

Initial Summary of Findings in a Survey of Idaho Timber Workforce Issues

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Summary

As part of an Idaho Timber Workforce Improvement Project surveys were conducted with selected leaders to gain their insights. Sixty interviews were completed by 16 logging firms, 13 milling firms, 3 trucking firms, 4 forestry services firms, 6 large private landowners, 5 public landowners, 3 representing other industries (Construction, Pulp & Paper, & Machinery), and 12 other experts. Six women provided input while the rest were men. The average age of subjects was ~53 years. Summary results and the survey form are included in appendices.

This Report identified some Guiding Principles for consideration of improvement efforts.

- Imperative for sector leaders to get everyone behind something—not just react to external forces individually
- Forestry sector is a changing sector not a dying sector (mature, sunset, old-age, low-tech, etc)
- Sector needs to recognize that the new generation will not perform like the current generation of managers and workers
- Sector leadership is questionable if individuals cannot put aside self interest for the common good
- Scrupulous honesty and openness are crucial
- A substantial statement for improvement is needed and the sector must assure success of the first visible effort
- Public interests must be addressed and connections to workforce emphasized, eg, stewardship, environmental protection, rural communities, etc.
- Single, identifiable voice would be best-- one credible with the sector and the public
- Safety and health of workers is a unifying force
- Cheap fix is not a lasting fix—problem is intergenerational
- Future sector leaders need knowledge of workers and their issues, eg from Universities.
- Solutions for individual firms may not affect sector much—need a rising tide to lift all boats
- Pessimism can be overwhelming—a spark of optimism will need fans to ignite the flame

The mass of interview information has been reduced to a group of survey themes that are more fully developed in the Report. These include:

Aging Workers

Pay a Major Issue

Single Firm Solutions

Job Leavers...Job Stayers

Challenges and Obstacles

Rural Communities

The Sector is in Doubt—for Everyone?

Generation Gap
Technology—Perceptions and Gaps
Professionalism of Workers not just Pay
Subjects Speak Out

The section on Towards Improvement lists some concepts that might improve the Idaho timber workforce but offers no guarantees of success. The general list is abbreviated below:

- **Maintain knowledge in aging workforce**
- **Address stability issue – forestry is a changing industry not a dying industry**
- **Set up structure to make improvements—Idaho Action Planning Committee**
- **Find permanent funding source**
- **Involve individual workers**
- **Emphasize technology**
- **High school counselors?**
- **Consider paid summer camp**
- **Review training**
- **Consider workers compensation offset**
- **Work with state labor economists**
- **Image and media (tv, radio, web) approaches**
- **Work design for a new generation**
- **Engage a task force to look at the issue of “season length”**
- **Consider more detailed interviews with young**
- **What are options for providing “benefits” (health insurance, retirement plan, etc.)**
- **Discussion of who are the “players” in workforce issues**

Concluding Remarks comment on the greater detail in the survey and invite readers to participate in the Summit.