



March 12, 2012

NR12023

# News Release

Contact:  
**Karen Gonya**  
Development and  
College Relations Office  
33 Edgemont Drive  
Presque Isle, ME 04769  
Phone: (207) 768-2809  
Fax: (207) 760-1101  
kgonya@nmcc.edu

## NMCC hosts Focus the Nation 2.0: Biomass and Beyond

**Aroostook County** - For the second year in a row the current status and future development of alternative energy in Maine was center stage at a forum hosted by students at Northern Maine Community College. “FTN 2.0 Biomass and Beyond” took place on the NMCC campus Wednesday, March 7.

The day-long conference had over 100 people in attendance and featured a variety of members from within the energy sector brought together to discuss the impact of alternative energy development within Maine. The forum featured speakers Gerry Chasse, president and chief operating officer of Bangor Hydro, and Dr. William Strauss, president and founder of FutureMetrics, LLC and director of Maine Energy Systems. Each offered a perspective on the future of alternative energy.

Chasse profiled the developments of some of the roadblocks and possible solutions identified since a similar event held a year ago at NMCC, particularly relating to the progress of the ‘connector’ which would allow for the inclusion of northern Maine with the New England power grid. Chasse spoke on the importance of advancing SmartGrid technology not only to aid in further development of the project but also as a way of helping Mainers reduce future energy costs.

The remainder of the conference, as the title suggests, looked at the emerging biomass energy industry that has advanced significantly in recent years, particularly in northern Maine. Strauss shared his findings on the economic impact and viability of biomass energy production, with special focus on Maine. He also shared his insight and research at conferences in Europe and on the west coast of the United States.

“All areas of alternative energy, in particular the use biomass, is growing rapidly, and we felt it was important for both students as well as the community to host an event that would bring everyone together to discuss the advancements that are affecting our region and well as the State,” said Focus organizer Natalie St. Pierre. “Forums like these allow students the opportunity to assume a leadership role by being responsible for all major aspects of the forum, leaving us with a feeling that we are truly working to affect change in northern Maine.”

The afternoon featured a panel discussion with four statewide advocates of alternative energy: Todd J. Griset, an attorney with the PretiFlaherty law firm's energy and telecommunications group based in Portland; Andrew Plant with the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, who has been researching liquid and solid biofuel for farmers; Thomas Wood, senior planner for the Maine Forest Service Department of Conservation, who is responsible for grants for biomass projects awarded in the state; and Robert Dorsey, president and CEO for Aroostook Partnership for Progress, which leads the Mobilize Northern Maine initiative. They, along with the featured speakers, created an interactive dialogue with conference participants by answering attendees' questions moderated by Virginia Joles, director of communications and economic development at Maine Public Service Company.

#####



*NMCC hosted the Focus the Nation 2.0: Biomass and Beyond forum on March 7. Student organizers (seated from left): Gene Martin, Natalie St. Pierre, Nathan Woods, and Jessica Ouellette. Playing key roles in the day's event were (standing from left): Virginia Joles, moderator; panelists Robert Dorsey, Andrew Plant, Todd Griset, and Thomas Wood; featured speakers Dr. William Strauss and Gerry Chasse; and Timothy Crowley, NMCC President.*