



# Biomass Burning

THE UNSPOKEN REALITIES OF SUBSIDIZED POLLUTION

**I**n a Viewpoint on Aug. 1, 2012, Roy Keene described how Timber Town Eugene buzzes along nearly oblivious to the forest destruction and herbicide poisoning around it. Much like a frog in a pot of water brought to a slow boil, the timber industry relies on what geographer and author Jared Diamond has referred to as “landscape amnesia” — slow environmental degradation that would be offensive if only at a faster pace. The scenario with the Seneca biomass power facility is disturbingly similar. The Lane Regional Air Protection Agency (LRAPA) might let Seneca have its way, but no ad campaign on the part of Seneca is going to hide from the Eugene public the reality that biomass energy, like the chemical clearcut regime it emerged from, is a dirty, destructive dead-end.

Already belching disease-causing pollutants night and day, Seneca requests to increase its pollution without using the best available control technology for the most dangerous particulate matter, PM 2.5. While the federal appellate court recently overturned the biomass industry’s exemption of new facilities from CO2 regulation, Seneca is off the hook under the accepted grandfathering of facilities existing before 2011. Biomass energy, promoted by our own local air agency and public utility officials as clean, renewable, sustainable and carbon-neutral, is none of these. Too bad Eugene Water and Electric Board, which buys Seneca’s biomass electricity, recently cut its conservation and efficiency program that was reducing energy demand and helping ratepayers.

What’s sustainable or fair about subsidization?

Top biomass promoters, including Gov. John Kitzhaber, Sen. Ron Wyden and Congressman Peter DeFazio, tout Oregon as a huge, underutilized biomass fuel and power region. How much will the public benefit from the latest extractive industrial ploy? How many jobs will it bring in contrast to medical bills from the increased pollution? How much revenue will it return to at least offset public subsidies?

The Seneca facility requires huge volumes of chips and even whole trees. Not only are the logging and logging roads publicly subsidized, so was construction of the facility and is the never-ending transport of biomass to the facility. Seneca is getting trees from as far as Forest Service “stewardship” contract projects east of the Cascades. These subsidies will attract more Senecas to Oregon.

Highlighted recently in the national press, in the Southeast U.S. the burgeoning biomass industry heralds the final stages of forest exploitation, punching in new, heavily subsidized, thoroughly poisoned tree farms, wood pellet facilities and terminals for export to the United Kingdom.

Already manipulated like a third world country, Oregon suffers from increasing raw log and chip exports, including heavily undervalued public old-growth trees chipped as “culls” because of rot or fire scars. Weak Oregon Forest Practices Rules and an untaxed timber industry are reducing the private forest to fiber suitable only for burning while putting more pressure on public forest to provide construction-grade trees. What will be the effects of subsidized biomass fuel harvest be on our already contested forests?

How can we protect our health, our forests and the climate from the increasingly global demand for energy and biomass fodder and fuels? Especially from economically powerful countries like China who consumed their own forests centuries ago and are already consuming ours?

These are the unspoken realities of the emerging so-called “clean and sustainable” biomass industry in Oregon — questions Wyden and DeFazio, in their rush to do the bidding of their corporate masters, are not asking. As senior legislators in Congress they wield the power to open up public forests and waterways to biomass extraction and energy production, putting a dirty industry ahead of cost-effective and job-creating conservation, efficiency, heat pump and solar technologies.

Democrats fighting for food stamp continuation ought to reconsider their support for dirty biomass energy subsidies in the Farm Bill.

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## COUNTY DEBACLE

When Faye Stewart voted as Board of Commissioners chair, on a shotgun basis, to proceed with hiring Liane Richardson as “permanent county administrator,” Stewart said he “didn’t think they could find anyone better than Richardson.”

Stewart chose a “wired” hiring process instead of a normal public approach. Richardson was hired for Lane County’s top position without an open process, without basic background checks, without even signing an employment application.

Why did Stewart approve the sweetheart contract, giving Richardson a \$15,000 signing bonus as if she were a major league ballplayer, when Richardson had no significant prior executive management experience?

Why wasn’t Richardson hired, like many high-level administrators, on an at-will basis, able to be let go whenever it met the needs of Lane County? Why did Stewart approve the contract that promises her a full year of salary — a plush severance payment — for simple at-will termination?

And why does Richardson’s contract automatically extend for two years “if a change in board members” occurs?

Slipshod management under then board chair Faye Stewart is why we face the debacle of Richardson admittedly overpaying herself, in an arrangement spawned after her direct request for an exorbitant pay increase stalled in the cold light of public opinion — and then once exposed, responding by putting herself onto paid leave, at taxpayer expense.

The current mess at Lane County is, sadly, an all-too-predictable outcome when a commissioner fails in basic diligence for the public trust.

*Kevin Matthews  
Dexter*

## A PROPER RESPONSE

And the hits keep coming. Creds and huge respect and thanks due to EPD officer Kara Williams and other EPD women who had the ethics and backbone to speak up, stand up and shine a light on the deplorable sexual harassment they endured at the hands, literally, of now-fired EPD officer Stefan Zeltvay.

It could not have been easy for Williams and all of those other EPD women, in the midst of a “blue wall” culture, to take their stand. But they did. Undoubtedly their actions protected other women and girls as a result.

EPD officer Scott McKee acted conscientiously, ethically and responsibly, too, investigating an officer he’d worked with for nearly 20 years. Imagine the skills and due diligence steps he took, working with women and girls who were fearful of actually filing complaints, with good reason for such fears. For they, too, were ensconced in the blue wall culture, some with hopes to advance their careers in police work, fearful that taking a stand would harm them. They found the strength to file charges. McKee’s work undoubtedly helped these women and girls recognize that justice would be found, and good police investigatory work was key.

I’ve come to know many police officers from 40 months of nearly daily volunteer

court observing at Eugene Municipal Court. Our community is so fortunate to have so many police women and men who are a credit to EPD and the community itself.

Kudos to another hero, Chief Pete Kerns, who made his repugnance and anger over this matter crystal clear. I’ve no doubt his leadership skills will result in concrete, proactive steps toward zero tolerance for sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact, at the department or anywhere, ever, by any EPD employee.

As for Zeltvay? No jail time? I thought voters just green-lighted more jail beds for criminals such as he? Paid administrative leave for the past seven months? Appalling. Even so, anyone can be redeemable; I hope intensive therapy, not at taxpayer’s expense, for Zeltvay is at least somewhere in the picture?

*Carol Berg-Caldwell  
Eugene*

## ONE OF OUR CHILDREN

America believes that electing a half-white president means we are no longer racist. “Trayvon Martin, found guilty of killing an armed George Zimmerman while high on Skittles and iced tea.” Never mind driving while black or brown (DWB). Never mind the hoodie. Many of us have always been guilty of walking while red, black, yellow or brown (WWB).

In the end, there is only one people. All of us in this life together. Dead Iraqi and Afghan children are the same as the children of Connecticut.

Trayvon was one of our children. Don’t you feel the pain, America? You can’t kill people and then go back to your picnic.

*Jim Linwood  
Eugene*

## A NATIONAL DISGRACE

Martin Gilens, a professor at Princeton and author of *Affluence & Influence*, says his database indicates that people favored increasing the minimum wage by strong majorities up to the 90th percentile. The details are that among the poor, 86 percent supported it. Among the middle class, 81 percent. And among the affluent, those in the 90 percent category, 71 percent.

Is there anything at all that has the citizens of this country more united? Have legislators been so removed from citizens that they don’t know this? Is this not important enough for the media to be shouting about it at all times? Could an increase in the minimum wage stimulate the economy?

When there is no annual cost of living attached to the minimum wage, each year’s inflation rate makes the difference between the rich and the poor get larger. This inequity is a national disgrace.

*Bob Cassidy  
Eugene*

## SAME RACIST ATTITUDE

Here’s the internet address for a cogent rebuttal to the type of drivel Jerry Ritter provided in the July 25 letters: [wkly.ws/1ir](http://wkly.ws/1ir). As if Ritter cares one iota about violence in black communities.

Personally, I’m sick of Ritter’s racist invective and wish that *EW* would stop