



15 November 2017



SENT TO LSU AGCENTER/LOUISIANA FOREST PRODUCTS DEVELOPMENT CENTER - FOREST SECTOR / FORESTY PRODUCTS INTEREST GROUP

The Charlotte Observer

VIEWPOINT

N.C. forests are under assault; Gov. Cooper should help

BY NORMAN L. CHRISTENSEN AND WILLIAM H. SCHLESINGER -SPECIAL TO THE OBSERVER EDITORIAL BOARD

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On Wednesday, we will join more than 100 scientists to send [a letter](#) to Gov. Roy Cooper, urging him to address the threats posed by the wood pellet industry and to protect North Carolina's forests. These threats include emissions of greenhouse gasses and other pollutants, and the degradation and loss of critical biodiversity.

The world's largest producer of wood pellets, Enviva, owns and operates three wood pellet facilities in North Carolina, as well as a Virginia facility near our border. Meeting the production capacity of these four facilities requires logging, conservatively, nearly 50,000 acres of forest per year – often in ecologically important, native hardwood forest. The scale, location and pace of such logging have very negative consequences for our environment, our climate and our communities.

Gov. Cooper has pledged to uphold the goals of the Paris Climate Accord. Forest conservation and restoration are critical to meeting those goals. Forests are our most powerful tool to soak up carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the atmosphere. Regrowth of forests in other areas removes about one-third of the CO₂ emitted to the atmosphere by burning fossil fuels. But when biomass from forests is burned for electricity, it immediately emits large amounts of CO₂ to the atmosphere. The more biomass that is burned, the larger these emissions. Deforestation in tropical regions currently contributes about 10 percent to the rising concentrations of CO₂ in the atmosphere. Now is the time for us to protect forests, not remove them in the name of “green energy.”

Burning trees for power emits more CO₂ per unit of electricity than coal or gas plants. In addition, it releases harmful particulate matter and smog precursors. Yes, the regrowth of forests does recover this CO₂, but very slowly. It takes many decades, sometimes more than a century, for forest land to recover the CO₂ emitted from burning trees for energy. As the just-released National Climate Assessment indicates, we cannot defer action to reduce CO₂ emissions to some future time.

Biomass cannot be transported more than a short distance before the energy it contains is equivalent to the energy needed to haul it. So, it doesn't make sense that forests in North Carolina are being cut down, chopped into pellets, and shipped overseas to be burned in power stations in Europe – ironically, in the name of renewable energy.

Healthy, native forest ecosystems are also vital for climate change adaptation and disaster readiness. Natural forests reduce the risk to low-lying and flood-prone areas, whereas forest degradation and clear-cut logging increase flood risk and recovery costs. When the wood pellet industry drives the deforestation or degradation of coastal forests, we put coastal communities at greater risk for storms and flooding. As we pass the one-year anniversary of Hurricane Matthew, and as recent hurricanes have brought tragedy and tremendous cost to the U.S. and its neighbors, it is more important than ever that we invest in keeping native forests standing.



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Enviva has proposed a fourth wood pellet facility in Richmond County, which is being challenged in the courts. Yet another wood pellet facility in North Carolina would add to existing assaults on our forests and climate. To stave off the worst effects of climate change, it is imperative that we reduce CO2 emissions – and our forests are key to achieving that goal. Gov. Cooper can lead the way in the charge to protect forests.



William H. Schlesinger Norm Christensen

Christensen, Ph.D., is an emeritus professor of ecology and the founding dean of the Nicholas School of the Environment at Duke University. Schlesinger, Ph.D., is a biogeochemist and a former dean of the Nicholas School.

Richard P. Vlosky, Ph.D.
Director, Louisiana Forest Products Development Center
Crosby Land & Resources Endowed Professor of Forest Sector Business Development
Room 227, School of Renewable Natural Resources
Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA 70803
Phone (office): (225) 578-4527; Fax: (225) 578-4251; Mobile Phone: (225) 223-1931
Web Site: www.LFPDC.lsu.edu



President, Forest Products Society; President, WoodEMA i.a.

