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Northern Border Regional Commission Announces \$3.6 Million in Spring Awards for Forest Economy Program, New Timber for Transit Program

The Northern Border Regional Commission (NBRC) approved over **\$3.6 Million** in new awards to three projects as part of the Forest Economy Program and new Timber for Transit Program. These projects fall within the Spring Round of awards, with a second grant round available to prospective applicants in Fall 2024.

Now in its fifth year of funding, the Commission's Forest Economy Program supports the regional forest-based economy and the industry's evolution to include new technologies and viable business models across the 4-state NBRC region of Maine, New Hampshire, New York and Vermont.

New in 2024, the Timber for Transit Program is designed to advance the use of domestic forest products in transportation infrastructure projects across the Northern Border region, to showcase the capabilities of wood in these applications. The program seeks highly competitive projects that can demonstrate and widely promote the utility of high value forest products (e.g. glued laminated timber, cross laminated timber, composite materials, etc.) in transportation infrastructure and commit to enhancing climate resilience in rural communities.

"Forestry is a traditional heritage industry in our region, one that has shaped communities and served as a vital piece of the economy. These awards demonstrate the type of innovation that will define the forest products industry in the coming years," said **Chris Saunders, Federal Co-Chair of the NBRC**. "We are particularly excited to debut our inaugural Timber for Transit awards which have the potential to foster new markets and economic opportunities."

Forest Economy Program funding was awarded to the following organization:

- **University of Maine System – Orono Campus (ME) - \$1,000,000:** This project will create capabilities for pilot-scale biochar production, pretreatment, and testing within UMaine's Forest Bioproducts Research Institute (FBRI) to support the growing biochar production industry in the Northern Border Region.

"We are excited to receive this funding from the NBRC which will enhance the UMaine Forest Bioproducts Research Institute's (FBRI) biomass and biochar testing and analytical capabilities, enabling us to offer top-quality, certified services to the forestry industry in the Northern Border Region and beyond," said **Clayton Wheeler, Director of the FBRI**.

“Renewable, sustainable biochar is an important new resource with emerging manufacturers in our region which will have a significant, positive economic impact. We anticipate this investment will lead to the establishment of a biochar consortium to expedite further technology commercialization and foster economic growth.”

The first awards made through the new Timber for Transit Program are:

- **Patrick Leahy Burlington International Airport (VT) - \$1,778,400:** The North Concourse Replacement Project (Project NexT) includes new concourse replacement, four new aircraft gate replacements, four new passenger boarding bridge replacements, new passenger circulation, and hold room space. A standout feature of the building's design is its employment of mass timber framing, structure, and maple ceilings, effectively reducing the embodied carbon footprint of the construction.

“We are proud to make mass timber a central feature of Project NexT, the largest initiative in airport history utilizing mass timber, geothermal energy, and solar power to heat, cool, and operate the new terminal. Our commitment to environmental stewardship is exemplified by this project and supported by this invaluable partnership with the NBRC and this new grant. At the Patrick Leahy Burlington International Airport, sustainability soars to new heights,” said **Nic Longo, Director of Aviation for Leahy BTV.**

- **Southwest Region Planning Commission (NH) - \$911,393:** The proposed project will assess the feasibility of meeting a variety of rural transportation infrastructure needs with innovative timber products sourced from regionally available tree species. The project focuses on overcoming challenges and building on opportunities specific to transportation infrastructure in Cheshire County, NH.

“The Timber for Transit Program will help turn two challenges into a solution,” said **Southwest Region Planning Commission Executive Director Todd Horner.** “On one hand, rural communities in Cheshire County have transportation infrastructure needs, with deteriorating bridges high on the list of priorities. On the other hand, there are gaps in the regional timber economy that prevent the use of local species in engineered wood products, which are emerging as a key sustainable building material of the future. This project will help bridge the gap between these two issues to cultivate the market for locally sourced engineered wood.”

The funds for these programs, and all NBRC programs, are available thanks to the support of the Congressional Delegations of all four NBRC states: Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont.

A second round of applications will be solicited in the fall of 2024. Please refer to the NBRC's website, www.nbrc.gov, for additional announcements about the Forest Economy Program, Timber for Transit Program, and other funding opportunities.

About the Northern Border Regional Commission (www.nbrc.gov)

Created in 2008, the Northern Border Regional Commission is a federal-state partnership whose mission is to catalyze community vitality and economic prosperity in Maine, New Hampshire, New York, and Vermont through flexible funding and strategic support.