

Announcing a Conference on the Role of Education, Research, and Technology in a Michigan Biomaterials Initiative

Michigan's Rick Snyder convened the Governor's 2013 Forest Products Summit on April 23. The five-year working goals that were used to frame the Summit included: (1) increasing the economic impact of the forest products industry on state and regional economies from \$14 billion to \$20 billion; (2) increasing the export of value-added forest products by 50 percent; (3) increasing forest products-related jobs by 10 percent; (4) supporting existing industry; and (5) encouraging regionally based industry development. Key actions to inform the Summit were: (1) identifying opportunities and challenges for the forest products industry, including emerging markets; (2) developing a framework for communication and collaboration among the forest products industry, financial community, economic development support network, government, and universities; (3) aligning resources within state government and universities to address goals and actions identified in the Summit; and (4) increasing the public awareness of Michigan's forest products industry.

It is apparent from these key actions above that institutions of higher learning in Michigan stand to play a major role in realizing the working goals for the Summit. However, a great deal of their capacity in the forest products area has been lost in recent decades. Thus, we decided to convene a conference at the Great Wolf Lodge in Traverse City, Michigan, on October 3-4, 2013, hosted by the Michigan Society of American Foresters (MSAF), which focuses on enhancing the role of education, research, and technology in a Michigan Biomaterials initiative. More specifically, the conference will be designed to develop an educational program (two-year, four-year, graduate, and continuing) in biomaterials and to identify gaps in knowledge and technology that, if filled, would enhance the initiative. We use the term "biomaterials" to broaden the scope of the endeavor to include any organic materials that are extracted from ecosystems, although wood (and its derivatives) is the most common one in our state. From a life-cycle perspective, the issue is that of how to extract these materials from ecosystems without compromising their integrity; how to process these materials in a myriad of ways to fully utilize the resource; how to market them regionally, nationally, and globally; and how to recycle these "green materials" through the same or other materials, or back through ecosystems. The ultimate goal of this endeavor is to position institutions of higher learning in the state of Michigan to work with other sectors to increase the economic well-being and overall quality of life for its citizens while maintaining the health of the ecosystems upon which they depend.

We have investigated higher education's capacity for biomaterials research, education, and outreach in the U.S., and determined that most of this capacity resides in the coastal and near-coastal regions of the country (e.g., North Carolina State University, Virginia Tech, University of Maine, and Oregon State University). Thus, our conference in the fall will bring together landowners, academicians, natural resource agency personnel, industry people, community and economic development leaders, and legislators from the state of Michigan to hear from comparable groups in the various states noted above regarding their successes in this area. The conference will also help to identify major sources of funding to move this initiative forward by building capacity in Michigan's higher education institutions.

For further information on the conference, including objectives, the agenda, registration, and lodging, please visit the MSAF web site calendar (<http://michigansaf.org/Calendar/calendar.htm>) and go to "MSAF Fall Conference." **The deadline for early registration is September 27. That for reduced-price lodging at the Great Wolf Lodge for the nights of October 2 and 3 (\$77.00, excluding taxes and fees) is September 30 and for the nights of October 4 and 5 (\$139.22, excluding taxes and fees) is September 15.** For questions about conference content, contact: Terry L. Sharik, Dean, School of Forest Resources and Environmental Science, Michigan Technological University, Houghton, MI 49931 (e-mail: tlsharik@mtu.edu; cell phone: 734-972-2356; office phone: 906-487-2352). For questions about conference arrangements, contact Bernie Hubbard, Michigan Society of American Foresters (e-mail: forestmeister@sbcglobal.net; phone: 906-630-0767).