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Gazette Times

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Recession hits tree farm sawmill

By David Sykes

The nationwide recession has hit home at the sawmill set up two years ago to saw logs from the 25,000 acre poplar tree farm near Boardman. The mill has cut back from two shifts and 105 full time employees to just one shift with 59 employees, a representative of the company told the Heppner Chamber of Commerce at its weekly meeting last Thursday.

Luke Maynard, irrigation manager at Greenwood resources, which operates the tree farm, said the cutback was necessary because of the overall recession and slowdown in the economy. The mill produces mostly boards for molding, cabinetry and furniture pieces, much of it exported to China. He said in the third quarter of this year the mill had two shifts and was operating full time but then had to cut back. The mill is capable of producing 100 million board feet per year at full production.

Maynard gave an overview to Chamber members of the tree farm, which was purchased in 2007 from the Potlatch Corp.

The tree farm irrigation system is capable of pumping 225,000 gallons of water from the Columbia River per minute to irrigate the 23,000 acres near Boardman and an additional 2,500 acres across the river in Washington. The water is delivered through a complex computerized irrigation system of canals, 100 pumps and finally into miles and miles of black drip irrigation lines. The hoses are used over and over and can last up to 25 years, Maynard says. Two years ago the company upgraded all its intake pipes to protect fish in the Columbia.

The manmade forest attracts a multitude of wildlife including coyote, deer, porcupine and cougar. Maynard said there is an estimated 600 deer on the property and one section is set aside for employee and contractor hunting. He said some animals, especially the coyote, like to chew on the drip lines. The company has also installed 150 nesting boxes for owls which prey on rodents which also chew on the lines.

The fast growing trees are planted between 145 to 290 per acre and are harvested after 12 years when they reach an average height of 110 feet. They grow an average of 10 feet in height and one inch in diameter per year. They are then taken to the mill in eight, 10 or 12 foot logs where they are cut into boards, then taken to the dry kiln on the Port of Morrow and cured with excess steam heat from the nearby gas power plant. The company plants and harvests about 600,000 trees per year.

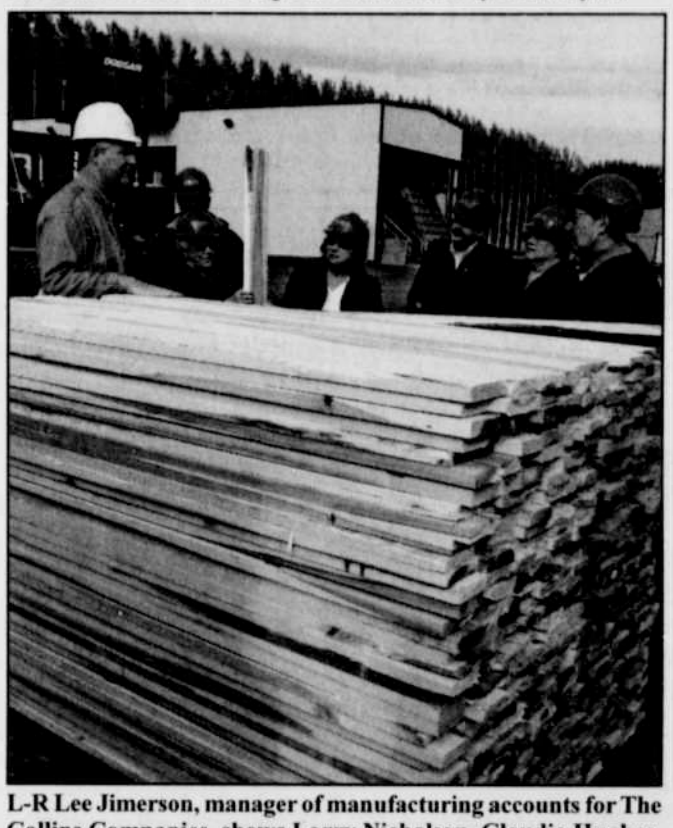
During the growth cycle the trees are pruned by hand by between six and 15 crews of 15 men each. The trees are breed to be as straight as possible with the bottoms going to the mill and the top part being chipped and sold on the chip market. About 65 percent of the tree is used for lumber. The company also plans to supply some material to the new ZeaChem ethanol plant opening soon in Boardman. Maynard also said they are testing some logs with peeling for plywood manufacturing.

Maynard said they usually have 15 to 18 different clones of the Pacific Albus poplars growing at any given time, and that they are always trying to develop new clones which grow straighter, faster and more bug resistant. He said it takes four to five years of testing to develop a new hybrid ready for production growing.

After the trees are cut down the ground is made ready again for a new crop again by mulching up any leftover material and grinding the stumps down to the ground. The irrigation line is pulled up and wrapped in coils ready to be laid again. The new trees are planted in between the last rows of trees. The stumps are not removed because in four to five years they will break down and deteriorate away, saving quite a bit on labor costs, Maynard explained.

"It's a little tough right now," Maynard said about business and the economy. "But we expect things to pick up in the future and we are in this for the long haul."

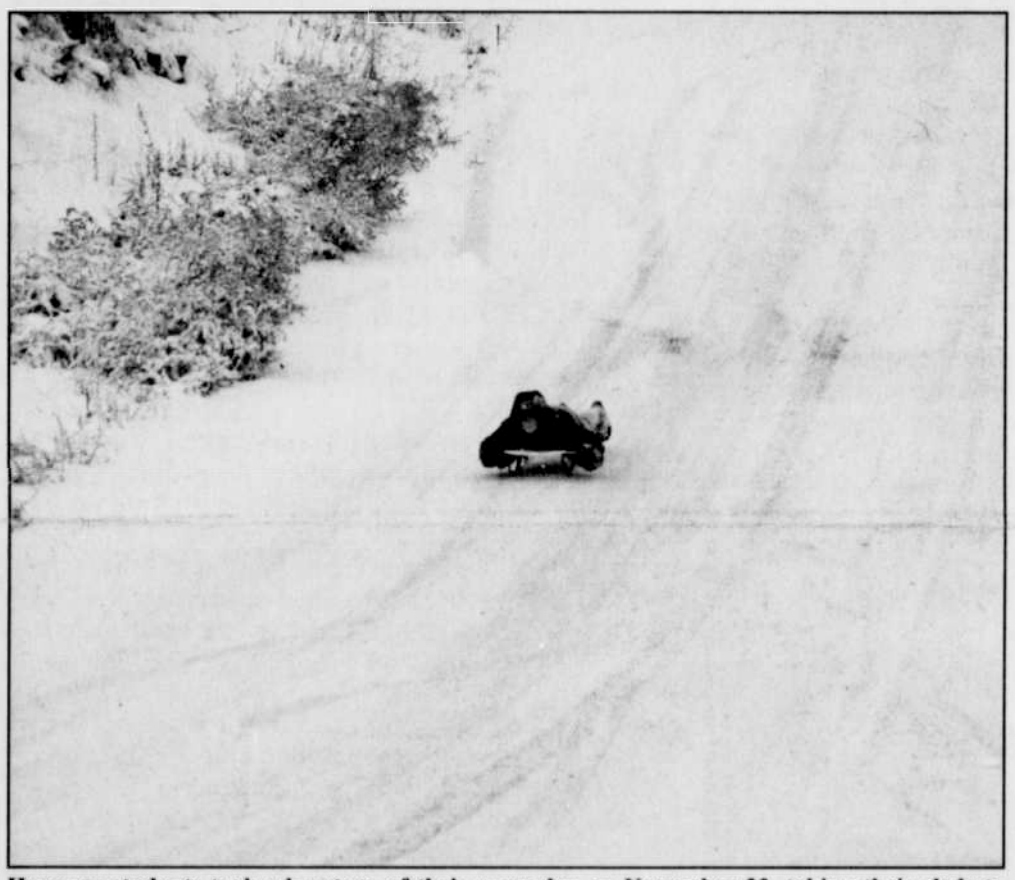
Luke Maynard, irrigation manager for Greenwood Resources, gave a presentation about progress at the Boardman tree farm and sawmill to the Heppner Chamber of Commerce last Thursday. He said the recession has hit the mill operation and they have had to cut back on production. *Photo by David Sykes*



L-R Lee Jimerson, manager of manufacturing accounts for The Collins Companies, shows Larry Nicholson, Claudia Hughes, Nancy Snider, Jeff Bailey, Sheryl Bates and Kricket Nicholson the cut Pacific Albus boards from the sawmill in Boardman. *File photo from 2008 Heppner Chamber of Commerce tour of sawmill article*

Trees are grown in straight rows with as few limbs as possible. They are cut and taken to the sawmill in 12 years. *File photo by David Sykes*

Students take to the hills



Heppner students took advantage of their snow day on November 23, taking their sleds to Water Street. *-Photo by Autumn Morgan*

Area pastors invited to submit Christmas messages

The Heppner Gazette-Times invites area pastors to submit Christmas messages to be published in the December 22 edition. The deadline is Friday, December 17, at 5 p.m.

Messages can be dropped off at the Gazette office, emailed to editor@rapidserve.net, or faxed to 541-676-9211.

Gazette-Times to close for Thanksgiving

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed on Thursday and Friday, November 25 and 26, in observance of the Thanksgiving Holiday. The office will re-open on Monday, November 29, at 9 a.m.

Arbogast, Gould fill elk tags

Cade Arbogast (left photo) and Tom Gould (right photo) filled their elk tags this hunting season. *-Contributed Photos*

Health department to conduct free flu clinic

The Morrow County Health Department will conduct a free flu clinic at Riverside High School in Boardman from 4-7:30 p.m. on December 1.

Shots will be given on a first come, first serve basis. People with no insurance or funds to pay for flu shots and would otherwise not be able to get a flu shot are encouraged to stop by and get their shot. Everyone is welcome.

For more information call the Morrow County Health Department in Heppner at 541-676-5421 or in Boardman at 541-481-4200.

Lorenz announces retirement from school district

Longtime Morrow County School District Business Manager Rhonda Lorenz recently announced her retirement. Lorenz joins district office superintendent Mark Burrows, assistant superintendent Phyllis Danielson, and Mary Kay Bellamy from accounts payable who will retire at the end of the 2010-2011 school year.

We will be closed at ALL locations
Thursday, Friday & Saturday
OPEN MONDAY FOR HOLIDAY SHOPPING
Check out our Christmas shopping flyer in this week's paper!
Morrow County Grain Growers
Greeen Feed & Seed, Heppner and MCGG, Lexington