

Timber certification allows loggers to LEAP into sustainability

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Many would argue that logging is straightforward, cutting, processing, and moving trees to a transport location. Modern loggers strive for much more through professional development by becoming certified in Idaho through a program called Logger Education to Advance Professionalism.

LEAP is a program that allows loggers to learn more about tree biology, forest ecology, and the impact of harvesting forest streams, making participants more attractive candidates in the job market.

The logger education program is nationally acclaimed and started 24 years ago by loggers who wanted to improve their skills and services for forest owners and managers.

According to the University of Idaho's brochure, participants in the program will effectively operate and protect environmental values through improved communications with landowners, foresters and natural resource professionals.

The LEAP program is predominantly taught by the University of Idaho faculty members and other forestry industry professionals who offer their knowledge and expertise.

According to UI Extension educator of forestry, Chris Schnepf, "UI Extension faculty teach most of the program, IDL staff who do some guest presentations, agency and industry foresters who help coach the field activities."

The courses feature three days of training and learning with field exercises in forest biology, forest ecology, silviculture and forest water quality.

In addition to learning how to be a more efficient logger, the program fulfills Idaho's Pro-Logger program, designed to recognize and certify a logger's commitment to professional development; LEAP also qualifies for the Society of American Foresters CFE credit.

Pro-Logger certification follows a similar objective to LEAP to meet the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) requirements and similar forest land certification programs.

SFI includes measures to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, species at risk, and forests with exceptional conservation value. It's the most extensive single certification standard in the world.

SFI certification allows for the sale of goods and services with labels that show consumers the products are sustainably produced and limited environmental impact.

The Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho represents 480 Independent Logging and Wood Hauling Contracting Companies from across Idaho and recognizes LEAP as the standard for Idaho's sustainability.

According to the University of Idaho's College of Natural Resources, programs like LEAP are essential in states such as Idaho because Idaho is the 8th largest lumber producer in the United States, harvesting 1.15 billion board feet of timber in 2018 and Idaho's forest products sector provided more than 11,700 jobs in 2018, plus a few thousand more are employed as truckers transporting wood and wood products.

LEAP plays an essential role in the logging industry today, with over 18,000 loggers participating to date, and many employers in the industry require the training.

"Essentially, participants are expected to get a basic literacy in forest ecology, silviculture, and forest water quality. Most of the mills are requiring loggers to get the training." Schnepf said.

Instructors in LEAP include Randy Brooks, Chris Schnepf, Jim Ekins from the University of Idaho Extension, Tom Eckberg, Erika Eidson, Dan Miller and Stephani Penske from Idaho Dept. of Lands agency and industry foresters who instruct as field coaches.

The first day of courses covers in-depth topics about forest succession, fire, shade tolerance, tree species characteristics, insects and diseases that affect conifers in northern Idaho, forest stand growth and development, stand structure, soils, nutrient cycling, silvicultural systems, thinning, forest genetics, leave tree selection criteria, pruning, fertilization, balancing fertility and slash hazard.

The second day focuses on the effects of timber harvesting on the forest site, including compaction, impact of different types of logging equipment, erosion and productivity loss.

It also included network planning, drainage, surfacing, scheduling, abandonment, rehabilitation, designated skid trails, landings, streamflow, channel morphology, water chemistry, stream sediments, water quantity and quality, stream organisms and buffer zones.

The third day includes fieldwork covering low and high water quality streams, silvicultural prescription, stream protection zone layout, stream shade, logging systems, insect and disease considerations.

Traditionally, enrollment is limited to 30 participants and operates in spring and fall. Due to COVID-19, there have been many difficulties with social distancing and changes to course offerings.

According to Schnepf, “Usually spring is when we offer these [courses], and registrations have been maxed out for those sessions most years.”

The LEAP program has a lot to offer anyone in the timber industry and only costs an individual \$75 to attend and receive course materials. There will be a course offered in Nov. in Moscow at the University of Idaho’s extension campus and more dates in spring to come.

“Registration fees are used to cover program materials, refreshments, room rental (if needed), and some speaker travel expenses,” Schnepf said.

Source: <https://bonnersferryherald.com/news/2020/oct/29/timber-tab-timber-certification-allows-loggers-lea/>