



Alternative Energy Resources Organization

432 N. Last Chance Gulch

Helena, MT 59601

Phone: (406) 443-7272 / Fax: (406) 442-9120

Email: aero@aeromt.org / Web: www.aeromt.org

Senator Max Baucus
511 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

March 18, 2009

Dear Senator Baucus,

Montana's Alternative Energy Resources Organization (AERO) fully supports the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project and encourages your legislative support of this unique collaborative effort. The Stewardship Project is a fine example of diverse groups working together in a non-partisan fashion to craft a proposal that will stabilize the local economy, improve the health of forests, expand recreational opportunities and designated wilderness, and build local energy self-reliance in northwestern Montana.

AERO's particular interest in this project lies in the opportunity to lend some resilience to the local timber-based economy with the development of an efficient biomass-fired power system at Pyramid Mountain Lumber in Seeley Lake. The combination of a new boiler and "co-generator" would efficiently produce renewable electric power and heat for the lumber mill by utilizing waste mill residues and insect-killed trees in the region. The potential exists to make this a truly community-based energy system with excess heat piped to the small downtown and school. Excess renewably generated electricity fed back into the grid could be sold to customers hungry for clean energy.

Furthermore, by reducing the forest fuel load, the development of this biomass energy system stands to minimize the potential for catastrophic wildfires and the associated greenhouse gas releases.

This is a project that is entirely consistent with the vision outlined in AERO's recent publication, *Repowering Montana: A Blueprint for Home Grown Energy Self-Reliance*. This document, published in 2007, outlines how Montana's energy economy can be rebuilt on a foundation of energy conservation, efficiency, and reliance on our state's abundant sun, wind and biomass energy resources. *Repowering Montana* points out that this state stands to gain the greatest benefits from renewable energy projects that are owned and operated by Montana businesses, rather than by absentee corporations.

AERO members across Montana recognize that the Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Project is an excellent model of collaborative resource and landscape planning that deserves your support. We are proud to offer our endorsement.

Sincerely,

Ben Brouwer
Energy Program Manager

Max Milton
Energy Task Force Co-Chair

Wilbur Wood
Energy Task Force Co-Chair

CC: *Senator Baucus Helena Office*
Megan Birzell, Clearwater Resource Council—Stewardship Project Coordinator