



Conducting and Experiment in Forestry Education

An experiment under Montana's forestry education program has proven that its section 319-funded public awareness and education efforts are working. Since 1989, Montana has concentrated its voluntary forestry BMP education program on presenting workshops for loggers and landowners, developing printed literature, and distributing literature to thousands of loggers, landowners, and professional land managers.

In 1991, Montana decided to determine if a new BMP education campaign could make a measurable difference in knowledge among its target audiences. A new 34-page, full-color forestry BMP booklet--written by a Montana State University Extension forester, and a Department of State Lands commissioner-- provided the material.

The experiment had two major objectives--to measure user knowledge before the booklet's release and to measure knowledge 12 months later. In 1991, a direct mail questionnaire was sent to 550 randomly selected potential respondents--timber fallers, forest landowners, dozer/skidder operators, road builders, logging contractors, and foresters. The survey document contained 38 true-false and multiple-choice questions covering such subjects as stream crossings and their effect on water quality, stream-side management and timber harvesting BMPs, hazardous materials, forest roads, and other forest activities.

All those who completed the questionnaire received the BMP booklet by return mail. Approximately 12 months later, the same questionnaire was sent to all who responded to the 1991 mailing. The return rate on the 1991 questionnaire was 36 percent. The return rate for the second questionnaire from those who had previously - responded and had received the booklet was 53 percent.

Scores of all six audiences responding to the second questionnaire showed improvement. Forest landowners showed the largest increase in knowledge--with test scores increasing by 9 percent. Road builders and timber fallers increased 5 percent, with logging contractors and dozer/skidder operators increasing by 4 percent. Knowledge of stream crossings increased the greatest of all subject areas--by 20 percent. Prior to this experiment, the prevailing attitudes to Montana's voluntary BMP education program were "Don't tell me what to do," "I know all there is to know about BMPs," and "BMPs are just a matter of common sense." However, the 1992 questionnaire indicated a dramatic change in attitude among respondents. For example, when asked about the need for increasing attention to forestry BMPs, the average respondent leaned heavily toward the opinion that this information was long overdue.

Montana's voluntary forestry BMP education program, using \$86,430 in section 319 funds, appears to be working. On-the-ground audits of forest harvest sites, conducted regularly by the Department of State Lands Forestry - Division, show that in addition to increasing the knowledge of critical audiences in subjects important to water quality protection, application of that knowledge in the forest has dramatically improved.