

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

EUROPEAN IMPORTS OF WOOD PELLETS FOR “GREEN ENERGY” DEVASTATING US FORESTS

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.

The results portray a disturbing pattern: a significant proportion of Enviva’s pellets are produced using trees and

other large-diameter wood from native hardwood forests.¹ 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.”^{2,3}

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.⁴

¹ Enviva’s own website reports that hardwood makes up 59% of their source material. Enviva Biomass, “Track & Trace Program,” <http://www.envivabiomass.com/sustainability/track-and-trace/> (accessed April, 2017); Enviva’s own sustainability program reports it often takes 25-100% of the harvest volume in final cuts of mature forests around their Chesapeake mills—far beyond normal quantities of “residues” or scrapwood. Enviva Biomass, “Enviva Wood Supply Map,” <http://www.envivabiomass.com/sustainability/track-and-trace/enviva-wood-supply-map/#5/32.658/-81.914> (accessed April, 2017).

² 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).

³ Duncan Brack, Chatham House, Environment, Energy and Resources Department, “Woody Biomass for Power and Heat Impacts on the Global Climate,” February 2017. <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/woody-biomass-power-and-heat-impacts-global-climate> (accessed April, 2017).

⁴ NRDC Issue Brief, “Money To Burn? The U.K. Needs to Dump Biomass and Replace its coal plants with Truly Clean Energy,” October 2016, <https://www.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/uk-biomass-replace-coal-clean-energy-ib.pdf> (accessed April, 2017).



2017

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.



INVESTIGATION FINDINGS

MARCH 2016

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.

2016



2015

MAY 2015

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.



INVESTIGATION FINDINGS



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.

2014



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