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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thompson Falls School Now Heated with Biomass (Ribbon cutting ceremony for the new waste-wood heater to be held October 11th)

Thompson Falls, Mont— It will become official on October 11th when the ribbon cutting ceremony is held. Thompson Falls School will be the newest addition to an ever-growing list of schools being heated through the utilization of forest biomass fuel.

The celebration will be held at the Thompson Falls Jr. High School Gymnasium starting at 10 a.m. A variety of guests, including Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) Director Mary Sexton, and Paul Ries, Acting Director of State & Private Forestry for the Northern Region of the Forest Service will be on hand to speak and view the new boiler. The Master of Ceremony will be Hannah Peters, Thompson Falls Junior High School student.

Forest biomass, sometimes referred to as “slash” is the small diameter trees, shrubs, and debris left over from logging operations and forest fuel reduction projects. Essentially, it’s the residue or waste from forest management operations that would otherwise be piled and burned. It also includes waste from wood manufacturing. In the last several years the Montana Department of Natural Resources & Conservation (DNRC) and the USDA Forest Service have teamed up with Resource Conservation and Development Councils (RC&Ds) in a program called “Fuels for Schools.”

The program is designed to put biomass to good use, mainly as a heat source for numerous public schools, hospitals, and other public buildings throughout the state. Thompson Falls is the latest example of this new alternative energy source. A grant from the Forest Service through Northwest Regional RC&D covered \$225,000 of the \$455,000 system.

“The intent of the Fuels-for-Schools program is to jump-start the development of a dispersed energy market in the state of Montana, to use what is typically a wasted by-product of forest management,” explained DNRC Fuels for Schools Coordinator, Angela Farr. “By burning slash in modern, efficient boilers rather than in open piles, we dramatically reduce the air quality impact and use heat that would otherwise be wasted.”

Biomass utilization is not a new concept in Europe or the eastern U.S., or with the wood products industry. Smurfit-Stone Container in Frenchtown is the biggest biomass energy user in Montana. More good examples of biomass energy use are the University of Idaho and Chadron State College in Nebraska. All three utilize biomass as a dependable source of energy and have done so for over a decade. “As a fuel source, biomass is cheaper than most alternatives for heating and cooling large buildings,” explained DNRC Service Forestry Bureau Chief Rob Ethridge. “For example, Thompson Falls Schools will pay about \$26 per ton of fuel for the school and they only need about 400 tons of fuel for the entire year.”

The new biomass boiler is expected to save the school about \$60,000 dollars per year in heating fuel, over what fuel oil would have cost them at current prices. After making their loan payments on the new system, they will be about \$30,000 ahead in the first year. “Our savings projection has almost doubled since our analysis last spring, because fuel oil prices have increased by about a dollar a gallon,” said School Superintendent Jerry Pauli. “The timing of this couldn’t be better! This savings in fuel costs means that the district doesn’t have to cut teaching supplies or staff.”

The public is invited and encouraged to attend the ceremony in Thompson Falls, which will include tours of the new biomass system. For more information about Montana’s Fuels for Schools program, contact Farr at 406-542-4239 or visit the website at www.fuelsforschools.org

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