

Forestry Field Days

Three-fifths of our commercial forest land is owned by more than 4 million people. These woodlands average 71 acres in size and produce at only 48% of their potential.

Forest owners are a diverse group and often exhibit little interest in their woodlands. Attempts to enhance the management on private forestry lands face two problems: (1) how to get an audience receptive to woodland management and (2) how to convey understandable basic forest management concepts to the audience. One solution has been field days where education and entertainment are combined. The entertainment draws the public, and natural resource specialists have the opportunity to speak to a large number of people.

Several factors influence the success of a field day. Choose the subject you want to stress—woodland management, Christmas trees, windbreaks, or wildlife, and the audience you want to attract—the general public, farmers, absentee landowners.

A good field day requires so much preparation that a well-organized planning

group is essential. Subcommittees arrange specific parts and a coordinator ensures that the parts fit together. Choose a location that offers the facilities you need, such as proper forest conditions for tours and buildings for displays. An accessible location and adequate parking are essential.

Field days that are major community events attract many people. People are attracted by new and unusual equipment, especially if it moves and has a sound track. They're interested in how their grandfather split shingles and made maple syrup or sassafras tea. Those who don't go on the tour at least see some aspect of forestry, and go home thinking about woodland management.

Schedule the field day to minimize conflicts with other events. Farm planting and harvesting seasons and days when there are competing athletic events are inappropriate times. Saturdays are good; however, nature tours on Sundays and industrial tours during the week have been successful. Weather permitting, field days held in late winter can be very



successful because many people are looking for something to do.

Discussion of a forestry topic is more effective if done in a woodland setting, on a short hike or tour. A single guide can take a group through and explain things or have the guide introduce specialists at "stops" on the tour route. The latter method has the advantage of involving many people with specific areas of expertise.

How much time should the tour take? This is an important point because a tour that's longer than 1½ hours is going to bore most people. People get tired of standing too long in one spot. They like to walk between stops. Wagon rides are enjoyable, but pose serious logistic problems.

Most field days for the general public give each speaker about five minutes to speak and five minutes for questions. The people who want more detail will ask questions. A speaker that makes one good point that leaves a lasting impression is successful.

Most planners use agency and industrial personnel and consulting foresters as speakers. Some speakers charge fees, so don't be caught by surprise. Tour guides are important in introducing speakers and answering questions between stops. They should be friendly, enthusiastic, and helpful.

With audience safety in mind, insurance is a necessity. The sponsoring group may have to purchase insurance for a day or have a rider attached to the landowner's policy. If a large crowd is expected, plan to have a doctor or nurse on standby.



The importance of publicity to a successful field day can't be overstressed. Lead and follow-up announcements are a necessity. Potential field day attendees can be reached very inexpensively by bulk rate mailings or with franked mailing privileges available through some agencies.

Notices with pictures should be sent to area newspapers. A variety of newsletters give free publicity. Don't forget the farming and conservation magazines published in the state. Radio stations have public service announcements. A visit by a TV reporter and camera crew for pre-field day publicity is helpful. Each organization sponsoring a field day should prepare a list of all area newspapers, newsletters, and radio and television stations for current coverage and future use.

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