2021 Impact

Despite on-going COVID-19 and technology challenges, UI Extension, Benewah County programs were able to move forward in 2021. Most activities and events were held in-person this year, although they may have looked a little different. The 28th annual Sixth Grade Natural Resource Tour was able to travel around the county to natural resource sites again this year, and summer camps, after-school programs, and adult education classes came back in-person and were well attended.

Thirty-one forest owners attended the 2021 Thinning and Pruning Field Day held in St. Maries. Many Benewah County residents also attended UI Extension forestry programs held in adjacent Idaho Panhandle counties. Zoom-based forestry programs held in 2021 on forest health, fire risk reduction for homes located in the wildland urban interface, forestry cost sharing, backyard forests, and a multi-faceted program titled 10 Acres and a Dream reached over 631 participants, including many from Benewah County. In 2021, one Benewah County resident served as a certified UI Extension volunteer with the Idaho Master Forest Stewards. Collectively, Idaho Master Forest Stewards provided over 530 hours of volunteer service to over 1,000 contacts in 2021.

4-H in Benewah County

The UI Extension, Benewah County 4-H program continued its strong presence, with youth completing their projects during the Benewah County Fair and Horse Show. Four regional livestock online workshops were held, with over 200 attendees from eight states, including 11 presenters from six different states. Due to health outbreaks and weather considerations, the annual fall awards festival was held as an online awards show. Families were encouraged to dress up and cheer for each other. The event was well attended and pictures from the evening show that attendees enjoyed the opportunity to celebrate each other’s success with quite the creativity, including dressing up pets and decorating their chairs for the festive event.

Despite COVID-19 and technology challenges in the past two years, hybrid opportunities have allowed for more dynamic engagement by volunteers and 4-H families to join virtually for meetings and events. This is in part to increased technology infrastructure across the county, more comfortability with online platforms and the new technology available in the UI Extension classroom.

On the Horizon

The Ignite Your Spark youth development program provided the opportunity to offer STEM programming on days when kids were out-of-school and continued to support homeschool cooperatives and after-school programs in the district. From lessons on sustainable polymers to simple machines, youth have been engaged with hands-on educational activities. UI Extension hosted a maker’s table at the St. Maries Farmer’s Market, creating an opportunity to experience and access materials for STEM experiments and projects. Funding has been secured to continue the after-school program and to hire AmeriCorps members to help provide these programs. Small farm education will be offered, and the Idaho Master Gardener program has created new outreach and education opportunities for the upcoming year.