

## Building a regional pipeline for natural resource careers

### AT A GLANCE

Natural Resources Workforce Exploration Day helps students discover natural resource careers close to home while supporting local employers and building a stronger rural workforce.

### The Situation

North Central Idaho's economy and communities depend heavily on forestry and associated natural resources, yet students may have limited opportunities to explore careers within these industries. Local logging contractors recognized the need to introduce young people to rewarding careers that provide competitive wages and allow families to remain in the region.

### Our Response

In 2024, local logging contractors Jesse Hunt of Jesse Hunt Logging, John Larson of M. John Larson Logging and Gerry Cox of Gerald Cox LLC brought their vision for a workforce exploration event to life. Their goal was to give students firsthand exposure to forestry, natural resources, skilled trades and other technical careers available in North Central Idaho.

University of Idaho Extension, Clearwater County, partnered with the logging contractors to expand and facilitate the event, connecting their industry-driven effort with schools, natural resource professionals, businesses and community organizations. Natural Resources Workforce Exploration Day rotates among Kamiah, Orofino and Grangeville, allowing students



Students braved the rain to discuss natural resource career opportunities with local companies and contractors.

throughout the region to explore the natural resource industries and career opportunities important to each community.

### Program Outcomes

Since its inception in 2024, Natural Resources Workforce Exploration Day has reached more than 1,023 junior high and high school students in grades 6-12 from communities throughout North Central Idaho. Participating students have come from 17 school districts spanning from Riggins to Lewiston, as well as the Idaho Youth Challenge Academy, private Christian schools, homeschool groups and other educational programs. The event hosted 350 students in 2024, 374 in 2025 and 299 in 2026.

## impact University of Idaho Extension

Students gained firsthand exposure to natural resource careers through hands-on activities, including operating log loaders and road graders and using logging simulators. They also interacted with working professionals, explored equipment and technology, and learned about education, training and employment pathways.

Anonymous post-event self-assessments showed that students found the event helpful in exploring future career opportunities. Among respondents, students rated the event an average of 7.1 out of 10 for helping them think about future jobs and careers in the region. Students also identified careers they learned about through the event, including logging, firefighting, fire control and military careers.

Of the students who reported having no plans for after high school, 40% indicated that the event helped them learn about new career options. These findings indicate that the event is expanding students' awareness of career pathways and helping them connect with opportunities available in their region.

The event also builds connections among local employers, higher education institutions, natural resource organizations and community agencies. More than 65 companies and organizations are invited to participate each year, with nearly two-thirds committing to attend. Participants represent logging, trucking, lumber mills, colleges and universities, state and federal forestry agencies, wildlife agencies, construction, equipment dealerships and businesses that support the natural resource industry.

Following each event, an article highlighted is submitted to local newspapers, generating additional interest from local companies seeking to participate in future events.



Students had the opportunity to operate logging equipment, under the careful guidance of trained operators.

### The Future

Plans are already underway for the 2027 Natural Resources Workforce Exploration Day. Jesse Hunt, John Larson and Gerry Cox remain committed to hosting the event in the region, and University of Idaho Extension, Clearwater County, remains committed to partnering with them to connect more area youth with opportunities in natural resource fields.

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

In addition to our planning partners and vendors, we thank Idaho Forest Group, University of Idaho College of Natural Resources, Nightforce Optics and the Clearwater-Lewis Farm Bureau Board for their monetary and in-kind contributions.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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