European Imports of Wood Pellets for “Green Energy” Devastating US Forests
As far back as 2013, investigative reporting by the Wall Street Journal uncovered clearcutting of 100 year old wetland hardwood forests to source Enviva’s Ahoskie, North Carolina mill...

“Logger George Henerson said that earlier this year, he sold Enviva several hundred tons of hardwood that his crew clear-cut from a swamp that hadn’t been logged for about 100 years.

“Enviva, now they need wood bad enough that they’re paying for some swamp logging,” said Mr. Henerson.”

- The Wall Street Journal

INTRODUCTION

Since 2013, media and local groups have investigated and documented the devastating impact that European demand for wood pellets is having on forest ecosystems in the Southeastern United States. These investigations provide critical insight into the supply chains for pellets exported by Enviva, the largest wood pellet manufacturer in the United States and key supplier to top European utilities, such as Drax Power in the United Kingdom and Dong Energy in Denmark.

In a new investigation (February, 2017), local groups found that mature hardwood forests were cut down to source Enviva’s new wood pellet mill in Sampson County, North Carolina. The images from this investigation, which follows similar investigations in 2014, 2015, and 2016, once again expose the unsustainable logging practices being used to provide biomass to Enviva (i.e., clear cuts of wetland forests). They also spotlight the vast quantities of whole trees and other large-diameter wood—biomass feedstocks known to be high-carbon—entering Enviva’s supply chain.


Multiple independent, peer-reviewed, and governmental studies have determined that these feedstocks increase carbon dioxide emissions to the atmosphere, not reduce them, even compared to fossil fuels like coal. Yet, European Union policy still considers all biomass incineration to be “carbon neutral”, and fails to require utilities that burn biomass to account for their carbon emissions at the smokestack. NRDC Report, “In the U.S. Southeast, Natural Forests are Being Felled to Send Fuel Overseas,” October 2015. https://www.nrdc.org/resources/us-southeast-natural-forests-are-being-felled-send-fuel-overseas (accessed April 2017).

European policymakers are increasingly looking to “sustainable” sourcing standards to ensure their biomass imports are “green.” Yet, the damaging practices documented in these investigations are all happening under the umbrella of such “sustainable” standards. Countries looking to meet their commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement and phase out coal should stop wasting billions in scarce public resources subsidizing dirty and destructive biomass energy. Instead, European policymakers need to invest in truly clean and lower cost energy technologies like solar and wind.

INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

FEBRUARY 2017

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a destroyed bottomland hardwood clearcut back to the Enviva Sampson County, North Carolina facility.

The clearcut site was located in Sampson County, North Carolina, outside of Clinton, North Carolina.
Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood to the Enviva Ahoskie, North Carolina facility. The cut left a large wetland area desolate.

The clearcut site, captured here in aerial and drone images, was located in the Roanoke River basin in North Carolina, just outside of Williamston, North Carolina.
Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a devastated wetland clearcut to Enviva’s Southampton, Virginia and Ahoskie, North Carolina facilities.
DECEMBER 2014

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a wetland clearcut back to the Enviva Ahoskie, North Carolina facility.
For more information on how European pellet imports are impacting forests and increasing carbon emissions, please contact:

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