

Hundreds of panhandle loggers learn more about sustainable forestry in 2024-2025

AT A GLANCE

UI Extension helps loggers practice sustainable forestry which supports Idaho forest product companies access to markets that require certified wood products.

The Situation

Loggers are a critical link in forest management, particularly on land whose owners are less active in directly managing their property. Since most loggers work on many forest properties a year, they also provide another vehicle to communicate with a larger number of family forest owners.

Unfortunately, if communication between landowners, loggers or foresters is inadequate, the resulting harvests may not meet expectations. State forest practice laws remedy this somewhat, but they are designed to provide minimum standards. If loggers understand the “spirit of the law” in forest practice act regulations, they can often modify their activities to reach forest management goals more effectively. That is particularly critical with use of mechanized harvesting tools that give loggers more responsibility in the woods.

The more loggers know about forest management, the better they can communicate with forest owners, foresters and others involved in managing forests. Participating in education programs can simultaneously improve demand for their services and document their commitment to forest stewardship.

A growing number of forest products retailers want to sell forest products that can be certified as harvested



Loggers prepare for a stream assessment at Logger Education to Advance Professionalism (May 2005 in Coeur d'Alene).

from sustainably managed forests. The Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), the forest certification program that most Idaho mills participate in, requires loggers who are trained in forestry best management practices. To the extent forest certification programs require trained loggers, UI Extension logger training efforts are vital to helping Idaho forest product companies maintain or increase Idaho's share of global markets for certified wood products.

Our Response

Logger Education to Advance Professionalism (LEAP) is a national Extension program piloted in Idaho and several other states. LEAP features over 20 hours of training designed to increase loggers' understanding and skills related to forest ecology, silviculture and

water quality. LEAP is instructed by University of Idaho Extension faculty, with additional presentations from Idaho Department of Lands personnel on state forestry laws, insects and disease.

Partially stimulated by SFI, the Idaho logger education committee developed the Idaho Pro-Logger program, administered through the Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho. The Idaho Pro-Logger credential requires LEAP and 12 credits of continuing education annually.

With growing enrollment in the Idaho Pro-Logger program, more loggers are looking for ways to meet credit requirements. Based on logger recommendations, we developed LEAP Update, an annual pro-program where loggers learn about current forestry best management practices.

Twenty-eight people attended LEAP in 2025 and 182 people attended the two LEAP Update sessions offered in the panhandle in 2025. Loggers also attended other 2024-2025 UI Extension forestry programs in the panhandle on topics such as family forestry, tree planting, tree identification, and forest health. In total, UI Extension provided 1,437 continuing education hours for 206 panhandle loggers in 2024-2025.

Program Outcomes

One thousand, two-hundred and thirty-one loggers have attended the 50 LEAP sessions offered annually in the Idaho Panhandle since 1994. Participants in the 2025 LEAP session indicated knowledge increases of 34% regarding forest ecology and silviculture, and 40% regarding forest water quality and streams.

As a result of loggers' participation in the LEAP Update sessions held in the Idaho Panhandle in 2025:

- 153 panhandle loggers will be safer regarding saw chain shot,
- 141 will communicate about Idaho forest density issues,
- 134 will communicate about logger outreach/training,
- 131 will respond to forest insect and disease issues,
- 128 will better protect Class II Streams,
- 109 will make better decisions about forest harvesting equipment,
- 103 will communicate about forest animal damage,
- 93 will communicate about UI Experimental Forest activities; and
- 87 will identify riparian weed issues.

As of October 2025, 617 loggers are enrolled in the Idaho Pro-Logger program. Training in programs offered by UI Extension helps loggers to apply better land stewardship. Through communication from these loggers, this knowledge will also reach landowners, who will ultimately increase wood and biomass to support Idaho's economy, while maintaining water quality, improving forest health and enhancing biological diversity.

The Future

UI Extension will continue to provide LEAP and other educational opportunities guided by Idaho loggers.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho
- Idaho Sustainable Forestry Initiative State Implementation Committee
- Idaho Department of Lands

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Chris Schnepf, Area Extension Educator, Panhandle Forestry • University of Idaho Extension • 208-292-1288 • cschnepf@uidaho.edu

54-25-cschnepf-panhandle-loggers • 11/25