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SmallWood 2010: Bridges, Business, and Biomass

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The SmallWood 2010 national conference held April 20-22, 2010, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, USA, provided state-of-the-art information and fostered peer-to-peer learning among those actively engaged in small-diameter and woody biomass utilization.

The first SmallWood conference was held in 1998 in Lewiston, Idaho, and has been held every two years since. These conferences address potential utilization options for small-diameter and underutilized trees. Enormous quantities of woody biomass are generated today from forestry businesses, fuel reduction and landscape restoration projects, forest thinning operations, insect infestations, and natural disasters such as hurricanes. These issues drive the need to create solutions for using low-value waste wood.

SmallWood 2010 held 14 technical sessions with more than 60 speakers and moderators that bridged a wide array of small-diameter and woody biomass sectors, technologies, and technical disciplines. New for SmallWood 2010 was a focus on timber bridges and potential opportunities for using small-diameter material in bridge applications. An evening session was dedicated to networking.

For two days in concurrent sessions, an extremely knowledgeable slate of speakers, practitioners, and experts from across the United States presented information on woody biomass topics such as federal policy and its impact on public and private forest owners, timber supply and resource competition, emerging timber bridge technologies and opportunities, kiln drying, using beetle-killed trees for wood pellet production, wood energy systems, marketing, durability and preservative issues, and procurement, processing, and transportation challenges.

On the evening of the first day of the conference, participants attended an informal reception that included information exhibits and technical poster presentations on various facets of small-tree utilization. It also gave practitioners and experts including land managers, producers, and users of small-diameter and woody biomass, equipment manufacturers, investors, and policy makers the opportunity to network and stay abreast of current and emerging smallwood technologies.



Rattlesnake (small-diameter) pedestrian bridge, Missoula, MT. Photographer: U.S. Forest Service.

On the last day of the conference, attendees were given the option of two field tours in the surrounding Hot Springs area to visit businesses and operations that use woody biomass. Operations included a hardwood composite mill, wood pellet plant, and energy plantation research plot, two timber bridges, which included the longest stress-laminated bridge in the United States.



Harvesting woody biomass, northern Wisconsin. Photographer: U.S. Forest Service

Almost 200 people from 5 countries (Canada, United States, Austria, Portugal, Italy) attended this conference co-sponsored by IUFRO Division 5. In addition to the USDA Forest Service, major sponsors of this conference included the Biomass Energy Resource Center (BERC), the Southern Group of State Foresters, and the Arkansas Forestry Commission.

Link to biographies, abstracts, and presentations given at SmallWood 2010:
<http://www.forestprod.org/smallwood2010/information.html>