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Walla Walla port, Boise reach land agreement

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Port of Walla Walla and Boise Cascade White Paper have signed agreements for a two-way land deal, a port official said Wednesday.

As part of the package, the port proposes buying a 1,900-acre tree farm from the paper-making company, Boise, which in turn will acquire the former Ponderosa Fibres property from the port.

The port recently agreed to buy the defunct paper recycling mill from Walla Walla County.

The port will pay \$4 million for the land east of the Boise paper mill off Highway 12 in Wallula, said Jim Kuntz, the port's executive director. The land, which is zoned for industrial use, will help the port with recruiting new manufacturers to the area.

And Boise will shell out nearly \$2.6 million for the multi-storied building, which cost \$110 million to build 11 years ago.

The building sits on Boise land, which had been leased to the operators of the recycling mill who filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in 1999.

Boise plans to use the 80,000-square-foot building as a warehouse, said company financial manager Jim Caddey.

Port Commissioner Paul Schneidmiller said both deals will have long-term positive impacts.

The port helped put the Ponderosa property back on the county tax rolls, and the port's proposed acquisition of the Boise tree farm will create opportunities for economic development and growth in the area.

"There are few tracts of industrial zoned property like this in the state of Washington," he added.

Kuntz said the farm has significant water rights, availability of power and gas lines and capabilities for rail access. Additionally, the land's proximity to the highway will attract companies looking for large parcels of land to set up manufacturing facilities. "It gives us a distinct advantage in recruiting," he said.

He added that two companies, which he declined to identify, already have asked about the land. About 400 new jobs will be created if they move into the area, he said.

Chuck Wierman, Boise's farm manager, said the company sold the poplar tree farm because less of that type of hardwood is needed.

New machines make paper using a different wood blend, he said. And the company's 9,000-acre farm near Ice Harbor Dam can take care of all the hardwood needed in the mill.

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