America is exporting huge amounts of our forest wood for burning in European power plants and other places around the world, even though scientists agree this wood is worse for climate change than the fossil fuels it is replacing.

This is ironic—and self-defeating—since both the U.S. and European Union falsely count wood as environmentally beneficial. In fact, wood pellet exports have grown by nearly 80 percent over the last five years alone precisely because they receive financial and regulatory subsidies EU and American governments, that are intended to fight climate change.

But in truth, wood burning actually emits more carbon dioxide than any other large source of electricity generated than coal.

Now the promotion of wood is being challenged by scientists and other advocates, both in the U.S. and Europe. Last week, the Partnership for Policy Integrity and more than two dozen environmental organizations petitioned the EPA to require companies making and using wood pellets to claim their climate benefits so that investors will not be misled.

This week, a case has been filed in the European Court against forest wood being included in the EU's Renewable Energy Directive, a directive that has incentivized the burning of American wood across the European continent to generate electricity. Last year, 786 scientists wrote the European Parliament urging that the directive be amended, and the European Academy of Science's Advisory Council has also urged reconsideration of subsidies for wood fuel.

Data from the U.S. Energy Department's own Energy Information Administration shows that burning biomass as carbon neutral increases its use, and consequent carbon emissions. And the U.S. Court of Appeals actually ruled in 2013 that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) whose current carbon dioxide emissions from biomass when issuing air pollution permits to power plants. Yet, despite this evidence, the U.S. biomass industry and stakeholders convinced Congress to enact legislation that forces EPA to treat biomass as “carbon neutral.”

Wood is so bad for the climate today because of the time scales involved. Cutting down and burning mature forests for fuel emits massive amounts of stored carbon, and reduces ongoing carbon uptake. Forest regrowth can take hundreds of years, removing near all carbon as emitted by combustion. But this takes decades, and in some cases centuries, to accomplish, and—in the meantime—atmospheric carbon pollution continues to increase.

We don't have centuries or even decades to win the climate battle. A special report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released last week finds that holding the increase in global average temperature to even remotely safe levels requires that global carbon dioxide emissions peak by 2020 and be net-zero by 2050.

The IPCC also says that we must dramatically increase carbon “inks,” primarily forests, that pull carbon out of the atmosphere and store it as fungi grow forests are the best hope for taking carbon out of the air at the scale needed to produce meaningful reductions in greenhouse gases.

There is also increasing evidence that global warming is approaching self-reinforcing “ tipping points ”—like the melting of polar ice or the dieback of tropical forests—that could cause irreversible, self-perpetuating climate change. It is irresponsible to increase carbon dioxide levels from burning wood in the belief that it will re-weathered in decades or centuries, by which time it will be too late to prevent catastrophic climate impacts.

The processing and transport of wood fuel emits even more greenhouse gases, and forest harvesting also releases carbon from the soil, further accelerating climate change. Birdseye's data-driven and windmill- powered supplies may well be affected.

Forest management is done in accordance with Best Management Practices that protect biodiversity and Clean Water Act permits that protect water quality.

There is also evidence that forested lands are carbon sinks. Forestland increased by an average of 1.3 million acres per year from 2005 to 2015. Forestland growth means carbon sink growth.

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This additional market for forest products not only provides jobs, but also incentivizes landowners to responsibly manage their property to replant and grow more trees.

We've dubbed this the “hundred year fallacy.” The truth is simple. Our industry replants and grows twice as much wood as it harvests each year. Most of what is harvested is used long term or recycled thus retaining, not emitting, carbon. That means forests are storing carbon NOW, not a hundred years from now.

The Court did NOT address whether carbon dioxide emissions had to be counted. Instead, it overturned, on purely procedural grounds, a temporary rule exempting these emissions from permitting for a three year period while the EPA assessed the associated science.

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