

Letter to the editor

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(Photo: File)

Energy industry should embrace all sources of alternative energy

The Obama administration's "Clean Power Plan" is designed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions by 32 percent of 2005 levels by 2030 and poses a substantial challenge to the energy sector, particularly where coal is the primary fuel. Topping the list of alternative, renewable sources of energy are wind and solar.

Solar energy brings to mind either rows of static photovoltaic panels or rows of living photosynthetic plants, each of which reduces carbon emissions: photovoltaic panels because they emit no gas, and photosynthetic plants because the carbon dioxide they release upon combustion is balanced by the carbon dioxide they consume through growth and the biosynthesis of fuel.

Louisiana and much of the South is amenable to both types of solar capture, but its climate and access to water make it particularly well-suited to the cultivation of energy crops. The Chinese tallow tree, because of its robust growth and energy-rich content of its abundant seeds, is a prime contender. While condemned by some

because it can be invasive when not properly contained, this tree is an ideal choice as an alternative, renewable source of fuel for the production of electricity.

Unlike manufactured panels, the energy-producing apparatus of the Chinese tallow tree is self-replicating and never needs to be repaired. Moreover, employing this alternative, solid fuel source in existing coal-fired plants would greatly extend the useable lifetime of those facilities. Clearly, tallowfuel is well-positioned for supplementing and ultimately replacing coal inasmuch as government mandates will be curbing the use of coal for generating electricity, and coal's finite reserves will eventually decline, making the cost of production economically unsustainable.

It is incumbent upon the energy industry to embrace all forms of alternative energy sources. Planning now for mass cultivation of sustainable, renewable energy orchards stocked with Chinese tallow trees will help insure that future generations will have ample access to electricity.

— Carl Bernofsky

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