



# UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

Forest Management No. 64

## WANTED: Big Trees

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There are many impressive things on this big blue ball we call home, but few surpass the magnificence of a soaring, magnificent big tree. Called the superstars of their species, champion big trees have been recognized by American Forests National Big Tree Program since 1940. With more than 700 species in the National Big Tree Register, these champions are found in the fields, forests, rangelands, and urban parks and yards of America. Big tree hunters are people of all ages and walks of life who share a love of one of nature's finest accomplishments – a truly splendid big tree.

Idaho has participated in the National Big Tree Program since the mid-1960s, with a shared mission

of locating, measuring, and recognizing the largest individual tree of each species. We have had many notable National champion trees in the past. One, a western redcedar, was a massive 18 feet across its diameter and some 177 feet tall when it was measured back in 1979. This tree, located outside of Elk River, ID, received so many visitors that a boardwalk was built around it to protect its root system. Another well-known past state champion was a western white pine outside of Harvard, ID. Scientists estimated that this tree was likely standing there when Lewis and Clark made their way through Idaho on their journey to the west coast. If only these venerable trees could talk – oh the stories they could tell.



You will see when looking at the Idaho Registry of Champion Trees ([www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/big-trees](http://www.uidaho.edu/extension/forestry/big-trees)) that there are many species without national champions; there are also many species in Idaho that are larger than current national champions, but were measured too long ago to submit for national status. Some of our reigning state champions were measured over 40 years ago and may or may not be alive. Nominators of these trees are encouraged to visit these champions and resubmit updated information and photographs.

To date, Idaho has 3 National Champion trees and at least 4 more that are currently being submitted for national recognition:

- whitebark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*)
- English oak (*Quercus robur*)
- smooth sumac (*Rhus glabra*)



The previous national champion Rocky Mountain lodgepole pine (*Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*), was located in Valley Co. and was reported dead in 2015.

Photo courtesy of the Idaho Big Tree Program

The Idaho and National Big Tree Programs define a tree as a woody plant that has one erect perennial stem or trunk at least 9½ inches in circumference at 4½ feet above the ground (DBH), that has a definitively formed crown of foliage and is at least 13 feet tall.

Big trees can be native or cultivated species and varieties. Hybrids and minor varieties are excluded from the National listing but are accepted by the Idaho program. Cultivars are not accepted by either program. The currently accepted scientific and common names we use are from the USDA Plants Database (PLANTS) <http://plants.usda.gov/java/> and the Integrated Taxonomic Information System (ITIS) <http://www.itis.gov/>.

The nomination process begins at the state level. To get started, complete an Idaho Big Tree Nomination form, found on the UI Extension Forestry Idaho Big Tree program page by clicking on the *Nominate a Tree* section. Measurements need to be verified in the field by a qualified forester. GPS coordinates and photographs are required by both the state and national programs.

The completed nomination packet is sent to the Idaho Big Tree Program Director, who verifies the information and tallies the points. If the nominee has enough points to challenge the current national champion, records are submitted to the national program by the Idaho Director.

Champion tree status is awarded using a point system: one point is recorded for each foot of height; one point for each inch of circumference; and one-quarter point for each foot of average crown width. To calculate a tree's total point value, we use the following equation: trunk circumference (inches) + height (feet) + ¼ average crown spread (feet) = total points.

The registered champion tree is the one in the state and/or nation with the most points. When two trees have scores that fall within five points of each other, they are listed as Co-Champions. Champions listed in the National Big Tree Registry must be re-measured every 10 years to maintain their champion status. The Idaho Big Tree Program keeps track of state champion trees using the same system. Idaho champions retain their status until another state nomination topples the reigning champion or the reigning champion dies.



When nominating a big tree, measurements must be verified by a qualified forester.

Photo courtesy of the Idaho Big Tree Program

The National Big Tree Registry is updated yearly and new champion trees are announced at the end of each summer – search the latest National Big Tree Registry at [www.americanforests.org/bigtrees/bigtrees-search/](http://www.americanforests.org/bigtrees/bigtrees-search/). The nominator(s) and owner(s) of champion trees are recognized by the State and/or National program with a certificate and are listed in the Registry(s).

Fall is a great time to be outside camping with your family, hunting, or just enjoying a walk with your dog. And while you're outside enjoying the striking foliage and crisp temperatures, keep your eyes open for those big trees that are out there just waiting to be discovered, because now is a great time to bag yourself a trophy tree.



The new state champion red alder (*Alnus rubra*), shown with nominators Aaron and Amanda Black, is located on the Idaho Panhandle Forests in Bonner Co.

Photo courtesy of the Idaho Big Tree Program

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