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FIFTY YEARS OF FORESTRY EXTENSION IN IOWA

by Dean R. Prestemon

This article is intended to provide a brief history of forestry extension in Iowa over nearly the last fifty years, with particular emphasis on activities since 1966. Information is based on a review of past issues of the Ames Forester, records at Iowa State University, and personal contacts with past extension foresters. No claim is made that all details are absolutely correct, or that all relevant information is included. However, a serious attempt has been made to record pertinent information relating to the development of forestry extension at Iowa State University.

Staffing

Richard (Dick) Campbell served as Extension Forester from 1950 until 1956. During 1957 and 1958, Martin E. Craine and Lee Andreas served as Extension Foresters. Robert Davidson was hired on January 1, 1959, and served until September 30, 1963, when he left to attend graduate school at Harvard. James Gottsacker joined the staff as Extension Forester on June 17, 1963, and served until June 15, 1966, when he left to join the U.S. Forest Service. In September of 1965, I came on staff with a 40 percent appointment in extension and a 60 percent appointment in research. The intent was to expand forestry extension activities by developing a forest products extension program focused on the proper use of wood in construction. David Smith served as Extension Forester from September 1, 1966, to June 30, 1967. On September 1, 1967, David Countryman was promoted from extension assistant to Acting Extension Forester and served until April of 1968. Ed Grafton became Extension Forester on July 1, 1968. Ed worked in the department for four years, and then he accepted a position at Glenville State College in West Virginia. Dr. Randall Heiligmann became Extension Forester on March 1, 1973, and served until January 10, 1975. Randy left to join the extension staff at Michigan State University. Jim Gulliford, a forestry graduate student, was a full-time extension staff member from January 1 to May 31, 1975; that same year my extension appointment was increased to 75 percent.

Dr. Paul H. Wray began his tenure as Extension Forester on July 1, 1975, with a 75 percent appointment in extension and a 25 percent appointment in research. In 1987, Paul Wray and I both increased our extension appointments to 92 percent. Mark Vitosh was hired as a full-time staff member in forestry extension in 1994 and was assigned specific responsibilities relating to urban forestry and youth education. On July 1, 1994, I enrolled in Iowa State University's Phased Retirement Program with a 66 percent appointment. Paul Wray increased his extension appointment to 100 percent in 1996; on July 1, 1998, I began my final year at Iowa State with a 50 percent appointment.

In addition to extension faculty and full-
time staff, the forestry extension program in Iowa has been served well by graduate assistants who work half time while pursuing an advanced degree. During the late 1950's and early 1960's, Lee Andreas, Jack Kepler, and Donald Reckler served as extension assistants in forestry for varying lengths of time. After several years apparently without an extension assistant, David Countryman was appointed as a forestry extension assistant in 1966. Other forestry graduate students that have served in that capacity since that time include Dave Braley, Ervin Schuster, Brad Upfield, Jim Gulliford, Kim Coder, Reinee Hildebrandt, Jeff Roe, and Amy Kuehl.

Another group of people that have made special contributions to extension programs over the past 50+ years are those forestry faculty members without a formal extension appointment who are primarily responsible for resident instruction and research. For example, in the early 1960s, Fred Hopkins and Bob Ethington provided teaching input to special forestry extension programs; in more recent years, Dave Countryman and Steve Jungst have taught important segments of a major educational program. Department heads and chairs have also been very helpful in supporting and delivering forestry extension programs. Finally, unique contributions from extension specialists in other disciplines has increased the breadth and quality of forestry extension programs particularly during the last 30 years.

**PROGRAMMING**

Although records are very limited prior to 1965, Extension Foresters reportedly worked on a variety of programs including Christmas tree production, utilization methods, windbreak establishment, woodland management, walnut marketing, urban forestry, and conservation education for youth. Special emphasis was placed on outdoor recreation programs from 1968 to 1972 under the leadership of Ed Grafton. Prior to 1976, educational programs were most typically provided in response to requests from county extension offices; considerable time was spent responding to mail and phone requests from individuals and working with mass media outlets.

After Paul Wray joined the Department of Forestry, the extension program was thoroughly reviewed, and new program goals were established. The major mission of Forestry Extension at Iowa State University was formally articulated as “providing educational programs to improve and expand forest and tree resources in the state.” The decision was made to become more proactive and provide aggressive leadership for a few targeted programs focused on specific clientele. Two areas of emphasis were selected: 1) woodland management and plantation establishment targeted to landowners; and, 2) the proper use of wood in building construction directed at builders and material suppliers. To minimize potential conflicts with the Iowa Conservation Commission, agreement was reached with State Forester Gene Hertel to have forestry extension focus primarily on education, to have the forestry unit within the Iowa Conservation Commission emphasize service to landowners, and to have forestry extension and the District Foresters work cooperatively whenever appropriate. This working arrangement continues today; this state agency was renamed the Iowa Department of Natural Resources in 1986.

Outdoor classrooms for landowners, labeled as Forestry Field Days, were initiated in 1976 in cooperation with District Foresters of the Iowa Conservation Commission. Two field days were
offered during that fall; these programs were very popular with more than 100 people attending each event. Since that modest beginning, Forestry Extension has offered more than 270 Forestry Field Days over the last 22 years with an average attendance of about 40 people. Beginning in 1985, the utility and effectiveness of this educational program has been evaluated every other year using a mail survey of landowner clients; the client responses to survey questions have been very positive and consistent. For example, in the 1997 survey, 97 percent of the clients responding reported having a better understanding of their woodlands, 74 percent implemented specific management changes, 57 percent developed a specific management plan, and 73 percent estimated the dollar value for the benefits received by attending Forestry Field Days at more than $250.

From the early 1970s to the middle 1980s, forestry worked very actively with extension specialists in architecture, economics, engineering, home economics, landscape architecture, and sociology to sponsor educational meetings and provide reference materials for homebuilders, retail lumber dealers, designers, and homeowners. Forestry extension was instrumental in organizing a multidiscipline extension group called the "Housing Task Force" (later the "Home Team") to work on housing problems. During the most active time period, 10 to 15 educational conferences were offered each year in major Iowa population centers for the construction industry; simultaneously, information on energy efficiency and home maintenance was provided for homeowners across the state. Several cooperative research projects supported by outside grants evolved from this multidiscipline housing extension program. With the perceived passing of the energy crisis in the late 1980's, interest in housing diminished in county extension offices resulting in greatly reduced requests for assistance from forestry extension in this program area.

In 1988, Forestry Extension, in cooperation with Forestry Division of the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and other organizations, launched Iowa's nationally-recognized Master Woodland Managers Program. This educational effort was designed to provide 36 hours of intensive, broad-range forestry instruction for woodland owners. By the end of 1998, 610 volunteers had been trained as woodland ambassadors at 24 locations across the state; graduates from the first 22 sessions have already contributed over 14,500 hours of public service. This program provides a cadre of well-trained volunteers to assist natural resource professionals and to promote forestry to other landowners and the general public.

Forestry Extension has been active in providing educational programs on urban and community forestry for many years. For example, from the late '70s through the '80s, forestry extension was involved in the "Plant Iowa Program", the "Trees for the Future" effort, and the "Community Tree Program." Urban forestry programs have not been continuous over the years because of inconsistent and limited resources. However, beginning in the early '90's, reliable, consistent availability of federal funds coupled with the appointment of an urban forester in the Department of Natural Resources stimulated a dramatic surge in urban and community forestry activity in the state. Forestry and horticulture extension have assumed the leadership role in providing educational programs. For example, Community Forestry Workshops, typically involving two hours of instruction on tree establishment and care, were offered in 27 differ-
ent communities last year with a total of 660 participants. The Community Tree Steward Program was initiated in 1994 with the goal of developing a network of highly motivated, well-trained volunteers to expand and improve Iowa's community forests. Two Community Tree Steward programs, involving 24 hours of instruction, were sponsored last year involving 60 participants. The first 261 graduates of this program have already reported over 7,000 hours of community service.

Forestry Extension has sponsored educational programs for youth since 1950; the level and type of activities have varied depending on resources available and interest of extension staff. Early efforts were focused primarily on providing educational programs and resources for young people enrolled in 4-H. In the 1980's, the youth audience was broadened to involve other organized groups, and outdoor classrooms were offered to schools. Recently, a renewed effort has been made to provide conservation education for youth and teachers. During the last program year, 38 presentations were made to 960 students, and 19 classes of 5th and 6th grade students received intensive training in the Community Tree Steward Program for Youth.

Forestry Extension has also been involved in a variety of other educational efforts over the years including regional continuing education programs for resource professionals, multi-state Forest Stewardship Conferences for landowners, Iowa's Shade Tree Short Course, windbreak schools, Christmas tree workshops, and specialized forestry applications meetings. The Woodland Owners Newsletter was initiated in 1982 and, for several years, this quarterly publication was mailed to over 13,000 people in the state; in recent years, this newsletter has been scaled down because of limited resources. Forestry Extension maintains almost 100 forestry extension pamphlets and notes to provide supporting materials for educational programs. Extension Foresters have been involved in a large number of radio and TV programs during the last 20 years and have regularly sent out timely releases to newspapers across the state. Numerous mail, telephone, and e-mail inquiries are handled every day. In 1997, Forestry Extension established its own web page.

In the late 1980s, operating funds from conventional state appropriations for extension programs were reduced and began to limit program delivery in forestry. Fortunately, special federal support did become available to forestry and wildlife extension units in 1987 from the Renewable Resources Extension Act. In addition, beginning in 1991, substantial federal forest stewardship and urban forestry funds have been provided through grants from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources to support forestry extension activities. During the last three years, Forestry Extension has also secured special funds to support Iowa's Master Woodland Managers Program from the Iowa Tree Farm Committee and from the Iowa Woodland Owners Association. Currently, two-thirds of the operating funds for forestry extension activities (exclusive of salaries) come from sources other than state appropriations.

**Personal Observations and Future Outlook**

Forestry Extension in Iowa between 1950 and 1965 was characterized by frequent staffing changes, limited resources, and responsive programming. Beginning in 1975, staffing was increased and became more stable. Forestry extension has had the same two extension faculty mem-
bers working together since that time, and valuable assistance has been provided by quality graduate assistants and, more recently, by a very productive full-time staff member. The forestry extension effort has become more focused during the last 22 years with the development of two or three major programs. The information delivery systems used have been modified over the years to fit the needs of the clients. Active, continuing partnering with the Forestry Division, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, has contributed to both successful audience generation and effective program delivery. In addition, cooperation with county conservation boards, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, and other organizations has become typical in many programs. Forestry extension has clearly demonstrated its ability to respond to special educational needs in the state such as managing storm damaged trees, using wood as a home heating fuel, or modifying construction to improve energy efficiency.

I believe that the extension program in forestry has been a very effective one during my 33+ years at Iowa State University. The university has approved hiring a replacement faculty member with a minimum of 50 percent extension appointment. Every effort will be made to hire the right individual to assist Paul Wray and Mark Vitosh in the continuation of an active, effective forestry extension program. The challenges will be to adapt to a modified working environment at Iowa State, to keep pace with changing needs of clientele, to maintain close ties with current cooperators and identify other potential partners, to continue acquisition of financial support from outside sources, and to deliver educational programs and information in the most effective and efficient manner with limited resources. 

The Ames Forester...