



Mesa Verde Pellets, LLC, processes a significant amount of sawdust and woody waste from the company's two mills and from nearby public and private forest lands. Image courtesy of Todd Gardiner.

Woody Biomass Processing Mill Boosts Forest Health and Economic Growth

In the small southwestern Colorado town of Mancos, operations at Mesa Verde Pellets, LLC, exemplify how reclamation of forest products can advance both the environmental and economic well-being of a community.

Mesa Verde Pellets, a subsidiary of Aspen Wall Wood (AWW), specializes in producing aspen and ponderosa pine pellets for home heating and industrial use. According to David Sitton, chief executive officer of AWW, the pellet plant has been

expanded and retrofitted with a biomass utilization system capable of processing a significant portion of sawdust and other woody waste generated at the company's two mills. Small-diameter logs from the San Juan National Forest, Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre, and Gunnison National Forests, State lands in Colorado and Utah, and private forest lands will also be collected and hauled to the plant for processing.

The \$2 million, 53,000-square-foot plant expansion and retrofit was funded in part by a \$495,950 community wood grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Forest Service. The production at the plant will assist the Forest Service in addressing forest health issues, as well as vegetation management goals established by the Rocky Mountain Restoration Initiative, which works to increase recreation opportunities and improve the resilience of forests, communities, and water resources.



The plant supports existing operations that employ 75 individuals and will create at least 10 new jobs in the upcoming year. Image courtesy of Todd Gardiner.

Todd Gardiner, the wood innovations program manager for Cooperative Forestry in the Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Region, says AWW has long been a major partner with the Forest Service. "The company's relationship with the Forest Service will continue to help us meet objectives for forest health and sustainability, benefiting communities throughout southern Colorado."

More Information

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ENHANCING THE LOCAL ECONOMY THROUGH USE OF RENEWABLE RESOURCES

Equipment within the plant includes three 2-ton per hour pellet mills. In addition to a chipper to accommodate small-diameter logs, the units incorporate dust and waste collection, grinders, material moving systems, cooling equipment, bagging bins, and a bagging system. Mesa Verde is expected to produce 360 tons of pellets per week. Electricity for plant operations is supplied by a local electric cooperative that sources 70 percent of its power from renewable sources.

The plant supports existing operations that employ 75 individuals, of whom approximately 55 percent are of Native American or Hispanic descent. The expansion is anticipated to create at least 10 new jobs. AWW's company operations are also located near three large Native American reservations, where residents have traditionally been reliant upon coal for heating their homes. Many of these families are transitioning to wood or wood pellet heating, and the local availability of pellets would benefit this traditionally underserved community.

Operations at Mesa Verde support other area businesses, such as timber harvesting for small-diameter wood, and provide a general boon to the local economy. Improving forest health through management can also enhance watersheds within the region's communities, which rely on agriculture and recreation as income sources.

FAST FACTS

- Mesa Verde produces heating pellets from sawmill woody waste and chipped small-diameter logs from nearby public and private lands.
- The plant's expansion and retrofit were funded in part by a \$495,950 community wood grant from the USDA Forest Service.
- Plant production will assist the Forest Service and other land managers in addressing forest health issues and vegetation management goals.
- The expansion is anticipated to create at least 10 new jobs, increase local pellet availability and commercial activity, and provide opportunities for harvesting small-diameter wood.



Mesa Verde Pellets, LLC, is projected to produce more than 360 tons of pellets per week. Image courtesy of Todd Gardiner.