



# UI Extension Forestry Information Series

## Logger Credentials

*Chris Schnepf*

Recently there has been more and more focus on a highly skilled work force, and one way that skill is documented is a credential. A credential is defined by Webster's Dictionary as "something that gives a title to credit or confidence". In other words, a credential can provide some assurance that the bearer can perform a task related to that credential with a reasonable degree of competence.

Credentials occur in many forms at many levels. A credential can range from membership in a professional organization, to certification by that organization, to more formal licensing programs required by a state or other level of government. Some credentials require completing some sort of schooling or passing a test. A degree from a high school or college is one level of credential. But even a college degree is becoming insufficient in many settings. For example, many Idaho K-12 teachers have completed a new national teacher certification process that requires extensive documentation and testing.

Credentials seem to be growing in importance in our society and the forestry community is not immune to these larger trends. For example, in 1994 the Society of American Foresters started a new "certified forester" program that requires a forestry degree from an accredited institution, five years of forestry work experience, and 60 contact hours in continuing forestry education every three years. One of the advantages of credentials is that they give those unfamiliar with a field standards by which to judge services they are paying for. Landowners seeking a forester can consider whether a forester is certified to provide one criteria for their decision.

**How do you choose a logger?** There are roughly 3,500 full- and part-time loggers in Idaho. How do

you choose? Unfortunately, some forest owners end up choosing the first logger who knocks on their door without doing more research. One might look in the newspapers for a logger, but many loggers will tell you to ignore the loggers you see advertised in the papers or on TV – the best loggers have all the work they need and do not need to advertise. But that puts many landowners in a quandary – how do you get "in the loop" to find out who the better loggers are? Working with a reputable consulting forester can help, but consultants are also always looking for loggers with a higher level of training and skill. A logger credential would help.

**Idaho's new *Pro-Logger* Program.** To many Idaho loggers there is a difference between a logger and someone who simply cuts trees. However, loggers have not traditionally been very fond of additional paperwork or other administrative hoops, so they have not been quick to support formal logging credentials. Nevertheless, loggers have become increasingly frustrated by those who buy a chainsaw, declare themselves loggers, then log in a way that gives all loggers a bad name.

Because of these reasons, and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI), which is an effort by member companies of the American Forest and Paper Association (AFPA) to raise the standards for forestry on private lands, there has been growing support among northwest loggers for logger credentials.

After some preliminary meetings, a statewide logger education implementation committee was established. The committee consists of loggers and representatives from forest industry, the University of Idaho, the Idaho

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Department of Lands, and Idaho Logging Safety Advisors. That committee developed and governs Idaho's new *Pro-Logger* program, administered through the Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho (ALC). To participate in the program:

1. The owner/operator and key employees of a logging firm must take three days of instruction in silviculture, forest ecology, and water quality as offered in the current University of Idaho Extension program titled LEAP (Logger Education to Advance Professionalism).
2. All employees of a logging firm, including the owner/contractor, must take first aid training sufficient to receive first aid certification as required by current OSHA regulations.
3. Employees of a firm directly associated with harvest operations on the ground, including the owner/contractor, will take a half-day course in safety and best management practices at least every other year.
4. The owner/contractor must take 16 credits of continuing education activity annually in approved continuing education programs (on topics such as first aid and safety, workers compensation issues, forest practices act, silviculture, forestry, marketing/insurance).

Hopefully, the programs that loggers participate in as part of this effort are designed well enough that loggers leave with knowledge and skills they can apply directly to their work on the ground. In program evaluations filled out by loggers who have attended LEAP, nearly 100% of the participants typically indicate they will implement improved management practices as a result.

However, completing a given number of hours of training is no guarantee of what someone has learned, that they will always practice what they have learned, or that they will otherwise meet your expectations. At a minimum, this program does give you a leg up on operators who have at least been committed enough to the professions to go to these programs. You should still check on things like insurance coverage and references, and put together a contract that precisely communicates your expectations for a given job (stop

into your Extension office for a copy of EXT 759:*Selling Woodland Timber: Contract Decisions*).

This new logger credential program will likely continue to develop and evolve with time, but it is off to a very good start. For more information on the program, or for a list of participating loggers, contact the Associated Logging Contractors of Idaho at (208) 667-6473.

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