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(From my friend & colleague, Dr. Dalia Abbas)

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## Should American Wood Fuel European Power?

Growth of wood-fueled power generation in Europe spurs protests from Southern environmentalists in the U.S.

ClimateWire

November 14, 2014 | By [Elizabeth Harball](#) and [ClimateWire](#)



Europe depends heavily on wood-based fuels to meet its goal of sourcing 20 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2020.

*Credit: [Tom Woodward via flickr](#)*

A growing feud over the use of American wood to fuel power production in Europe came into sharp relief yesterday as an environmental group staged a seafaring protest during a forest industry conference.

Participants at this week's Mid-Atlantic Forest Products Conference toured a deepwater export terminal near Norfolk, Va., owned by Enviva LP, a major wood pellet manufacturer and conference sponsor. The tour group was met by about 16 protesters on a party boat circling Enviva's Port of Chesapeake, brandishing a 16-foot banner reading "SOS—Save our Southern Forests" and waving smaller signs that read "Stop Enviva."

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Organized by an Asheville, N.C.-based environmental group called the Dogwood Alliance, the protest is the latest move by activists to draw attention to the wood pellet industry's growth in the South, where they allege forests are being chopped down unsustainably so European nations can meet renewable energy targets.

"We shouldn't be exporting our forests to be burned for electricity in the U.K.," Scot Quaranda, a spokesman for the Dogwood Alliance, said before the protest Wednesday. "We need to find more ways to protect and preserve forests."

A spokesman for Enviva declined to comment on the protest. In a statement to *ClimateWire*, Seth Ginther, executive director of the U.S. Industrial Pellet Association, said, "We are disappointed to see these anti-biomass campaigns continue to spread mis-information about the biomass industry.

"Biomass is sustainably sourced from low-value wood fiber, and from by-products and residues of other forest products industries," Ginther added. "Governments in European countries that are importing biomass for energy have set strict sustainability standards and requirements for biomass, which the industry is meeting through forestry certifications and continuous third-party audits, ensuring the sustainability of the product, as well as providing data on the carbon benefits associated with replacing coal use with biomass."

### **Europe's renewable energy targets drive demand for wood pellets**

Other voices in the forestry sector, including Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, said that wood-based energy is renewable because the wood burned is replaced by other trees that take in carbon dioxide, making the process carbon-neutral.

But some environmental groups argue that it takes too long for trees to grow back and compensate for the carbon dioxide emitted. U.S. EPA still is in the process of determining how to regulate emissions from wood-fueled power plants.

Today, however, it is not U.S. policy that is driving the growth of the wood-fuel sector. Europe depends heavily on wood-based fuels to meet its goal of sourcing 20 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2020.

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In a [report](#) submitted to the Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service in July, the European Commission stated it expects biomass to account for 45 percent of the European Union's renewable energy use in 2020, stating that forestry products will constitute "a major part" of the biomass used.

As a result, wood pellet exports from the United States nearly doubled in 2013, the Energy Information Administration reports. Almost all of the 3.2 million short tons of pellets exported left from ports in the Southeast or the Mid-Atlantic.

### **Can future demand be met by healthy forests?**

Enviva is undoubtedly among the companies benefiting from this trend. It [filed](#) a \$100 million initial public offering with the Securities and Exchange Commission in late October and is planning to build two new pellet plants in North Carolina.

Local governments in the Southeast have embraced the industry's growth there. North Carolina Gov. Pat McCrory (R) welcomed Enviva's new facilities in his state, [saying](#) the company's investment will create "good, sustainable jobs."

Asked whether forests can be managed sustainably and still produce wood for energy, Forest Stewardship Council President Corey Brinkema said, "Certainly it's possible."

Brinkema leads a group that sets sustainability certification standards for forest products, which are independently verified for industry players like timber or wood pellet companies. An FSC representative spoke at this week's Forest Products Conference in Virginia.

But Brinkema said that while FSC certification does not address issues related to carbon emissions, climate-related concerns about wood-fueled power are warranted. He also said he was uncertain whether growing global demand for woody biomass could be met in a way that also keeps forests healthy.

"Whether the volumes that may one day be demanded—the volumes of biomass for these various energy generators ... can be harvested sustainably, I don't know the answer to that," Brinkema said. "I would suspect that would be very difficult."



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