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Bioenergy Workshops Coming to the Kootenays

Workshops on developing small-scale bioenergy projects in the Kootenays will be held in Cranbrook Oct. 4 and Castlegar Oct. 5.

The workshops will focus on the feasibility of fueling heating systems using wood with otherwise marginal commercial value.

“There is a lot of interest in the Kootenays in exploring ways to use wood biomass to support interface fuel treatments and ecosystem restoration projects,” said Dan Murphy of the Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society, which is co-sponsoring the workshops with Columbia Basin Trust, BC Bioenergy Network, SCR Management, RW Gray Consulting and Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program.

“Reducing the risk of wildfire around communities and restoring grassland/open forest ecosystems involves removing large volumes of trees that often have little or no value as sawlogs or pulpwood,” Murphy explained. “Without markets for the wood taken off, interface and restoration projects become very high-cost undertakings.”

Using this wood biomass to generate heat for buildings has the potential to produce both environmental and economic benefits, said BC bioenergy expert Tom Hobby, who will lead the workshops in Cranbrook and Castlegar.

“Not only could community wildfire protection and ecosystem restoration become more economically viable and effective, wood-fired heating systems can be very energy efficient with extremely low levels of emissions,” Hobby said.

“Operating costs are significantly less than using most fossil fuels at current market prices and will most likely remain more stable based on local supply contracts versus future fossil fuel prices, which are dependent on global markets.”

He noted that thermal biomass energy technology is commercially available today and would be particularly suited to the relatively small communities of the Kootenays.

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The upcoming workshops are a follow-up to a recent tour of the federal Fuels for Schools program operating in Montana and other US states.

A group of First Nations, local government, college and school district representatives from the Kootenays spent two days in June visiting four Montana public schools that have been heating with wood chips or pellets over the past five years.

The October workshops will feature provincial and international speakers with hands-on experience in bioenergy project feasibility, planning, development and operation.

Two speakers will travel to the Kootenays direct from the Canadian Bioenergy Association's international conference and trade show in Vancouver.

Workshop cost is a nominal \$30 which includes lunch and handouts. To register or for more information, contact Dan Murphy at 250-421-9320 or dgmurphy@telus.net.

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The Rocky Mountain Trench Natural Resources Society (Trench Society) is a coalition of ranching, hunting, wildlife and environmental organizations working with other partners in the Rocky Mountain Trench Ecosystem Restoration Program to restore the grasslands and open forests of the East Kootenay. Trench Society member organizations are:

- Cranbrook Archery Club
- East Kootenay Wildlife Association
- Kootenay Livestock Association
- Rocky Mountain Naturalists
- Southern Guides & Outfitters Association
- The Land Conservancy of BC (Kootenay Region)
- Waldo Stockbreeders Association
- Wildsight
- Windermere District Farmers Institute