

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Idaho Master Forest Stewards spread better forestry in 2022-2023

AT A GLANCE

Idaho Master Forest Stewards are volunteers trained and certified by UI Extension who provide educational assistance to forest owners and others interested in forestry.

The Situation

Roughly 1.7 million acres of Idaho forests (over 40% of the forests in many northern Idaho counties) are owned and managed by over 36,500 family forest owners. Family forests are critical to timber supply, water, wildlife and many other shared values. The number of family forest owners is increasing due to timber companies selling forest lands and property splits. Unfortunately, there are fewer public and private foresters to help forest owners manage their forests.

A 2016 survey of 2,869 Idaho forest owners by the University of Idaho Policy Analysis Group found that forest owners' peers and social networks were the most used and most important sources of information, recommendations and opinions in decision-making about their forests. Complete results of that survey are available at uidaho.edu/cnr/policy-analysis-group.

Our Response

Given the importance Idaho forest owners place on peer-to-peer interaction, one way to increase the capacity to give more family forest owners more forestry knowledge and skills is through a master volunteer program.



Idaho Master Forest Steward Frank Morado coaching Idaho Master Forest Stewards trainees October 2022.

Extension programs have long developed master gardeners, 4-H leaders and other volunteers to help spread current, research-based knowledge. In 2008, UI Extension received a grant through the Idaho Department of Lands to develop the Idaho Master Forest Stewards (IMFS) program to improve the growth and health of Idaho forests through forestry education by trained and certified volunteers.

A steering committee of 16 forest owners provided the initial guidance to the program in two, one-day retreats. The resulting program consists of 70 hours of training, including:

- Existing UI Extension programs: “Forestry Shortcourse” and field days on thinning and pruning, insects and disease, and forest measurement;

- Four one-day IMFS “core” sessions, with content on family forest owner assistance efforts, native understory plants, invasive species, riparian ecology and adult and extension education methods; and
- A case study, where trainees spend a day with a natural resource professional then write a two-page case study of what they learned.

In return for their training, certified Idaho Master Forest Stewards provide at least 70 hours of volunteer service. Volunteers must also get 15 hours of continuing education annually to remain certified. Thus far, Idaho Master Forest Stewards have collectively completed 4,497 hours of continuing education in addition to their initial training to become certified volunteers.

Program Outcomes

As of October 2023, 33 Idaho Master Forest Stewards are certified and volunteering. Roughly 60 additional Idaho Master Forest Stewards are in various stages of completing their training.

In a final 145-item knowledge and experience assessment, all certified IMFS volunteers have scored over 90% correct, demonstrating an average percentage knowledge increase of 35% over the course of the training.

IMFS volunteer activities were lower than usual during COVID, but in 2022-2023, Idaho Master Forest Stewards provided 509 hours of volunteer service to 1,027 forest owners and others. In addition to interacting with individual peer forest owners, Idaho Master Forest Stewards typically volunteer in a wide range of activities, including hosting and teaching at forest owner field educational programs; writing articles for

newspapers and magazines; teaching youth about forests and forestry; and serving in leadership positions in the Idaho Forest Owner Association, Idaho Tree Farm Program and conservation districts.

Since the program began, Idaho Master Forest Stewards have provided 13, 625 hours of volunteer service worth \$378,649 and made 54,657 contacts with adults and youth. Sixty-five people have met IMFS certification requirements and 40 Idaho Master Forest Stewards have met the initial 70 hours of volunteer pay-back. Some volunteers have greatly exceeded this. Twenty volunteers have provided over 250 hours of volunteer service, and eight volunteers have provided over 500 hours of volunteer service. Thirty-three certified volunteers have served at least five years, and 13 have served at least 10 years.

The Idaho Master Forest Stewards program is built on a philosophy of shared leadership between the volunteers and University of Idaho Extension. Volunteers are guiding the IMFS program’s continuing evolution. For example, in 2023 they met to discuss ongoing IMFS program development, learn about forest bio-char, and participate in field trips to one of the volunteers’ forest near Sagle, Idaho.

The Future

Idaho Master Forest Stewards will continue to help sustain Idaho’s forests. They will also inform the forestry community about family forest owners’ needs and help guide University of Idaho Extension and research programs and technical assistance efforts of public and privately employed foresters.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Idaho Department of Lands

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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