



Wood pellet fuel deemed 'carbon neutral' in U.S. spending bill

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By Emily Flitter

NEW YORK May 3 (Reuters) - A week after President Donald Trump vowed to impose new tariffs on Canadian lumber imports to help the U.S. timber industry, lawmakers passed a spending bill that could push U.S. government agencies to promote burning wood pellets to fuel power plants.

The budget bill that the U.S. House of Representatives passed on Wednesday, which makes way for nearly \$1.2 trillion in federal spending, directs the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture to "establish clear policies that reflect the carbon neutrality of biomass."

Biomass, or wood pellet fuel, is considered a renewable energy source because it is composed of trees, which can be replaced after they are cut down. It is used to heat homes and fuel power plants.

Scientists say burning wood pellets actually produces more harmful greenhouse emissions than coal or natural gas.

"Recent advances in science and accounting for pollution from different types of woody biomass have clarified that burning trees to produce electricity actually increases carbon emissions compared with fossil fuels for many decades and contributes to other air pollution problems," a group of 60 U.S. scientists wrote in a 2014 letter to the UK's secretary of state for energy and climate change.

The European Union already treats biomass as carbon-friendly and subsidizes its production.

A biomass industry group offered praise for the measure on Wednesday.

"We are thrilled to see such strong bipartisan support for biomass, which Congress is officially recognizing as the carbon neutral, renewable energy source that it is," said Dave Tenny, president and chief executive of the National Alliance of Forest Owners, in a statement emailed to Reuters on Wednesday.

Environmental groups criticized the decision. Danna Smith, executive director of the Dogwood Alliance, an environmental group focused on forests and logging in the southern United States, said the provision "will add to a significant climate problem we already have in the U.S."



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The legislation, which will keep the government funded through the end of the fiscal year on Sept. 30, now goes to the Senate, which is expected to pass it before a midnight Friday deadline. (Reporting by Emily Flitter; Editing by Leslie Adler)

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