

Nebraska's newest power plant will use wood, other waste, as fuel

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The Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) is celebrating the announcement of a new power plant in the state.

Green Star Energy Group's planned facility in South Sioux City will turn wood waste, among other things, into electricity.

Adam Smith, NFS forest products program leader, says this is a potential game-changer for the state's foresters.



An architect's image of the planned \$53 million gasification power plant in South Sioux City. (photo provided)

"We have eastern red cedar, continuing to cause problems in grasslands and forests," Smith tells Nebraska Radio Network. "We do a lot of active management, but that leaves a significant wood resource on the ground with no place to take it. A power plant, which uses low-quality wood, could be a great outlet for a lot of that material."

He says there are other sources of wood waste too.

"We do have a sawmill industry in the state, largely creating pallets, but there is a wood waste from that process," Smith explains. "As Emerald Ash Borer moves into Nebraska communities, there's going to be a great opportunity to utilize some of that wood."

NFS reports there are only a few boilers in the state that can burn wood, so the new facility will accept more of the available resource.

"Existing markets for wood waste can't really be much of a solution for this wood that's coming down from red cedar or Emerald Ash Borer management," Smith says, "so it really will take a new large facility like the one being proposed by Green Star to make an impact on those wood waste sources."

Lance Hedquist, city administrator of South Sioux City, calls it a win-win situation. He says the plant will use gasification and not burn the wood, so it is better for the environment too.

"South Sioux City is well-known for its environmental efforts," Hedquist tells Nebraska Radio Network. "This blends well with the image of the city and actions that we've taken on many fronts."

With the addition of the gasification power plant, the city will get 57 percent of its energy from renewable sources.

Hedquist says citizens and businesses in town ultimately benefit from lower energy costs.

Construction on Green Star Energy Group's new plant begins next spring.