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Torrefaction plant could be operating by next June

By Richard Hanners Blue Mountain Eagle Dec 18, 2018



Matt Krumenauer, representing the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, updates the Grant County Court on Dec. 12 about plans for a torrefaction plant in John Day.

The Eagle/Richard Hanners

A \$15.5 million torrefaction plant could be in operation at the Malheur Lumber Co. mill in John Day as soon as June.

As the plant ramps up toward full capacity by the end of 2019, Restoration Fuels LLC could hire 15-18 employees, including local management, Matt Krumenauer told the Grant County Court on Dec. 12.

Krumenauer represents the U.S. Endowment for Forestry and Communities, which developed the local project. Restoration Fuels is a subsidiary of the endowment.

Joe Koerner will be the plant's operations manager. The plan is to rely on Malheur Lumber for maintenance staff and Iron Triangle for trucking. Krumenauer said the endowment has a strong relationship with the Forest Service, which could consider the torrefaction plant as a tool for forest management.

The U.S. spends billions fighting wild fires, but spending millions to manage forests to prevent wild fires is not sustainable without a revenue stream. The question has been what to do with low-value biomass and non-saw wood material from stewardship projects on the Malheur National Forest.

One solution is to chip and roast this biomass to produce a torrefied wood product to burn in coal-fired plants. Up to now, the endowment's focus has been on refining a torrefaction process for the John Day area and developing markets, Krumenauer said.

Japan — which has imposed tariffs on power produced by nuclear and coal, making torrefied wood competitive — has shown interest in torrefied wood mass, he said.

The endowment is willing to take on the initial investment risk with hopes the private sector will eventually take over the enterprise. The torrefaction process has been successfully tested at a large scale in Mississippi, Canada and the Boardman plant, Krumenauer said.

The endowment had considered locating the new plant at the Prairie Wood Products property and other sites in Grant County but chose Malheur Lumber because of its existing infrastructure, wood handling and processing facilities, state air quality permit and experienced on-site staff, Krumenauer said.

The plan calls for replacing the existing boilers with a larger and more efficient one, replacing the existing belt dryer and rotary kiln used for making pellets with larger units, and adding a briquetting

The replacement equipment is commonly found in timber plants around the world, Krumenauer said. The plan is to avoid disrupting ongoing mill operations, but the pellet plant will shut down temporarily while key equipment is replaced.

Krumenauer said the plant will start operations using log chips and not slash from stewardship projects. As the plant proves itself and ramps up production, it will turn to slash material and even trucking in chips produced off-site.

A town hall meeting to present the project will take place at the Canyon City Community Hall on Jan. 10.



Joe Koerner will be the operating manager of the Restoration Fuels LLC torrefaction plant in John Day.

The Eagle/Richard Hanners



Matt Krumenauer headed up developing the Restoration Fuels LLC torrefaction plant project in John Day.

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