



## Sonoma County Biomass Business Competition

Local Innovation • Sustainable Forests • Growing Small Business

[www.Biomass.Biz](http://www.Biomass.Biz)

# BioBiz FAQs

February 18, 2021

## Why a Biomass Business Competition?

The Northern Sonoma County Air Pollution District (NoSoCoAir) and a coalition of forest experts, business leaders, and public officials, recognize that forest restoration is necessary to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfires and to maintain healthy forest ecosystems. A recurring barrier to forest restoration activity is the removal and utilization of excess biomass that exacerbates fire fuels and alters the native ecosystems. The goal of the Competition is to spur local small business innovation to create high value wood products from the woody residuals from forest health and fuel reduction activities, which foster complementary and ongoing partnerships that support forest restoration activities and help maintain healthy forest ecosystems.

## What Do the Projects Look Like?

The BioBiz is a showcase of local small business innovation. The Competition seeks to utilize excess biomass which needs to be removed for forest restoration activities. The funding for the Competition is in the range of \$35,000-\$48,000 for two business plan concepts. It is not the intent nor scope of this Competition to create large scale bioenergy projects or the commercial logging of large healthy trees.

## What is the Goal of the Competition?

The goal of the Competition is to develop a wholistic economy to support the continued protection of Sonoma communities through wildfire risk reduction and sustainable forest management. We aim to create new markets which support ongoing and sustainable fire-safe vegetation management and avoid air pollution from catastrophic wildfires. Understanding the value of small businesses, the Competition will prioritize the development of new ideas into a historic sector to overcome persistent barriers to stewardship. The selected awardee(s) will actively work with state, regional, and local entities to accomplish and support vegetation removal projects that supply a high-value end-use for commercial and non-merchantable wood.

## How Does the Competition Work?

The Competition supports launching a new small business venture or expansion of an existing small business to build and expand the local wood utilization market. Local applicants propose a small business plan concept to utilize excess biomass. Sponsored by local support, the Competition aims to promote local employment and local business opportunities on all contracts. The business plan concepts are evaluated in two phases by an interdisciplinary panel of reviewers using specific scoring criteria.

## What is the Competition Timeline?

The Bio Biz Competition launched with a [Request for Proposals](#) (RFP) on February 1st, 2021. There is a six-week submission period ending March 26th, followed by the first phase review period. In this phase the review panel will evaluate the proposals for eligibility; perform preliminary scoring; and move the most promising candidates forward. In the second phase, selected applicants will pitch their business plan concepts in person; the proposal scores will be finalized; and then the winners will be announced. Winning proposals will have funds available to them in July 2021.

## What are the Benefits of Supporting a Wood Product Business?

The wood products industry plays an important role in employing rural workers and implementing forest restoration projects needed to reduce wildfire risk and improve forest health. For rural and tribal regions to increase economic self-sustainability, community forestry programs and wood product businesses are needed to handle woody biomass. The Competition is committed to delivering the many co-benefits that are recognized by federal, state and academic groups as a solution to forest health, wildfire abatement and the prevention of landscape-scale land conversion which all have direct implications to mitigating climate change.

## What are the Air Quality Considerations?

Minimizing catastrophic wildfires helps maintain healthy air quality. The increasing size, intensity, and frequency of catastrophic wildfires has severe implications for air quality and public health. Wildfire smoke contains fine particulate matter and can increase the formation of ozone. When man-made structures are burned, they can release toxics, metals, and asbestos. It is not uncommon for wildfire events to exceed air quality standards meant for public health and safety. Wildfires also emit black carbon, which is a severe climate change pollutant. The utilization of waste wood, rather than its disposal through open burning or landfill disposal, is a great win for air quality.

## Is the Competition Subject to CEQA?

The Competition itself is not subject to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) because it does not commit any agency or business to a definite course of action pertaining to a “project” as defined by that Act. Of course, an Application may be proposing a project that could eventually require environmental review and permitting. While the Competition is not subject to CEQA, the Competition has several categories in their scoring criteria which will allow the panel of judges to assess the applicant’s sensitivity to environmental issues and scientific components of their feedstock supply. Applicants consideration of the environment in their package is very important to the program.

## What is Biomass Feedstock for BioBiz?

The Competition defines the term “woody biomass” vegetation removed from forests like small diameter stems, dead tree-tops, limbs, ladder fuels or diseased trees that otherwise cannot be sold as higher-value products such as saw timber. Due to the consecutive years of catastrophic wildfires that have hit Sonoma County, developing an end use market to incentive the proper management of forests is needed. While the Competition promotes the use of snags and logs for crucial habitat, nutrient cycling and biodiversity, excessive amounts of dead, dying or diseased trees can lead to significant wildfire fuel loading, thus posing a risk for another catastrophic wildfire. The Competition hopes to see applicants who can prioritize the types of feedstocks which will improve forest health and reduce wildfire threat.

## How Can I Learn More?

In line with the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resource Extension on Forest Research and Outreach, the Competition believes California needs to play a more active role in its forests. The Competition will reflect the immense amount of State policy support like SB 859's Wood Utilization Barriers team working under the State's Forest Management Task Force to encourage business development through proven non-merchantable woody-product solutions.

Years of fire suppression have radically affected millions of acres of forestland in California. This has resulted in stressed trees, disease outbreaks, and dominance of tree species that reproduce in crowded shady conditions. In the absence of fire, it is possible to thin trees to reduce competition and create openings so shade-intolerant trees can grow. Historically, fire has played a primary role in shaping the health of our forest ecosystems. However, if the same type of prescribed fires were to occur on many of our lands today, we would see large, uncontrollable wildfires similar to those which have impacted Sonoma the last five years. For many, the goal with forest management is to restore stand health back to reintroduce fire onto the landscape. A wood product business is an essential outlet for this process and simultaneously can help the divestment of non-renewable fossil fuel through the product of other products like biochar, mass timber, bioenergy and biofuels.

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