

UI Extension empowers hundreds of families to manage forests in 2024-2025

AT A GLANCE

Family-owned forests are critical in northern Idaho counties. UI Extension provides education that helps these forest owners keep their forests healthy and productive.

The Situation

Roughly 44% of the forests in the Idaho Panhandle (Boundary, Bonner, Kootenai, and Benewah counties) are held and managed by 23,796 family forest owners (owning five acres or more).

Family forests are critical to timber supply, water, wildlife and many other shared values. For example, family forests tend to be more concentrated near key locations for ecosystem functions (e.g., along lakes, streams and in increasingly rare low elevation wildlife habitats).

Since 1987, the average annual timber harvest from these forests in the Idaho Panhandle has been over 167 million board feet, valued at over \$100 million milled. Family forests have provided 28% of the timber harvest in 10 northern counties of Idaho since 1997.

Family forest owners usually have multiple goals for their property. With a better working knowledge of forest ecology, silviculture and related forest management techniques, family forest owners can sustainably produce more wood and biomass and simultaneously improve forest health, water quality, wild-life habitat and other forest values.



"Forest Insect and Disease Field Day" participants learn about spruce budworm, a defoliating insect (Bonners Ferry 2025).

Our Response

As part of the Idaho Forest Stewardship program, a cooperative effort with the Idaho Department of Lands and many other partners, UI Extension provides an annual series of workshops, field days and other educational activities titled Strengthening Forest Stewardship Skills. The activities are designed to strengthen forest owners' ability to implement practices that improve forest health and growth. They are offered in a variety of locations and times.

Forest owners can also choose from over 140 forestry Extension publications available through local UI Extension offices. UI Extension videos on water quality, "selective" logging and forest tax management,

provide additional learning resources. Finally, the UI Extension Forestry website offers a large archive of short forestry publications on a variety of topics and a calendar of upcoming forestry education opportunities.

Program Outcomes

In 2024-2025, 468 owners of 25,002 family forest acres attended UI Extension workshops and other educational activities in the Idaho Panhandle. Participants indicated knowledge increases averaging 70%. They also indicated they would implement many improved forest management practices. For example:

- 242 forest owners will monitor insects, disease or animal damage issues,
- 232 will favor tree species that resist insects and disease,
- 97 will identify Idaho trees,
- 87 will reduce unwanted vegetation,
- 75 will thin forest trees,
- 73 will prune forest trees,
- 72 will monitor/manage weeds or other non-native invasive species,
- 49 will reduce fuels in home ignition zones,
- 43 will attend additional forestry education programs,
- 41 will make houses easier for firefighters to identify and access,
- 26 will complete a forest management plan,
- 26 will purchase a compass,
- 25 will use safety equipment when thinning,
- 24 will contact a forester or other natural resource professional for additional assistance,
- 22 will use a compass to identify and record forest locations,

- 20 will use map and compass to layout forest measurement plots; and
- 17 will plant forest tree seedlings.

In 2016, the University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group surveyed 2,869 Idaho forest owners. Compared to other forest owners, those who sought assistance from UI Extension had taken significantly more management actions on their forests and planned to do more activities in the next five years. Forest owners who had completed an 18-hour, six session UI Extension program titled “The Forestry Shortcourse” were significantly more likely to have completed 12 different forest management practices (e.g. thinning, planting) than respondents who had not. Shortcourse participants were also much more likely to have a written forest management plan for their property (73% of shortcourse participants had a written forest management plan, compared to 25% of forest owners who had not completed the shortcourse). Complete results of that survey are available at <https://uidaho.edu/natural-resources/research/policy-analysis-group>.

The Future

The improved management practices family forest owners implement because of knowledge and skills gained in UI Extension programs will increase wood and biomass to fuel Idaho’s economy, maintain water quality, reduce catastrophic fire risk, improve forest growth and health, and enhance biological diversity.

Strengthening Forest Stewardship Skills will continue to be offered annually, along with new publications, internet content and other efforts to help Idaho Panhandle family forest owners manage their forests more effectively.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

- Idaho Department of Lands
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Idaho Department of Fish and Game

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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