

BIOMASS: Plant will need 8,000 tons to keep facility running for a full day

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

Wayne Lei, director of research and development for PGE, said biomass is an intriguing though challenging concept for Boardman. First, in order 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 exact date has not been set, but 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 Company.

Bruce Daucavage, 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



Photo contributed by Oregon Torrefaction

In order to use as biomass, woody debris must undergo a process called torrefaction, described as a "half-step below making charcoal."

this," Daucavage said. "The technology is already proven."

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

However, Daucavage 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 Complex. Torrefaction could be the solution, Daucavage 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, Daucavage said. Oregon Torrefaction is in the process of 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. Daucavage said

they hope to start torrefaction in the next few days. "The idea is to invest dollars back into forest health and rural communities," Daucavage 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."

Brendan McCarthy, PGE's state environmental policy manager, said a number of factors will come into play before they decide whether biomass in Boardman makes sense for ratepayers. Cost and supply of the fuel is all part of the equation, as well as what it would take to retrofit the plant's emission controls for a new power source.

If the full day test burn is successful, the next step will be to see if biomass can be used to power the plant for multiple days in a row. So far, McCarthy said they are encouraged by what they're seeing but it will continue to be a major effort moving forward.

"It's complicated," McCarthy said. "You can see how creating this whole new way of energy, you really need to work through everything."

PARKS: Estimated \$182,009 to replace the playgrounds

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ment, a topic the steering committee discussed at a meeting Tuesday.

Instead of applying for smaller grants to cover one playground project, special projects coordinator Deb Whittaker said bundling could be used to do multiple playground projects across similar parks.

While bundling is usually used with other municipal projects, such as street pavement, Whittaker said Clackamas County was able to bundle several park projects together by building similar playgrounds across its district.

If the city applied for the state grant, it would also apply for other grants from private community foundations to help cover the cost of the local match.

Whittaker said the risk of bundling is that the department puts all its eggs in one basket at the expense of other grant opportunities.

A department estimate pegged the cost of replacing the playgrounds at \$182,099. The big ticket item is the \$94,642 cost of replacing the Kiwanis Park play area.

The Kiwanis Club has been a major benefactor of the park and Roger Stueckle, both a member of the steering committee and the Kiwanis Club, said the club could apply for grants and provide some of its own funding for the project.

Although its playground remains open, staff also included Sherwood

Park as an area that could receive grant money because of the advanced age of its playground. Cook expects his department to eventually dismantle and remove the Sherwood playground.

When asked by the committee which parks he would prioritize, Cook said he would consider not replacing the playgrounds at Aldrich and Vincent parks because of their proximity to other North Hill playgrounds at Pioneer and Sergeant City.

Cook said cutting the number of playgrounds might make maintaining them easier for parks staff, which has been hit hard by budget cuts in recent years.

"You can build all the dream worlds you want, but I guarantee in 15 years, if you don't take care of it, it's going to be a piece of garbage," he said.

With the grant deadline for the Wildhorse Foundation set for Oct. 1, Cook said he wanted a concrete plan ready by the end of September.

The application for a grants over \$75,000 is due with the Oregon Department of Parks and Recreation April 1, 2017 while small grant applications \$75,000 and under is due May 1, 2015.

If Pendleton's attempt at bundling doesn't work, Cook said the city would apply for smaller grants and replace the playgrounds piecemeal over a number of years.

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ZIKA: No vaccines, medicines to prevent it

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District CEO Bob Houser didn't return phone calls regarding potential cases within the county.

For people who must travel to Zika-infested countries, Modie said the OHA advises them to meet with their healthcare providers to discuss prevention methods. Because there are currently no vaccinations or medicines to prevent Zika, Modie said carrying EPA-approved bug-repellent is a must, as well as wearing long sleeves and pants.

People are also at risk of contracting Zika through sex.

With summer winding down, the good news for Oregonians is that cool

temperatures will significantly reduce the active mosquito population. In the meantime, however, OHA recommends people see their healthcare provider if they experience Zika-like symptoms.

And although no Oregon mosquitoes have been identified as Zika carriers, health officials recommend taking preventive measures similar to those for West Nile virus. That includes eliminating standing water around the home and using bug repellent.

"It's important to remind people that there still are mosquitoes out there," Modie said.

Contact Will Denner at wdenner@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0809

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