SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE

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SOUTHEAST ALASKA REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATION

Biomass Day at the Rural Energy Conference: Real Projects, Real Lessons, Next Steps

On October 29, the last day of the 2026 Alaska Rural Energy Conference in Fairbanks, wood energy took center stage. The day began with the breakout session "Wood Energy in Alaska: Practical Pathways, Real Projects, and Where It Works," where speakers shared how biomass is working in communities across the state.

That afternoon, the Alaska Wood Energy Development Task Group (AWEDTG) and Southeast Conference hosted a 3.5-hour work session, "Biomass: How to Make It Work in the North." Almost 30 people joined, including community leaders, operators, foresters, agency partners, and vendors. Speakers ranged from Tok school project champions to staff from the Denali Commission, Alaska Division of Forestry, and USDA Rural Development, along with biomass vendors. Karen Petersen moderated, shared the history of AWEDTG, and drew on decades of biomass work to share successes and lessons learned.

What made the session special was the conversation. Before the event, we asked our biomass partners to share their own projects, funding opportunities, successes, and lessons learned. This dialogue format took pressure off the speakers and brought in voices from across the room from the director of Rural and Renewable Energy at the Alaska Energy Authority to the mayors of Elim and Nenana and other community members.

The conference week also gave our staff time to meet partners in person, troubleshoot current projects, and visit the biomass systems of the Nenana Tribe and the City of Nenana.

What's next: we are following up on the action steps from these conversations, looking for funding sources, and planning the next biomass training.

Thank you to everyone who spoke, shared, and showed up, and to our partners at the Alaska Energy Authority, USDA Forest Service, USDA Rural Development, Denali Commission, and Alaska Division of Forestry.

Want resources from the session or to talk about your project? Contact Angie Mendbayar at (907) 322-3251 or angie@seconference.org.