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Nebraska Forest Service Partnership Receives Grant to Evaluate Expansion of Chadron Wood Energy System

LINCOLN, Neb. — The USDA has announced that the Nebraska Forest Service (NFS), an affiliate of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, received a \$77,400 grant to evaluate the feasibility of expanding the existing wood energy system at Chadron State College (CSC) in Nebraska's northwest Pine Ridge region. The wood energy system currently provides steam for heating and cooling to more than 1 million square feet of campus building space.

Through the TREES Heat Nebraska program, NFS is partnering with CSC, Chadron Public Schools (CPS), the City of Chadron and Chadron Community Hospital to evaluate the economic potential of increasing the size of the current woody biomass system to include the three nearby CPS buildings, City of Chadron pool complex and Chadron Community Hospital.

The grant was received from the USDA Forest Service, Wood Education Resource Center through the Wood Innovations Program.

"This project represents significant efforts to expand markets for the region's forest products," said Adam Smith, NFS forest products utilization team leader. "The Chadron State College boiler system has been a woody biomass energy icon in the state since the early 1990s. The potential expansion to include school, city and county facilities would again position the wood energy system as a state and regional leader in wood energy."

Expanding the wood energy system to include other facilities would increase the amount of heat used from the wood-fueled system and provide a boost to existing forest products industry in the Pine Ridge.

"The forests in the area have had some rough of years," said Doak Nickerson, NFS district forester. "The 2012 wildfires demonstrated the importance of managing these forests. The most effective way to increase forest management and decrease the threats of catastrophic wildfire is to expand the markets for low-value wood material being removed from the forests."

While CSC annually heats and cools with approximately 9,000 tons of ponderosa pine woodchips generated from forest management activities, the expansion of the existing system could dramatically increase the amount of wood fuel utilized. Under the grant, the partners will contract with an engineering firm to complete engineering design, cost analyses, and regulatory evaluation of the potential expansion.

“We look forward to collaborating closely with our partners throughout this project,” Smith said. “This opportunity has the potential to provide economic benefit to the community while improving the health of the area’s forests.”

For more information about the Forest Products Utilization or TREES Heat Nebraska programs, contact Adam Smith at the Nebraska Forest Service at 402-472-1276, or go to <http://nfs.unl.edu/program-markets.asp>

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