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## **US Senate Majority Leader Reid Introduces "WECHAR" Bill to Develop Biochar Technology**

*Contact: Thayer Tomlinson, IBI Communications Director, 914-693-0496 or Kelpie Wilson, IBI Communications Editor, 541-592-3083*

On Thursday, September 24, 2009, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada, and four cosponsors (Senators Max Baucus and John Tester of Montana, Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, and Senator Tom Udall of New Mexico), introduced the "Water Efficiency via Carbon Harvesting and Restoration (WECHAR) Act of 2009."

The WECHAR Act is one of several exciting new initiatives worldwide that are moving biochar closer to active deployment as a powerful climate mitigation tool capable of removing gigatons of CO<sub>2</sub> from the atmosphere over time.

What is biochar? Biochar is a specific form of charred biomass material that acts as a soil conditioner, enhancing plant growth when it is returned to the soil along with other needed amendments and fertilizers. Because biochar remains for hundreds to thousands of years in soil without breaking down, it is a highly beneficial form of carbon sequestration to combat climate change.

The WECHAR Act establishes a loan guarantee program to develop biochar technology, initiates a program of biochar landscape restoration projects on public land, and authorizes a competitive grant program to fund research on biochar characteristics, impacts and economics.

The WECHAR act directs the U.S. Geological Survey to assess the amount of feedstock in the form of invasive weeds and hazardous fuels on the public lands, the amount of carbon and biochar production potential in that feedstock, and the potential for water savings if it were removed.

Senator Reid's office indicates that water savings achieved through the bill could be substantial: "The potential for millions of gallons in annual water savings from the elimination of water-robbing invasive tamarisk will be particularly meaningful in Nevada. Elimination of this scourge in our watersheds can offset a significant portion of our water needs."

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IBI Executive Director, Debbie Reed, said, "The survey and assessment by USGS of carbon in these feedstocks will be an important first step to help set carbon accounting standards for including biochar as a credited carbon emissions reduction activity."

By using Western invasive weeds and shrubs and dangerous fuel loads as feedstock for biochar production, the bill seeks to match undesirable material that would otherwise be expensive to eliminate with a process that requires a source of woody material to make valuable products and provide critical ecosystem services like carbon sequestration.

"When biochar is made from invasive weeds and shrubs and from woody material that needs to be removed for ecosystem health," said Reed, "there is no competition with land to grow crops for food or fuel."

In the international policy arena, IBI just held a successful side event on biochar at the UNCCD (UN Convention to Combat Desertification) COP9 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Presentations critically evaluated biochar systems that generate multiple value streams for improving livelihoods in degraded and desertified lands and also provided a broad overview and introduction into the opportunities and constraints of the potential of biochar for drylands.

The recently released UNEP Climate Change Science Compendium has highlighted biochar as "an innovative approach to soil carbon sequestration" that "may offer a low-risk and very efficient way to mitigate climate change and replenish soil fertility." To read this section, please see: [http://www.unep.org/compendium2009/PDF/Ch5\\_compendium2009.pdf](http://www.unep.org/compendium2009/PDF/Ch5_compendium2009.pdf).

Finally, regional biochar groups in several countries have upcoming meetings and conferences that will continue to advance research and development of sustainable biochar systems. A Joint International Workshop between United Kingdom and China takes place on 18-20 October in Beijing. Please see the [announcement](#) for more information.

In the US, the Northeast Biochar Symposium will be held on 13 November at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. IBI Board Chairman Johannes Lehmann and IBI Executive Director Debbie Reed, will be presenting at the symposium. More info can be found [here](#).

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## More Information About Biochar

For more information about biochar, please see the [IBI website](#).

Biochar fact sheets: <http://www.biochar-international.org/publications>

Biochar Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs): <http://www.biochar-international.org/biochar/faqs>

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## WECHAR Bill Summary

Below is a summary of the WECHAR bill. The full text is [available here](#).

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# Water Efficiency via Carbon Harvesting and Restoration (WECHAR) Act of 2009

## Section-by-Section

Sec. 1. Short Title. Water Efficiency via Carbon Harvesting and Restoration Act of 2009.

Sec. 2. Findings.

Sec. 3. Definitions.

Sec. 4. Resource Assessment.

- Directs the U.S. Geological Survey to assess the amount of feedstock in the form of invasive weeds and hazardous fuels on the public lands, the amount of carbon and biochar production potential in that feedstock, and the potential for water savings if it were removed.

Sec. 5. Technology Research.

- Directs the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to develop loan guarantee programs for development of mobile and fixed but temporary biochar production technology that can be deployed in remote locations and use excess biomass as feedstock.
- Identifies that production units produced under these guarantee programs need to be primarily tasked to work with the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Forest Service on invasive tamarisk in the Mojave Desert, pinyon-juniper buildup in the Great Basin, and bark beetle-killed trees in the Intermountain West.
- Provides criteria for loan guarantee programs to ensure appropriate use and protection of funds and likelihood of success of the ventures accessing the program.

Sec. 6. Existing Technology.

- Directs the Departments of the Interior and Agriculture to develop loan guarantee programs for construction or acquisition of existing biochar production technology that can be put directly into use.
- Identifies that production units produced under these guarantee programs need to be primarily tasked to work with the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, and Forest Service on invasive tamarisk in the Mojave Desert, pinyon-juniper buildup in the Great Basin, and bark beetle-killed trees in the Intermountain West.
- Provides criteria for loan guarantee programs to ensure appropriate use and protection of funds and likelihood of success of the ventures accessing the program.

Sec. 7. Deployment.

- Directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to develop 3-year programs for use of the technology developed in section 5, and identifies that initial programs shall be carried out by the Bureau of Land Management using Great Basin excess pinyon-juniper, by the National Park Service using Mojave Desert tamarisk, and by the Forest Service using Intermountain

West bark beetle-killed trees.

- Directs the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to develop plans for use of the technology developed in section 5, and identifies that these shall use Great Basin excess pinyon-juniper, Mojave Desert tamarisk, and Intermountain West bark beetle-killed trees.

Sec. 8. Application and Market Research.

- Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to implement competitive grants programs to develop markets for biochar and bioenergy, analyze the production costs versus the economic benefits of biochar production, potential performance of biochar production in carbon sequestration programs, and compares biochar production with other biofuel production systems.
- Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to implement competitive grants programs to perform full environmental review of biochar production and use, including water savings, environmental benefits of biochar use in agricultural settings, and any potential adverse environmental impacts.
- Directs the Secretary of Agriculture to implement competitive grants programs to research and analyze potential uses for biochar in landscape restoration in different ecosystems and soil types.

Sec. 9. Authorization of Appropriations.

- Authorizes the appropriation of such funds as are necessary to carry out sections 4 through 8.
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