

## Hybrid Poplar as an Alternative Crop

Brent Cornforth, Boyd Simonson, and Loren St. John from the Aberdeen Plant Materials Center recently traveled to Ontario, Oregon to attend a Hybrid Poplar tour hosted by the Malheur County Extension Office.

Growers in Oregon, Washington and western Idaho are beginning to establish hybrid poplar plantations as an alternative crop. Hybrid poplar can be used for paper pulp, lumber and plywood, fuelwood, and in conservation plantings. Marketing studies indicate a growing demand that is greater than projected production. The strongest demand appears to be saw logs that can be processed into non-structural products such as pallets, moldings, paneling and furniture products. Poplar lumber also makes good bridge planks.

With ideal growing conditions and good cultural practices, a 20 foot saw log with 14 to 18 inch diameter can be produced in 10 years. Budget estimates using custom rates show costs of production to average about \$450 per acre per year and returns are estimated at \$10,000 per acre at the end of a 10-year growing cycle. The take home message from the tour is that a successful hybrid poplar grower must devote just as much time and effort to growing hybrid poplars as they would with any other crop.

The Plant Materials Center began evaluating hybrid poplars last year. We have tentatively identified two varieties that appear to be adapted to the climate and soils of southeastern Idaho. If you would like additional information on hybrid poplars, feel free to stop by or give us a call.

Submitted by: Loren St. John, Aberdeen PMC

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