

Increased Small Acreage Stewardship through “Living on the Land”

The Situation

As communities grow, land at the urban fringes is being converted from large, agricultural enterprises to smaller one to 40+ acre parcels that maintain some agricultural uses while attracting a more diverse population of owners. Small acreage landowners have a significant impact on the condition of soil, water, plants, and other natural resources through their cumulative effects. With more and more residents now “living on the land,” who were formally disconnected from the land, there is a huge demand for information and technical assistance to help them “do the right thing” for their wildlife, land and water resources.

Our Response

The Living on the Land (LOTL) curriculum has been used in Idaho since 2002 as a tool to teach small-acreage landowners in Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon (Donaldson, 2008). The program is designed to provide adults with information and skills to implement best management practices (BMP) on their small acreages. The program is coordinated by University of Idaho Extension Educators with assistance from over 20 collaborating agencies and organizations. Tours, hands-on activities, expert speakers and events were used to reinforce the classroom learning. Participants met for three hours, once a week for 18 weeks.

Over 230 adults and youth have completed the LOTL course from 2002 to 2008. They come from

10 counties in southwestern Idaho and one Eastern Oregon county. In 2008, 60 people enrolled in three concurrent LOTL classes held in Caldwell, Emmett and Fruitland, Idaho. Oregon State University Extension Educators from Malheur County assisted in teaching and facilitating the Fruitland class. This year’s participants owned or managed 920 acres in the Treasure Valley of Idaho and Oregon.

Program Outcomes

Participants were asked to complete an end-of-course evaluation to assess their learning as a result of participating in Living on the Land. Partial results from the 2008 evaluation are shown in Table 1.

Table 1.

Short-term Impact (Knowledge Gained)	Mean Before LOTL	Mean After LOTL
My knowledge about land stewardship & resource management	2.22	3.89*
My preparedness to adopt best management practices	1.94	4.06*
My understanding about how my choices have affected land use, lifestyle and the environment in my community and county	2.67	4.22*
My ability to effectively find and access resources to support my small acreage systems	2.06	4.44*

1=none, 2=a little, 3=some, 4=a good deal, 5=a great deal
*p<.001

Three months following the completion of the LOTL course, site visits were made by Extension Educators to 15 of the participant's acreages. During the site visit, landowners gave a tour of their property and visited with Educators about changes they had made as a result of the class. They also discussed problems they were still having with their land and were invited to participate in future LOTL activities. Educators asked a series of questions about plans and progress in implementing 15 different BMP's taught in the class. Participants could respond "Yes" they had implemented the BMP, "Maybe" they will implement the BMP in the future, "No" they did not plan to implement the BMP and "Not Applicable" to their small acreage property. Of the 15 sites visited, 128 BMP's had already been or were in the process of being implemented with an additional 25 BMP's listed as "Maybe." Site appropriate fertilization, weed and pest control, wellhead protection, and septic care were the most frequent BMP's implemented by participants as a result of the LOTL class. Since 95% of Idaho residents get their drinking water from groundwater sources, any reduction in excessive fertilization and improper pesticide handling will protect both environmental water quality and human health (Idaho Home*A*Syst).



Katie Painter, 2008 class participant and coordinator of the Refugee Gardens in Boise.

The Future

Plans are underway for three courses to be held in Parma, Meridian and Emmett in 2009. Changes to the topics in the course will be made based on evaluation data, alumni input and insight gained during the site visits.

Donaldson S, Hefner M, et al. 2008. Living on the Land: Stewardship for Small Acreages. Curriculum for small acreage landowners. University of Nevada. CM-08-07

Idaho Home* A* Syst. Drinking Water Well Condition worksheet. <http://homeasyst.idahoag.us/>

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