



**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

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DATE: 12/09/2022

TO: Austin Mudd
Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

THROUGH: Levi Harrell
Departmental Clearance Officer
Office of the Chief Information Officer

FROM: Jaelith Hall-Rivera
Forest Service, Deputy Chief, State & Private Forestry

SUBJECT: Request for Emergency Approval for a New Information Collection
Request (ICR)—Community Wood Energy & Wood Innovation Program

The Forest Service (FS) is requesting emergency clearance and review through 5 CFR 1320.13 for a new information collection for the Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) for the Community Wood Energy & Wood Innovation Program. This NOFO was developed and is being offered by the USDA Forest Service.

The intent of this funding opportunity is to support industry infrastructure investments in facilities to increase the use of wood and biomass. The Community Wood Energy and Wood Innovation Grant Program provides funding for grants to install thermally led community wood energy systems or to support non-construction activities to expand and improve efficiencies at innovative wood product manufacturing facilities. The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018 (7 USC § 8113) and annual agency appropriations authorize and fund the grants awarded under this program. The Forest Service expects renewable wood energy systems installed under this program to use the most stringent control technologies. The program places extra emphasis on assisting sawmills in economically challenged areas to retool or add advanced technology.

The collection of information in the NOFO is needed sooner than the regular time period associated with the Paperwork Reduction Act and is essential to the Agency's mission. Deployment of funding for this provision is essential to support the use of woody byproducts removed from forest management and restoration activities on federal, tribal, state, and private lands. This program supports industry investment and market development for wood energy and innovative wood products.

The Agency cannot reasonably comply with the normal clearance procedures because public harm is likely to occur. Extended time periods for deployment of this program will cause constraints to the ability of the Agency to manage a funding application

process and enter into funding agreements with applicants. This will potentially result in extended order times for equipment, increased cost of facility modernization activities, and reduced support for using materials removed from restoration projects. This program is a major opportunity to emphasize the importance of the forest products industry and the special connection with the USDA Forest Service.

Upon approval of this emergency collection, a NOFO will be published on grants.gov to complete and return to the Forest Service, leading to execution of funding agreements.

The NOFO application and review process is summarized as:

- The majority of grants and agreements awarded under the Community Wood Energy & Wood Innovation Program address the nationwide challenge of reducing the risk of catastrophic wildfires, disease, and infestations by retaining or expanding markets for excess biomass and low-value logs removed during forest management activities.
- The material removed supports traditional markets, new markets, and local economic development, and reduces emissions from the open-air burning of excess forest biomass.
- Up to \$4.0 million will be used to support this NOFO from Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL) Division J funds. Additional funds are planned from FY 2023 Forest Service appropriations, although that level will not be determined until the final budget is approved.
- Outreach for this NOFO will be conducted through grants.gov, National Association of State Foresters (NASF), Intertribal Timber Council, Forest Service Regions, Forest Service Office of Tribal Relations, Federal Forest Resource Coalition, American Logging Council, Forest Resources Association, regional timber and forest products associations, and NGOs such as The Nature Conservancy and U.S. Endowment for Forestry & Communities.

Applications will be submitted to the USDA Forest Service, State & Private Forestry for review and consideration. Funding recommendations will be made to the Forest Service and review by USDA Natural Resources and Environment (NRE).

We are requesting emergency approval of this new information collection package by January 5, 2023.

If there are any questions or concerns, please call Brian Brashaw at 608-334-5819.