

impact

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

Living on the Land alumni gain knowledge, apply recommended management practices

AT A GLANCE

Landowners in this popular small acreage program increased their knowledge of nine key stewardship concepts and used what they learned on their southwest Idaho properties following the course.

The Situation

Idaho landowners managing properties of 10 acres or less have increased 36% since 2000. As these numbers continue to climb, so has the demand for information and technical assistance to efficiently and sustainably care for these small acreages. Challenges of small acreage stewardship include weed control, water management, pasture development and maintenance, and crop and livestock care. New small acreage landowners often have little knowledge or experience related to these activities. If not resolved, this can lead to a frustrating, financially draining and discouraging endeavor. Mismanagement may even result in environmental degradation and the creation of pest reservoirs.

Our Response

In 2019, a multi-county team of Extension educators organized and led a 10-week “Living on the Land: Stewardship for Small Acreages” course in southwest Idaho. This course, developed by University of Nevada Cooperative Extension in 2001, has been offered in Idaho since 2002 and aims to educate and empower landowners to solve common small acreage issues. In 2019, invited speakers and specialists from around the



This happy couple’s end of course presentation included a marriage proposal. Photo by Ariel Agenbroad.

region addressed goal setting, water quality, water rights and access, irrigation, soils, crops, fruit and vegetable production, weed management, animal production, grazing/pasture management, integrated pest and insect management, recordkeeping, financials and small farm marketing.

Evaluation included pre/post-course surveys and follow-up site visits one year after the completion of the course. Registration allowed for one or two individuals, collectively called a “unit,” to take the course for one fee of \$250. Thirteen units, typically married couples or family members, completed the course. Most were managing between three and twenty acres and had little to no prior experience in land management.

Program Outcomes

Participants were asked to indicate their level of knowledge on key topics before starting class and their change in level of knowledge following the 10-week course. Topics addressed key sustainable land management practices including soil and water resource management, pasture establishment and maintenance, livestock production, and weed and pest management. All participants completed the pre and post course evaluations. By the end of the course, participants indicated increases in knowledge (one = no increase, five = great increase) on all class topics (Figure 1).

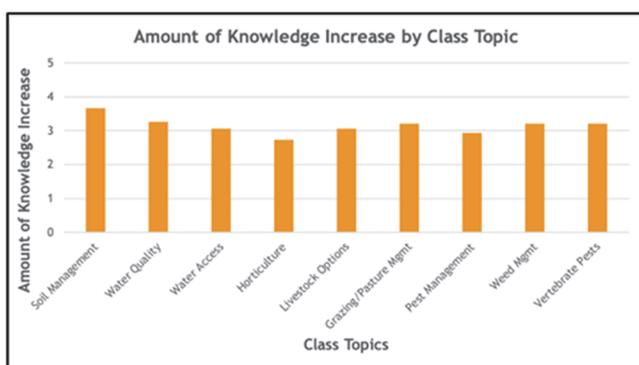


Figure 1. Knowledge increase among 2019 class participants.

In-person site visits and interviews by Extension educators one year after the class further demonstrated course impact by documenting short-term behavior change and adoption of learned land management practices. Eight of the 13 units requested a visit. Educators conducting site visits indicated that participants are utilizing many core best practices of small acreage management as taught in the “Living on the Land” course and implementing these practices on their acreages (see Figure 2).

Participants reported using integrated weed and pest management strategies to transform neglected lots, often full of noxious weeds, into productive pastures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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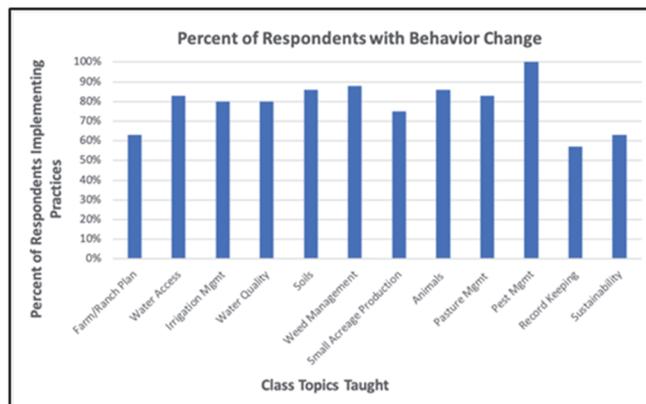


Figure 2. Adoption of sustainable land management practices.

In one case, participants that had initially wanted sheep and/or goats applied their new knowledge about the realities and challenges of different livestock options toward making a more informed decision. They cited the need for longer-term planning, better fencing and pasture management as reasons to temporarily delay purchasing animals. Another participant is starting a for-profit business raising wool sheep while another is currently increasing a flock of 25 ewes with 15 giving birth in 2020.

In total, participants gained knowledge and implemented best management practices toward becoming more effective land stewards and successful natural resource managers.

The Future

The “Living on the Land” course has been offered in southwest Idaho for nearly two decades. Each year, the course is adapted to best serve the needs of the participants and the communities where it is offered. Participants from the 2019 course inform and shape a continued effort by University of Idaho Extension to effect short and long-term behavior change among landowners, and shape positive influences on the peri-urban landscape in southwest Idaho.