



Poplar People Gather in the West

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The west coast of British Columbia is not generally thought of as being ‘poplar country’, yet Vancouver was the scene for 10 days in July 2014 of a series of major events which attracted poplar and willow people from around the world. The main attraction was IPS VI, the latest in an international symposium series, which was hosted by the University of British Columbia (UBC). Around that core were a number of side attractions, including the annual business meeting of the Poplar and Willow Council of Canada (PWCC) and the 47th session of the Executive Committee of the International Poplar Commission (IPC). Just across the border in Seattle, Washington, the Short Rotation Woody Crops Operations Working Group of the US held its biennial gathering just before IPS VI.

International Poplar Symposium

The series of International Poplar Symposiums, of which IPS VI is the 6th, is organized under the auspices of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) every four years. Cees van Oosten, vice-chair west of the PWCC, was the very capable leader of the organizing committee for this major international scientific conference attended by 200 participants from around the world, including 59 from Canada (Figure 1). The theme for the event – ‘Domestication of *Populus* and *Salix*: How far have we come, and how far do we have to go?’ – was explored in three days of technical sessions dealing with poplar and willow genetics, genomics, physiology, pests & pathology, environmental applications and management applications. In total, 70 oral and 127 poster presentations were given, including keynote addresses by Loren Rieseberg of UBC

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and Brian Stanton of Greenwood Resources, based in Portland, Oregon (Figure 2). The program also included many other prominent poplar and willow scientists. All the oral presentations (some in abstract form only) are available on the PWCC website at www.poplar.ca/upload/documents/ips-2014/presentations-list.pdf.



Figure 1. IPS VI participants at UBC (Photo: UBC Forestry)



Figure 2. Cees van Oosten thanks Brian Stanton following his talk (Photo: Peter McAuliffe)

At the end of the symposium, an opportunity was provided to visit the UBC Totem Field site on the campus (Figure 3). This is the location of the POPCAN *Populus trichocarpa* collection of the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and two replications of the Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada AgCanBaP balsam poplar (*P. balsamifera*) collection. POPCAN is a large-scale applied research project on the genetic improvement of poplar trees as a Canadian bioenergy feedstock funded by Genome Canada, with much of the work being done at UBC.

Two consecutive field study tours took place immediately following the Symposium. The first provided a full day of field visits to poplar plantations and natural riparian ecosystems in the Lower Fraser Valley, a region with some of the most productive agricultural land in Canada. Black cottonwood (*P. trichocarpa*) is the most prevalent indigenous poplar in this area and in plantations is commonly included as hybrids with *P. deltoides* or *P. maximowiczii* (Figure 4).

Many of the plantations were established by Kruger Products (formerly Scott Paper) which had a poplar nursery in the area (visited on the tour). With the closure of the Kruger groundwood mill in New Westminster in 2012, there is no longer a market for most of the poplar.



Figure 3. IPS VI group at UBC Totem Field (Photo: Jim Richardson)



Figure 4. Visit to 21-year-old plantation of *Populus trichocarpa* x *P. deltoides* clone TD 15-29 at MacInnes Farm, Langley (Photo: Jim Richardson)

An additional three-day field tour immediately followed the Lower Fraser Valley tour. It took 40 participants to the scenic Okanagan Valley with running commentaries on the many and varied natural ecosystems through which the tour passed. A stop was made at the Salmon Arm landfill project where recycled leachate from the municipal landfill of the town of Salmon Arm is used to irrigate a hybrid poplar plantation established on the landfill. Near Vernon, a 7 ha hybrid poplar plantation planted on farmland in 1988 by Mike Carlson of the BC Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations and irrigated since then with treated municipal wastewater was visited. The plantation was harvested in 2008, yielding 15 m³/ha/yr despite only minimal management, and is now managed as a coppice system.

Half a day was spent at the Kalamalka Forestry Centre of the BC Ministry near Vernon viewing a number of mainly softwood-oriented projects and activities, including soils and landforms of southern BC and the Okanagan Valley, selective tree breeding and seed orchard production in BC, insect and disease pests and the interior spruce genecology/climate change project. Also visited at Kalamalka was a hybrid poplar (*P. trichocarpa* x *P. deltoides*) spacing trial established in 2002 (Figure 5). Other stops included the Allan Brooks Nature Centre near Vernon, the manufacturing facility of Aspenware Inc., a company which produces single-use compostable cutlery from aspen and birch veneer, dinner at one of the Okanagan's famous wineries (Figure 6), and a charming al fresco lunch under the nut trees of the nearly 100 year old Gellatly Nut Farm Park.

A photo gallery on the PWCC website has numerous photos taken during the IPS VI field tours: www.poplar.ca/article/ips-vi-vancouver-2014-photo-gallery-159.asp.



Figure 5. Mike Carlson with 20-year-old *Populus trichocarpa* x *P. deltoides* TD 49-177 at Kalamalka Forestry Centre, Vernon (Photo: Jim Richardson)



Figure 6. Field tour group at Gray Monk Winery, Kelowna (Photo: Xudong He)

Poplar Council of Canada annual meeting

A number of important decisions were taken at the annual general meeting of the Poplar Council. Most visible and significant perhaps was the members' approval of a new name for the Council: Poplar and Willow Council of Canada - en français, Conseil canadien des peupliers et des saules. The expanded name – and an associated new logo – were adopted in recognition of the increasingly important role of willows in Canada in biomass plantations for energy and in phytoremediation. The new name and logo took effect once the name change had been approved by Corporations Canada as part of the process the Council is undergoing to conform to regulations under the new federal legislation for Not-for-profit corporations. The meeting in Vancouver approved draft 'Articles of Continuance' and a draft 'By-law Number 1', replacing the previous Council by-laws, and these were subsequently submitted to Corporations Canada in line with the new law. The Articles of Continuance have been accepted, and the website has been updated to reflect the new name.

Several important positions changed hands. Raju Soolanayakanahally (Figure 7) of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada in Indian Head, Saskatchewan was elected Chair,



Figure 7. Raju Soolanayakanahally (Photo: Jim Richardson)

replacing Barb Thomas who stepped down after five years in the position. John Doornbos of the Canadian Forest Service in Edmonton, a Past Chair, was appointed to the position of Treasurer, replacing Hamid Naeem who had resigned. Richard Krygier of the Canadian Forest Service in Edmonton replaced Cees van Oosten as chair of the Pesticide Working Group. Cees remains as a Vice-Chair of the Council. Jaconette Mirck, who has left Canada for a university appointment in Germany, resigned as chair of the Environmental Working Group. Steps are being taken to fill the vacancy.

An ad-hoc financial sub-committee which has been reviewing the financial sustainability of the Council reported to the meeting and received a number of suggestions for enhancing the long-term viability of the organization. Rick Hall, secretary-treasurer

of the Poplar Council of the US which has been inactive for a number of years, participated in the meeting as an observer and offered to encourage the members of that Council to join PWCC, which some have already done. Finally, plans for future annual meetings were discussed, and while no final decision was reached in regard to a meeting in 2015, the suggestion of a small targeted workshop in eastern Canada, probably in September, was favoured.

International Poplar Commission Executive Committee meeting



Figure 8. IPC Executive Committee meeting in Vancouver (Photo: Walter Kollert, FAO)

The Executive Committee of the International Poplar Commission, which meets every two years, held an intensive full-day session hosted by FAO at UBC immediately prior to IPS VI. The meeting was chaired by Martin Weih of Sweden and was attended by 18 participants, including, from Canada, Executive Committee members Barb Thomas and Jim Richardson, and Environmental Applications Working Party Vice-Chair Jaconette Mirck (now moved to Germany) (Figure 8). The main focus of the meeting was the challenges IPC faces in the future and the reform process which IPC, at its last Session (in Dehradun, India in 2012), agreed to embark on as a means of addressing those challenges. As a result of its deliberations, the Committee unanimously agreed to propose to the Commission a number of steps in support of the reform process:

- The thematic scope of IPC will be expanded to include other genera and species with similar attributes to poplars and willows for industrial and energy uses and environmental applications. These might include Acacia and teak, for example.
- The title of the Commission will be modified to reflect the expansion of the thematic scope, becoming 'International Commission on Poplars and Other Trees Sustaining People and the Environment'. The acronym, however, will remain 'IPC', which is well-recognized in the international forestry and agroforestry community.
- Working Parties of IPC will be restructured thematically with a view to streamlining, integrating and revitalizing them and to redesigning their mandates.

- IPC member states will be encouraged to revitalize and strengthen their national poplar commissions by implementing the IPC recommendations at the national level. The national poplar commission for Canada is PWCC, and its new, expanded name is in the spirit of these recommendations.
- Several other, more administrative, steps were also agreed, including greater support for the IPC Secretariat with increased funding from external sources.

The next full Session of IPC will take place in 2016, most likely in Berlin, Germany. The full report of the IPC Executive Committee meeting is available on the IPC website at <http://www.fao.org/forestry/ipc/69641/en/>.

Short Rotation Woody Crops Operations Working Group Conference

The Short Rotation Woody Crops Operations Working Group (SRWCOWG) held its 10th biennial conference in Washington State just before IPS VI. ‘Woody Crops: production alternatives for multiple uses’ was the theme which was demonstrated in two days of pre-conference tours in the Boardman Tree Farm and mills of Greenwood Resources in north-east Oregon. Tours were followed by two days of oral and poster presentations in downtown Seattle. Presentations are being made available through the SRWCOWG website at www.woodycrops.org/Conference Reports/.

In all, there were 12 consecutive days of poplar and willow-related events on the west coast during the latter half of July. A few individuals managed to participate in all of them. But the wealth of information presented, the variety of field sites visited and the importance of decisions made, all show that the west coast, if nothing else, provides a fertile environment for poplar people to meet, share, discuss and plan.

Save the Date:

Willow Biomass Energy Short Course

Syracuse and Ava, NY
November 18-19, 2014

Classroom and field training in sustainable production and multiple end-uses of shrub willow for heat, power and environmental benefits.

Offered by State University of New York - Environmental Sciences and Forestry

Information and registration: www.esf.edu/outreach/willow

