

# White House rejects biomass as carbon neutral

By [Robert Walton](#) Utility Dive, | July 2, 2015



## Dive Brief:

- The White House has issued a [policy statement](#) declaring its strong opposition to a House measure it believes would undermine President Obama's ability to put environmental reforms in place, and specifically rejecting calls to declare biomass fuels as “carbon neutral.”
- Several studies, as well as the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, have determined that biomass fuel does indeed contribute to greenhouse gases, though proponents say replenishing forests diminishes the impact.
- [HR 2822](#), an appropriations bill, would “drastically” underfund core Department of the Interior programs and the EPA's operating budget, the White House said.

## Dive Insight:

In a lengthy policy statement rejecting House Republican efforts at dismantling carbon reform, the White House has categorically rejected biomass fuels as carbon neutral, saying the idea flies in the face of sound science. HR 2822 would label biomass as a renewable source, at least in part because forests are being replaced quickly.

“The Administration objects to the bill's representation of forest biomass as categorically 'carbon-neutral,’” the White House said in the statement. “This language conflicts with existing EPA policies on biogenic CO<sub>2</sub> and interferes with the position of States that do not apply the same policies to forest biomass as other renewable fuels like solar or wind.”

The Energy Collective has published analysis by Jonathan Lewis, an attorney and climate specialist with the Clean Air Task Force, who called the statement a wise decision.

Both the House bill, and a similar Senate measure, indicate burning trees in power plants does not boost CO<sub>2</sub> levels in the atmosphere if growth rate of U.S. forests exceeds the rate at which they're cut. “But scientists have repeatedly demonstrated that burning biomass does increase atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentrations,” Lewis writes.

“When a power plant burns woody biomass, it emits more CO<sub>2</sub> per kilowatt generated than it would if it were burning coal instead,” he explained. “Biomass proponents argue that the CO<sub>2</sub> is reabsorbed as the harvested forest regrows, but aside from being highly uncertain, the regrowth

process takes many decades — during which time the additional CO2 emissions causes additional warming.”

## **Recommended Reading**

The Energy Collective: [White House Wisely Rejects the 'Categorical Carbon Neutrality' of Biomass, But What Now?](#)