

What's all this about biobased products?

Do you know what a biobased product is? You need to learn because all Federal agencies will be required to purchase them.

The Farm Security and Rural Investment Act mandated the adoption of a Federal Biobased Products Preferred Procurement Program, which requires all federal agencies to develop an affirmative procurement program for purchasing USDA-designated biobased products. Products classified as biobased are those commercial and industrial non-food products that are made up, in whole or a significant part, of biological and/or renewable domestic agricultural or forestry materials.

One biobased product that is currently used by the Forest Service is a wood composite product called Altree™, which is used to make road, recreation, and trail signs. Altree™ is noncorrosive, insect and mold resistant, nontoxic, and stable in all weather conditions. The product is made from small-diameter pine or juniper trees combined with recycled plastic milk containers. Altree™ was developed by P&M Signs, Inc., (www.pmsignsinc.com) in Mountainair, NM, in collaboration with the Forest Products Laboratory and other groups and is on GSA contract.

Recreation Technician Phil Bono, Six Rivers National Forest, and Vicky Estrada, District Ranger, Mountainair Ranger District, actively use Altree™ products. Estrada says that “We have used Altree™ for the past 3 years. P&M Signs has always been very responsive to all our sign requests, completing and delivering on time, and has been an extraordinary partner with the District in developing uses for our small-diameter juniper and ponderosa pine trees. Altree™ has proven to be resistant to weather, gun shots, and porcupines.”

Another biobased product frequently used by the Forest Service is ElWd™ (pronounced el-wood), made by Forest Concepts, LLC, (www.elwdsystems.com) in Federal Way, WA. Forest Concepts develops, manufactures, and markets innovative products, such as ElWd™, from small-diameter wood for habitat enhancement, erosion control, and water restoration. ElWd™ structures can be built almost anywhere using simple tooling, assembled by untrained volunteers, and it decays naturally in the environment.

Fisheries Biologist Jerry Edde on the Ottawa National Forest says he has had several years of experience using ElWd™ and he likes the biobased product. “We plan to use it even more widely in the future after our Wild and Scenic River Plans are completed.”

Increased use of biobased products will create a new source of product demand for farms, ranches, and forests. It is expected that the market, within a few years, could be worth several billions of dollars for manufacturers and vendors.

For additional information on the biobased product program, contact USDA Mike Green (OPPM) at (202) 720-7921 or visit the Biobased Products Initiative Web site at <http://www.biobased.oce.usda.gov/public/index.cfm>.