

## Rocky Mountain News

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### Fort Carson has chips on its soldiers

Bits of debris from forest thinning may one day power base

By Gargi Chakrabarty, Rocky Mountain News

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Fort Carson could become the first military base in the United States to get electricity from wood chips.

In a unique move, the U.S. departments of Agriculture and Defense are negotiating to build a small power plant inside the military base near Colorado Springs that will be fueled exclusively by forest-thinning materials collected from the Front Range.

The federally sponsored pilot project would produce up to 12 megawatts of power, enough to meet most of Fort Carson's demand. One megawatt serves the needs of 300 to 400 households.

"This project would combine two government needs," said Mark Rey, undersecretary of natural resources and environment at the Agriculture Department. "The first is to treat forests in the Front Range to reduce wildfire hazards, and the second is to use those forest thinnings as cheap materials to generate renewable energy."

Rey said the pilot project would also help the Defense Department's goal of becoming self-sufficient in energy needs at its facilities across the nation. He said a feasibility study would be completed this year and the project, if approved, would break ground in 2007.

Rey spoke at the Bioenergy and Wood Products conference at the Hyatt Convention Center in downtown Denver on Tuesday.

Addressing the conference, Gov. Bill Owens said the health of forests in Colorado would benefit immensely if entrepreneurs use the wood debris to make energy. He also urged the development of cellulosic ethanol from agricultural wastes such as corn stover, husk and switchgrass.

"If we can partner with our friends in the federal government, we can further extend our energy supply in a smart fashion," Owens said.

The Governor's Office of Energy Management and Conservation received a \$75,000 federal grant to invest in eight bioenergy projects. The state agency also got \$100,000 from the Western Governors' Association to boost the use of bioenergy and reduce excessive buildup of forest fuels that contribute to wildfires.

Nationwide, about 190 million acres of fire-prone Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management property need to be thinned. Each acre yields about 80 tons of dead wood, dried branches and other waste, known as biomass.

Thinning costs about \$800 to \$1,000 an acre. About \$760 million is authorized for the Healthy Forests program this year, but markets for biomass could make the thinning projects self-sustaining.

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