic Research Service. "The advanced age of many farmers raises questions about how land will be transferred to the next generation of agricultural landowners."

The survey results get to the heart issues commonly discussed in agriculture circles: Who are the next farmers, and how will they acquire land?

The report was drawn from 2012 Census of Agriculture statistics. Among the key findings:

- Approximately 39 percent of farmland in the contiguous 48 states is rented, including more than half of the cropland.

- Most of the rented cropland is used to grow commodity crops such as rice, corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

- An estimated 93 million acres — 10 percent of all the nation's farmland — will change hands between 2015 and 2019. A majority of the transfers will be accom-

plished through wills, trusts or gifts. About 21 million acres is anticipated to be sold between people who aren't related, while 13 million acres is expected to be sold from relative to another.

- The Midwest and Plains regions had the lowest percentages of owner-operated land, at 54 percent and 57 percent, respectively. The Northeast and West had the highest rates of land ownership.

In California, 55 percent of the farmland was owner-operated; in Idaho, 69 percent; and in Washington, 62 percent. Oregon was not surveyed, as the researchers selected various states to represent each region.

- An estimated 45 percent of U.S. farmland is in small family farms, and nearly half of that land is found in operations that own all the land they farm.

- Not surprisingly, retired farmers make up 38 percent of non-operator landlords, and farmers approaching retirement are much more likely to be landlords.

About 27 percent of the land farmed by producers under age 34 is rented.

"Given that the vast majority of farm-sector asset value is in real estate, the decision to rent or own farmland has a significant bearing on the ability of farmers to invest in production capital, meet debt obligations, and adapt to market and environmental conditions," the ERS researchers concluded.

Potato truck takes to Hudson River during New York visit

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

NEW YORK — The Idaho Potato Commission can thank the New York City Police Department for drawing attention to a grandiose publicity stunt orchestrated Aug. 24 in the Big Apple.

The department issued a tongue-in-cheek all-points bulletin over the police radio advising officers to "be on the lookout for a big potato floating down the Hudson River."

From that moment, IPC officials' phones began ringing incessantly with the coveted national media inquiries they hoped to generate by floating their Idaho icon — the Great Big Idaho Potato Truck — past the Statue of Liberty on a barge pulled by a tugboat.

The 6-ton replica Russet Burbank on a flat-bed truck has toured the country for the past five years to raise awareness of Idaho potatoes and drawing attention to IPC charitable donations in communities along its route. IPC is already planning a sixth tour.

IPC Commissioner Randy Hardy, of Oakley, said the truck was on the water for several hours, photographed by onlookers from tour bus-



Mark Von Holden/AP Images for Idaho Potato Commission

The Great Big Idaho Potato Truck visits the Big Apple in New York.



The Great Big Idaho Potato Truck passes the Statue of Liberty in New York.

es and ferry boats during its cruise.

"I think there will be a lot of media play on it from here on," Hardy said shortly after

the potato truck docked.

IPC President and CEO Frank Muir said the giant, floating spud was the top story on the news feed in New York City taxi cabs.

"There were TV crews filming it from helicopters. We've been picked up by all of the major media here, including the most popular radio station, as well as the TV station here," Muir said.

Muir said IPC began planning the event and securing the necessary permits about a year ago, moving to the water

because of restrictions against semi-trucks on certain Manhattan streets.

In conjunction with the spectacle on the Hudson, IPC also gave a New York City soup kitchen a voucher for 12,000 pounds of Idaho potatoes — roughly equivalent to the serving size of the replica spud. Muir and his cohorts volunteered at the kitchen Aug. 25 to help serve baked Idaho potatoes.

John-Harvard Reid, associate director of Holy Apostle Soup Kitchen, said his kitchen serves 1,000 homeless guests every Monday through Friday and hasn't missed a meal in 34 years, including during Hurricane Sandy.

"Getting a baked potato is like something you remember from home," Reid said. "A lot of times when you're homeless, you don't get those comfort meals that make you feel like you're home again."

In other IPC news, sports reporter Heather Cox took photographs and footage of IPC mascot Spuddy Buddy at the Summer Olympics in Brazil, with an emphasis on volleyball coverage. Cox has posted images from the Olympics on social media.

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