

# Global Markets for Biomass Energy are Devastating U.S. Forests







# CUT EMISSIONS NOT FORESTS

## CLEARCUTTING U.S. FORESTS IS NOT A CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTION

Global demand for wood pellets is devastating forest ecosystems in the Southeast United States. Investigations by media and independent watchdogs over the past decade reveal the truth about the supply chains for pellets exported by Enviva, the world's largest wood pellet manufacturer. These investigations expose the damaging logging practices used to source the so-called biomass industry, including the clearcutting of iconic wetland forests. Enviva's pellets from these ravaged forests are then shipped to utilities, such as Drax Power in the United Kingdom and Ørsted in Denmark.

Despite the claims of the industry, the independent reporting shows a disturbing pattern: wood pellets burned by Drax and others come from wood that is harvested from native hardwood forests in an area designated as a global biodiversity hotspot.<sup>1</sup> They also spotlight the vast quantities of whole trees and other large-diameter wood—biomass feedstocks known to be high-carbon—that are entering Enviva's supply chain.

Not only is this devastating for these irreplaceable forests, but it's worsening our Earth's climate crisis. Multiple independent, peer-reviewed studies have determined that burning biomass from forests for electricity creates more carbon dioxide emissions than burning coal, and that increased carbon dioxide concentrations persist in the atmosphere for decades or more.<sup>2</sup>

Two recent investigations add new evidence about the destructive logging practices being used to provide biomass to Enviva, adding insult to injury in a region that's suffered years of unsustainable logging. In March 2019, investigators in North Carolina again tracked logging trucks from a mature hardwood forest to Enviva's Northampton wood pellet mill. In January 2018, reporters from the UK Channel 4 News program Dispatches traveled to North Carolina to examine what is happening on the ground in the forests that have become ground zero for feeding Drax Power Station's voracious

demand for wood. The images from the Dispatches investigation tell a story of ecological devastation in the name of clean energy: a once majestic wetland forest clearcut to supply wood to Enviva, and ultimately to Drax.

The images from these investigations follow similar investigations in 2014, 2015, 2016, and 2017.

We now know that we must cut global emissions by half over the next decade to be on track to keep planetary warming within safe levels. Yet, climate and energy policies in countries like the United Kingdom, Denmark, the Netherlands, and now South Korea and Japan persist in treating biomass as a "carbon neutral" source of renewable energy and offering utilities lucrative incentives to increase reliance on biomass electricity.

Policymakers have for years looked to "sustainable" sourcing standards to ensure their biomass imports are "green." Yet, the damaging practices documented in these investigations are all happening under the umbrella of such "sustainable" standards. "Sustainable forestry" cannot guarantee a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions within timeframes relevant to fighting climate change. We must cut emissions, not forests.

Countries looking to meet their commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement and phase out coal must stop wasting scarce public resources subsidizing dirty and destructive biomass energy. Instead, policymakers in the United Kingdom, other European Union member states, and emerging markets for bioenergy around the world should redirect investments to genuinely zero-carbon energy sources like energy efficiency, solar and wind.<sup>3</sup>



## INVESTIGATION FINDINGS



# 2019

## APRIL 2019

In the early spring of 2019, investigators tracked logging trucks from a mature hardwood forest going to Enviva's Northampton, North Carolina facility. The clearcut was located in the Tar-Pamlico River Basin, alongside Sandy Creek, feeding into the Pamlico Sound of North Carolina.





INVESTIGATION FINDINGS



Photo Source: Channel 4 UK



## JANUARY 2018

Investigators tracked multiple logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood to the Enviva Southampton, Virginia facility. The cut left an area of mature wetland forest devastated as well as nearly 100 acres of surrounding natural forest.

The vast clearcut site was located less than a half-mile from the Merrherrin River, which feeds into the Albemarle Sound of North Carolina.

# 2018





# 2017

## FEBRUARY 2017

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a destroyed bottomland hardwood clearcut back to the Enviva Sampson County, North Carolina facility.

The clearcut site was located in Sampson County, North Carolina, outside of Clinton, North Carolina.





## MARCH 2016

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood to the Enviva Ahoskie, North Carolina facility. The cut left a large wetland area desolate.

The clearcut site, captured here in aerial and drone images, was located in the Roanoke River basin in North Carolina, just outside of Williamston, North Carolina.

# 2016





# 2015

## MAY 2015

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a devastated wetland clearcut to Enviva's Southhampton, Virginia and Ahoskie, North Carolina facilities.





## DECEMBER 2014

Investigators tracked logging trucks carrying whole hardwood trees and other large-diameter wood from a wetland clearcut back to the Enviva Ahoskie, North Carolina facility.

# 2014



**AS FAR BACK AS 2013, INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING BY THE WALL STREET JOURNAL UNCOVERED ENVIVA'S CLEARCUTTING OF 100 YEAR OLD WETLAND HARDWOOD FORESTS FOR ITS AHOSKIE, NORTH CAROLINA MILL...**

**“Logger George Henerson said that earlier this year, he sold Enviva several hundred tons of hardwood that his crew clear-cut from a swamp that hadn't been logged for about 100 years.**

**Enviva, now they need wood bad enough that they're paying for some swamp logging,” said Mr. Henerson.**

**- THE WALL STREET JOURNAL**

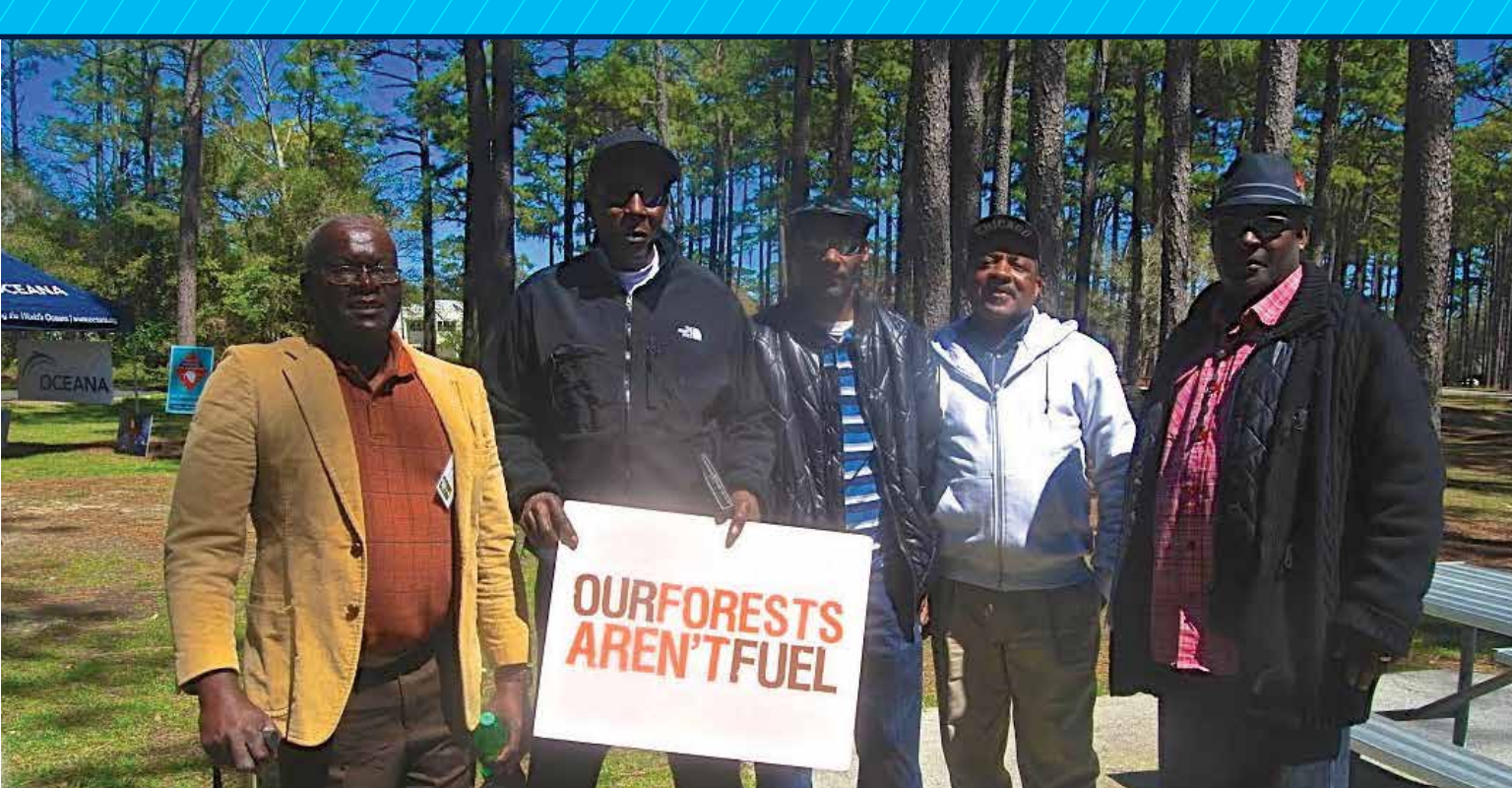
Scheck, Justin and Ianthe Jeanne Dugan, “Europe's Green-Fuel Search Turns to America's Forests,” Wall Street Journal, May 27, 2013.



**“It will take tens if not hundreds of years for it [the forest] to recover, if ever.”**

- PROFESSOR ALAN WEAKLEY, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL, AS TOLD TO CHANNEL 4 UK, JANUARY 2018





**We believe that everyone should have a clean, safe place to live, work, and play. Enviva has come in and detracted the living conditions of the community. This is what the community has to live with and it's an injustice to them.**

- BELINDA JOYNER, NORTHEASTERN, ORGANIZER, CLEAN WATER FOR NC







# PROTECT FORESTS

## WE MUST CUT EMISSIONS NOT FORESTS

Our forests are a giant storehouse of carbon; in fact, they contain more carbon than all our known exploitable deposits of oil, gas, and coal.<sup>4</sup> Protecting forests is a critical weapon in the fight against climate change. Releasing even a small percentage of this stored carbon or reducing the amount of carbon that our forests suck out of the air makes avoiding climate devastation much, much harder.

Enviva is planning expansions in poor, rural communities in North Carolina, Virginia, and the Gulf South. These are communities that already live in a region enduring some of the highest logging rates in the world. They suffer some of the highest poverty rates in the nation and face the threat of escalating flooding from climate change.

By protecting and restoring natural forests, we can increase the removal of carbon dioxide from our atmosphere, optimize natural flood control, stabilize fresh water supplies, and protect critical habitat for native wildlife. At a time when floods, droughts, and

heat waves are getting more intense, we need to be doing everything we can to restore intactness and connectivity across natural forests to protect human life and mitigate economic losses. As we transition the economy to build resilient natural landscapes through forest protection and restoration, we can create a more diversified economy that works for more people. Creating equity in the economy improves poor and marginalized communities' ability to withstand the harsh impacts of climate change.

We risk all of these benefits by putting bioenergy before people. Replacing fossil fuels is fundamental, but it must be done with genuinely zero-carbon sources of renewable energy like solar and wind. At the same time, we must protect, restore, and expand natural forests as our best defense against a changing climate and our best hope to slow the rising tide.

<sup>1</sup>Enviva's own website reports that hardwood makes up 55% of their source material. Enviva Biomass, "Track & Trace Program," <http://www.envivabiomass.com/sustainability/track-and-trace/> (accessed April, 2019); Enviva's own sustainability program reports it often takes 25-100% of the harvest volume in final cuts of mature forests around their Chesapeake mills—far beyond normal quantities of "residues" or scrapwood. Enviva Biomass, "Enviva Wood Supply Map," <http://www.envivabiomass.com/sustainability/track-and-trace/enviva-wood-supply-map/#10/36.4379/-77.2298> (accessed April, 2019).

<sup>2</sup>Brack, Duncan, "Woody Biomass for Power and Heat: Impacts on the Global Climate," Chatham House, February 23, 2017 available at <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/2017-02-23-woody-biomassglobal-climate-brack-final2.pdf>; European Academies Science Advisory Council, "Multi-functionality

and sustainability in the European Union's Forests", EASAC policy report 32, April 2017, available at [http://www.easac.eu/fileadmin/PDF\\_s/reports\\_statements/Forests/EASAC\\_Forests\\_web\\_complete.pdf](http://www.easac.eu/fileadmin/PDF_s/reports_statements/Forests/EASAC_Forests_web_complete.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>Stashwick, S., "Money to Burn II; Solar and Wind Can Reliably Supply the United Kingdom's New Electricity Needs More Cost-Effectively Than Biomass," NRDC Issue Brief, September 2017, [https://assets.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/money-to-burn-ii-uk-biomass-ib.pdf?\\_ga=2.165636671.1426806616.1526490771-1380781386.1517278009](https://assets.nrdc.org/sites/default/files/money-to-burn-ii-uk-biomass-ib.pdf?_ga=2.165636671.1426806616.1526490771-1380781386.1517278009).

<sup>4</sup>"Five Reasons The Earth's Climate Depends on Forests," Climate and Land Use Alliance, <http://www.climateandlandusealliance.org/scientists-statement/> (accessed May 15, 2019).





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impacting forests and increasing carbon emissions, please contact:

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