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## Mono County biomass project in California receives \$215,000 grant

By [Katie Fletcher](#) | December 17, 2014

California's Mono County thermal biomass project is one of three ventures awarded funding through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Program. The project received \$215,000 to remove and replace the current propane boiler system at the County Road Shop and Parks/Facilities building in Bridgeport with a new 2.5 MMBtu per hour or less thermal biomass boiler system to heat the approximately 12,855 square-foot building. The boiler system will utilize biomass residue resulting from activities associated with reducing forest fuel loads in the general vicinity of the project.

Wendy Sugimura, associate analyst for the community development department, said the benefits of the project are two-fold. In Mono County's jurisdiction fire districts are all volunteer-based. "There aren't a lot of resources, and the capacity to be able to encourage fuel-reduction treatment, so anything we can all do collectively for that effort is certainly beneficial to our local communities to protect people's lives and their properties," Sugimura said. "The second piece is we do get a lot of clean wood waste into our landfill, and it's helpful to have a better way to utilize some of that waste stream."

Besides reducing problematic biomass residue, a secondary goal of the project is to provide a model in the Sierra Nevada Region of a biomass project, potentially leading to more thermal projects utilizing forest-sourced biomass. "Part of the attraction of this project was that if we could get one on the ground in California it could provide a model for how that is done," Sugimura said.

The biomass boiler will be installed where the outdated propane boiler was, and the mechanical room will be retrofitted to accommodate a fuel hopper and water storage tank. Request for proposals (RFP) for the technology will be released in the spring. As part of the RFP the vendor must also provide training on system operations and maintenance to the staff.

The only new construction for the project is a wood chip storage building, up to 960-square feet, onsite to ensure one week of fuel supply to the boiler. It is anticipated the thermal unit will consume 367 bone-dry-tons (BDT) of biomass a year.

A voluntary group called the Eastside Biomass Project Team was formed in 2010 to explore biomass utilization projects. At the beginning of 2013 Mono County secured \$50,000 in funding for the team to conduct a comprehensive feasibility study to explore the opportunities for a biomass project. The study now serves as the reference for all the data in the project proposal. Originally a combined-heat-and-power facility was studied, but it was found not feasible based on the amount of biomass available.

According to the study's financial analysis, the facility could save \$88,191 over propane in a year. This number was determined from the study indicating that propane, on a market-rate cost of \$3.50 per gallon, results in a price of delivered energy of \$47.81 MMBtu and biomass chips, at the price of \$45 per BDT, costs \$2.65 MMBtu delivered. The study also determined a new thermal unit's average cost to be \$82,455 per MMBtu per hour. The total cost of the project is \$229,008.58.

The project is scheduled to be carried out over the next two years, including beginning project coordination in early 2015, equipment acquisition and installation optimistically in the second half of 2015, and grant closeout at the end of 2016 after testing, monitoring and a performance evaluation.

The other two grants, awarded through the Sierra Nevada Conservancy Governing Board for restoration projects, include a grant in the amount of \$176,853 to the Tahoe National Forest for the Wood Chip Hydraulic Mine Restoration Project in Nevada County, and a \$139,000 grant to the Sierra Foothill Conservancy to complete forest restoration activities on the Stockton Creek Preserve in Mariposa County.



The Mono County thermal biomass project received \$215,000 from a grant program funded through Proposition 84, or the Safe Drinking Water, Water Quality and Supply, Flood Control, River and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2006. Sierra Nevada Conservancy Grant Application

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