Speakers, Presenters & Moderators

Dennis R. Becker, Policy Analysis Group, University of Idaho Department of Natural Resource & Society – Dr. Dennis Becker is the Director of the Policy Analysis Group and Associate Professor in the Department of Natural Resource & Society at the University of Idaho. He received a Ph.D. in Natural Resource Sciences from the University of Idaho in 2002, was a Resources For the Future Fellow, and a Fulbright Fellow. Dr. Becker’s research focuses on policy development, evaluation, and analysis of social and economic impacts in the areas of forest management, bioenergy, carbon accounting, and related natural resource topics. He conducts policy analysis for various congressional, legislative, agency, and stakeholder inquiries in the U.S. and abroad.

Rick Brenneman, Idaho RC&D – Rick has over 40 years of experience in the wood products industry. He holds a degree in Business Administration with a Minor in Forestry from Central Michigan University. Prior to his retirement, he worked in forestry, manufacturing production, and distribution for Weyerhaeuser Company. Post-retirement, he has worked for Log Home Manufacturing, Western Canadian Cedar Export and the Idaho Woody Biomass Partnership.

Randy Brooks, University of Idaho College of Natural Resources – Randy Brooks is Professor and Extension Forestry Specialist at the University of Idaho College of Natural Resources. Randy has a PhD in Forest Science from Michigan Technological University. Research interests include forest biomass utilization, biofuels, water quality and forest operations. He has numerous publications, invited presentations, and courses taught.

Ben Rothfuss Dair, Sustainable Northwest – Ben is Senior Manager of Conservation Finance, and works across Sustainable Northwest’s Forest, Energy, and Green Markets program areas to increase the funding available to conservation projects by delivering analytical support and business services to partners. Prior to Sustainable Northwest, Benjamin conducted market and logistics risk assessments for an international timber investor, wrote feasibility studies on sustainable project finance for WWF Vietnam, and consulted to the Energy and Resources Institute of North America on a turnaround strategy for a tropical hardwood timber operation. Ben is a graduate of the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies and is a candidate for certification as a Chartered Financial Analyst.
David Drinkard, PE, PMP, Ag Energy Solutions – David Drinkard is Chief Executive Officer of Ag Energy, an Ag Tech company that has developed a mobile gasification system to produce biochar branded “Carbon Logic”™. Mr. Drinkard’s previous position was with Parker Hannifin as the Thermal Management Product Development Team Lead and site lead. Prior, Mr. Drinkard was Director of Product Development at Isothermal Systems Research, where he led cross functional teams and grew sales of aerospace product line over the course of 13 years. Mr. Drinkard started his career as a Mechanical Engineer and Integrated Product Team Lead for 15 years at Boeing, designing complex aircraft systems. Mr. Drinkard received his Bachelor’s in Mechanical Engineering from Gonzaga University, and is certified in Project Management.

Jim Elbin, Idaho Department of Lands – Jim is Forest Management Bureau Chief of Idaho Department of Lands (IDL) where he oversees policy and procedures and state management of endowment lands, and also provides the structure for the new Good Neighbor Authority program being built by the state. Previously, Jim worked as the IDL Silviculturist and Forest Management Program Manager for four years. He started working with IDL in 2001 out of the Southwest Office, later became a full-time forester at the Maggie Creek Office in Kamiah, and then a Resource Supervisor. Jim earned a B.S. of Forest Resources from University of Idaho.

Scott Godfrey, Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, USDA Forest Service – Scott is Vegetation and Stewardship Staff Officer where he manages the timber, silviculture, National Environmental Policy Act and GIS functional programs for the Nez-Perce Clearwater National Forests. Prior to this position, he worked as the Forest Timber Management Officer on the Nez Perce and Clearwater National Forests until 2016 and as the Timber Management Assistant on the Emmett Ranger District through 2006. Scott has 28 years of experience with the Forest Service which started with work on a seasonal timber crew, to lead timber sale preparation in Alaska and as a district forester in Colorado. Scott received two Bachelor of Science degrees in Aquatic Resources and Natural Resource Management and Development from Sheldon Jackson College in Sitka, Alaska.

Andrew Haden, Wisewood Energy – Andrew is the founder and president of Wisewood Energy and has over 12 years of experience in the biomass industry. He’s led the development and implementation of numerous biomass energy projects across the West and is considered one of the nation’s foremost experts in biomass systems and technology. He is the lead designer for all Wisewood Energy projects. Prior to founding the company, Andrew worked at Bear Mountain Forest Products and Ecotrust. Andrew holds a master’s degree in rural development from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and a bachelor’s in sustainable agriculture from The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington.

Jenny Hemly, Idaho Department of Commerce – Jenny is Business Retention & Expansion Specialist with Idaho Commerce where she has worked for three years. She works with businesses and communities to assist with their economic development plans and to help address any issues to growth they might be experiencing. Prior to Idaho Commerce, she worked at Idaho Department of Labor for 13 years where she managed re-training programs, including Workforce Development Training Funds. She is a graduate of the Northwest Economic Development Course, and the University of Idaho.
Gerry Ikola, Ikola Logging – Gerry has worked in the wood products industry for over 40 years and is currently President and General Manager of Ikola Logging, in McCall, Idaho. The family business has been actively logging in Central Idaho for 70 years. After graduating from Idaho State University with a Bachelor of Science in Business Management and Organization in 1970, Gerry returned to McCall and to his family’s logging business. With all the recent attention on woody biomass utilization, they have started a chipping business, which has been very productive since 2010. Gerry is a strong believer in proactive efforts to educate and inform the public about the forest products industry. Gerry was on the Board of Directors of the Intermountain Logging Conference for 15 years and served as president in 2000. He is a long time member of the Board of Directors of the Associated Logging Contractors, currently serving as president, and has been a member of the Idaho Forest Products Commission since 2003. Since 2008, he has been a member of the Idaho State Board of Scaling Practices.

Julie Kies, Northern and Intermountain Regions, USDA Forest Service – Julie is Wood & Biomass Utilization Coordinator and provides assistance and project support to facilitate and promote wood and biomass product manufacturing and use throughout the states of Montana, Idaho, Utah, Nevada, North Dakota and Western Wyoming. Prior to joining the Forest Service in 2016, Julie managed the forest products and biomass program for the state of Montana where she assisted with the development of several small-scale wood biomass energy projects and lead the Montana Wood Energy Team and wood promotion initiatives focused on bolstering wood-based businesses and markets, and enhancing awareness of the benefits of wood as a responsible choice. She holds a Bachelor’s of Science in Resource Conservation from the University of Montana.

Rodney Krogh, Evergreen Forest Products

Mac Lefebvre, Idaho Forest Group – Mac Lefebvre is a Log Procurement Forester for Idaho Forest Group-Grangeville, a purchaser on the Boise, Payette, and Nez Clearwater National Forests. Upon graduating from the University of Idaho School of Forestry, Mac worked for Boise Cascade as a Fee Land Forester at multiple locations, finishing with Boise Cascade at Cascade, ID. In 2005, he joined the IFG team to help source the new sawmill in Grangeville. Mac sits on the Steering Team of the Payette Forest Coalition, where he enjoys engaging with multiple stakeholders to create more resilient forests and enhancing rural Idaho communities. A fourth generation timber industry worker, Mac sees great potential for the timber industry in Idaho for years to come.

Eini Lowell, Pacific Northwest Research Station, Portland Forestry Sciences Laboratory, USDA Forest Service – Eini Lowell is a Research Scientist and earned a B.S. in forestry, with a wood science and technology emphasis from the University of Maine at Orono, and an M.S. in forest products from Oregon State University. She worked for the state of Maine’s forest products marketing program, ran her own consulting business, and conducted wood quality research at the Department of Forest Products at Oregon State University before joining the Forest Service’s Pacific Northwest Research Station in 1990 as a Research Scientist. She has been involved with wood quality and wood utilization for 30 years, addressing deterioration and utilization of dead and dying trees, utilization of hardwoods, and rural market opportunities for biomass and small diameter trees.
Armando McDonald, University of Idaho College of Natural Resources – Armando is a Professor of Renewable Materials in the Department of Forest, Rangeland and Fire Science at University of Idaho (UI) with over 32 years in bioproducts and biomaterials research and development. Armando came to UI in 2001 from New Zealand Forest Research, where he was a Group Leader of the Materials Discovery group. At UI, he teaches classes in Biocomposites, Biomass chemistry, and Bioproducts and Bioprocess Development. Dr. McDonalds’ group is currently investigating: bioplastics from lignin and other waste streams, biofuels from pyrolysis of biomass, development of nanostructured Fischer-Tropsch catalysts for production of fuels, biocomposites, algae conversion to fuels, biomass conversion into chemicals, and natural products chemistry. Dr. McDonald also works with industry on projects ranging from service work to product development projects.

Rich McMillan, Potlatch – Rich is Clearwater District Forester where he is responsible for all forest operations on 225,000 acres of Potlatch-owned land located near Headquarters, Idaho. He has been employed with Potlatch since 2001, and worked previously for Westvaco, Boise Cascade and US Timberlands Company. Rich is a graduate of the University of Idaho.

Stephanie Nelson, Wildfire Prevention Associates – Stephanie holds a degree in Economics from California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo. She began her career in the oil industry managing bunker fuel sales at the Port of Long Beach, then the Santa Barbara area managing corporate incentive programs. In 1998, she began working for Boise Cascade in the Forestry Division, eventually managing the GIS program for the Idaho Lands. In 2006, she supervised her first hazard fuels treatment project in the Bear Basin area. Over the past eleven years she has worked with Valley County to create a paradigm shift for landowners living with wildfire. She has successfully secured funding for numerous landscape scale restoration projects and is the Facilitator for the Valley County Fire Working Group. In 2016, with funding from the Idaho Department of Lands in cooperation with the USDA Forest Service, she and multiple partners created a Valley County Biomass Campus Study.

Quang Nguyen, Biomass Feedstock National User Facility, Idaho National Lab – Quang Nguyen has over 35 years of experience in R&D, process design, start-up and operation of biomass ethanol plants. Currently, he is the Director of the Biomass Feedstock National User Facility located at Idaho National Laboratory. Before coming to INL in 2016, he spent 14 years working at Abengoa, preceded by nine years at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. He graduated with bachelor and master degrees in chemical engineering and a M.B.A from the University of Ottawa. Quang is familiar with the many challenges in biomass handling and preprocessing that have caused long start-up time and low throughput of pioneer biorefineries. At INL, he oversees the pilot demonstration of advanced feedstock preprocessing processes to improve the operability and reliability of biorefinery operation.

Michelle Noordam, USDA Rural Development – Michelle is a Business Programs Specialist for USDA Rural Development. USDA Rural Development has multiple programs to assist businesses, municipalities, tribes and non-profits to benefit Rural America. Rural Development offers Business and Industry Guarantee Loans to encourage the commercial financing of rural businesses; Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) loans and grants to small businesses and agricultural producers for various qualifying renewable energy projects; Community Facilities loan program to aid communities in financing public facilities and equipment. Michelle has been
with the Agency for 15 years and has been in her current position for 3 years. Prior to working for USDA, Michelle was an adjunct instructor at North Idaho College, Business and Professional Programs Department. She also spent a few years working for the Latah Soil and Water Conservation District. Michelle attended the University of Idaho, where she earned undergraduate degrees in Accounting and Agribusiness and a Master’s degree in Agricultural Economics.

Robert K. Shaw, Emmett Sawmill – Robert is General Manager of Woodgrain Millwork at Emmett Sawmill, and has over 45 years of experience in wood products in both the primary and secondary sides of the business from the factory floor to corporate headquarters. He has held the roles of: Dry Kiln Manager – Boise Cascade, Emmett; Total Quality Manager – Boise Cascade, Idaho Region; Sawmill Superintendent – Boise Cascade, Cascade; Quality Manager – LP Meridian; Continuous Improvement Manager – LP Meridian; Corporate Director of Continuous Improvement – Woodgrain Millwork; Lean / Six Sigma Black Belt – LP Meridian; Plant Manager – Woodgrain Doors, Nampa. Bob’s experiences have given him an in-depth understanding of the integration from the forest to the finished products. In his current role, he is overseeing the upgrade of the Emmett sawmill, updating the mill to cutting edge technology.

Randy Shroll, Idaho Department of Commerce – Randy is Senior Economic Development Specialist for Idaho Department of Commerce and his responsibilities include Business Retention and Expansion and the Idaho Economic Development Rural Professionals Program (a program of state funding for 19 ED Professionals in rural communities statewide). He works with economic development professionals, city and county elected officials to carry out their plans for economic growth and vitality. He also manages the procedure for the state allocation of tax exempt bonds to finance qualified projects and programs as allowed by the Internal Revenue Service. Randy has been with Commerce 30 years and in 2016 received the Idaho Economic Development Association’s Bob Potter Award for Excellence in Economic Development. He is a graduate of The Economic Development Institute and a Certified Economic Developer (CED), certified by the International Economic Development Council. Prior to joining the state Randy was an Assistant Vice President, Southwest Division Marketing Manager with First Security Bank of Idaho (now Wells Fargo). He is a graduate of Boise State University and an Idaho native.

Chris St. Germaine, Clearwater County Economic Development – Christina St Germaine holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from the University of Minnesota. After fifteen years in the field, working to better mother nature, she made a career switch to better the region’s communities as an economic development professional. Chris has worked to expand telecommunications capacity across the region, provided business expansion and retention resources, built entrepreneurial development efforts, and written grants to bolster community infrastructure. She has lived and worked in the Clearwater Mountains of Idaho since 1990. She has worked for/with federal, state, county, city and tribal governments and private sector partnerships. Chris’s professional life is driven by forming proactive partnerships that leverage resources to meet identified needs.

Mike Sterling, Parma Post & Pole