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Title: Interim County Executive Officer requests discussion and possible action to support AB 998 by Assemblymember Connolly, which falls within the Disaster Recovery, Preparedness, and Resiliency; Climate Action; and Energy sections of Napa County's State Legislative & Regulatory Platform.

Sponsors: Board of Supervisors

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Date	Ver.	Action By	Action	Result
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TO: Napa County Legislative Subcommittee

FROM: David Morrison, Interim County Executive Officer

REPORT BY: Andrew M. Mize, Legislative & Policy Analyst

SUBJECT: **Consideration of AB 998 (Connolly)**

RECOMMENDATION

Interim County Executive Officer requests discussion and possible action to support AB 998 by Assemblymember Connolly, which falls within the Disaster Recovery, Preparedness, and Resiliency; Climate Action; and Energy sections of Napa County's State Legislative & Regulatory Platform.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AB 998 requires the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, in coordination with the State Air Resources Board and local air districts, to issue a report on the utility-scale biomass combustion facilities still in operation as of January 1, 2024. The report is required to include recommendations regarding upgrading biomass combustion facilities that consider impacts on disadvantaged, rural, forested, and agricultural communities.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

ENVIRONMENTAL DETERMINATION: The proposed action is not a project as defined by 14 California Code of Regulations 15378 (State CEQA Guidelines) and therefore CEQA is not applicable.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

A key facet of wildfire prevention and mitigation is the clearing of woody surface fuels to eliminate vegetation that would readily burn. This waste includes dead grasses, brush, tree limbs, and other vegetation that ignites easily. Typically, this fuel is either burned in a burn pile, which releases carbon into the atmosphere, or chipped, which requires the use of carbon-emitting machinery. An alternative use of this fuel is its conversion to energy through various processes.

Biomass refers to the organic material used to produce energy, known as Bioenergy. California reached its peak biomass power generation capacity in the early 1990's, when 66 statewide facilities had an installed capacity of 800 MW. This was, in theory, enough to power 600,000 homes. State funding for these facilities expired in the mid-1990's, and currently there are about 30 facilities in operation with a capacity of 640 MW. (Source: <https://www.energy.ca.gov/data-reports/california-power-generation-and-power-sources/biomass/biomass-energy-california>).

Among the products that result from this process is biochar, a charcoal-like product produced by applying heat to organic matter in a sealed, oxygen-starved chamber. Biochar has several environmentally-beneficial agricultural applications. Its use as a soil amendment reduces the emissions of greenhouse gases by the soil, helps soil retain water and nutrients, and slows soil decomposition. (Source: <https://www.chemistswithoutborders.org/Active-Projects/biochar.php>).

The woody waste generated through fuel clearing activities can be used to make biochar, meaning that this fire mitigation activity produces a byproduct that can be used to support sustainable agricultural practices. (Source: <https://www.usda.gov/media/blog/2019/07/24/after-fire-wood-waste-put-work>).

This bill requires the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission to evaluate the existing bioenergy facilities in the state and recommend strategies for upgrading those facilities as appropriate.