ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

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DRAFT LETTER

The Environmental Quality Council will review this draft letter during its September 13-14 meeting and determine whether to send it. It is part of the Council's H.J. 1 biomass study.

September 14, 2010

Governor Brian Schweitzer
Office of the Governor
Montana State Capitol Bldg.
P.O. Box 200801
Helena MT 59620-0801

Dear Governor Schweitzer,

On behalf of the Legislative Environmental Quality Council (EQC), we are writing to encourage your office and the Montana University System to assist the Legislature in its efforts to promote the use of biomass-based energy development in Montana. The EQC, in conducting its climate change study during the 2007-08 Interim, identified the expanded use of biomass feedstocks for energy use in Montana as a potentially important policy directive that deserved further evaluation and brought forward House Joint Resolution No. 1, which was approved by the 2009 Legislature. Over the last 16 months, the EQC has focused on H.J. 1 and the use of forestry and agricultural residues as a feedstock for heat and electricity. We feel the work being done by Montana's Agricultural Experiment Station and Extension Station is critical to advancing the use of agricultural biomass across Montana.

A high-level, statewide assessment of biomass availability for Montana developed by the U.S. Department of Energy, Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy Office finds there are 4.3 million dry tons of cellulosic biomass available in the state, along with 0.1 million dry tons of total crop biomass. Researchers at Montana State University's College of Agriculture and the Montana Agricultural Experiment Station are conducting research looking at how to advance biobased products for fuel, heat, and electricity in Montana. For example, researchers at the Ag Research Center in Moccasin are working to develop cropping systems to maximize plant biomass production and oilseed yield, and researchers in the College of Agriculture and College of Engineering are looking at using agricultural crop residue as an alternative to wood for pellet fuels used in residential stoves and commercial boilers. We applaud these efforts.

We are discouraged to learn of the funding reductions at Montana's Agricultural Experiment Station and the Montana State University Extension. It is our understanding that cuts are likely in areas of research focused on bio-energy, climate change, infectious disease, and biological control of weeds. We are deeply concerned about the impact these cuts will have on Montana's seven agricultural research centers and their ability to conduct in-depth studies, scientific investigations, and experiments.

While recognizing the necessity to address falling state revenues, we encourage the Governor's Office and the Montana Board of Regents to maintain a strong level of support for Montana's Agricultural Experiment Station and Montana State University Extension.

Sincerely,

Chairman Chas Vincent

Vice-chairman Bradley Maxon-Hamlett

cc.
Commissioner of Higher Education Sheila Stearns
Senator Max Baucus
Senator Jon Tester
Representative Dennis Rehberg