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BUSINESS

Japan Eyes 'Energy Forests' For Biomass Power Generation

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As part of efforts to shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy, the Japanese government is considering securing “energy forests” for the specific purpose of growing sources for woody biomass power generation, officials have said.

Greater dependence on woody biomass is believed to help mitigate climate change as the growing of forests absorbs carbon dioxide through photosynthesis and the use of renewable wood raw materials, as a replacement for fossil fuel products, reduces the volume of new CO₂ that would otherwise be released into the atmosphere.

At present, Japan uses biomass fuel derived from the thinning of forests and from branches removed in preparing lumber for building materials. Exclusively using a forest to grow woody biomass fuel is expected to cut labor and other costs by one-third as the work of thinning forests will become unnecessary, the officials said.

Forest biomass power generation would also boost resource-poor Japan’s energy self-sufficiency and help ensure a stable electricity supply in times of natural disasters and other emergencies, they said.

Moreover, it was stated that fast-growing trees can be grown and shipped in a relatively short period of time and could produce 2.5 times the yield of Japanese cedar, which is generally used as a building material.

In July, the Agency for Natural Resources and Energy and the Forestry Agency jointly set up an expert group to explore the feasibility of the woody biomass power generation project. It will study the issue in light of the need for forest conservation, the officials said.

Ensuring sustainable forest management through reforestation remains a challenge. The two government agencies say the project could be a new source of income for forest businesses and enable forestry and power industries “to co-exist in a sustainable manner.”

Japan currently depends on renewable energy sources such as solar and wind power to generate 17 percent of its electricity. The government has set a target of lifting the ratio of renewable energy to around 22 to 24 percent of its electricity by March 2031.



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A signatory to the 2015 Paris climate accord, Japan is targeting a 26 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by fiscal 2030 from fiscal 2013 levels, but is facing calls to set a more ambitious goal.

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