

# **Sustainable Forestry Education Research to Support Montpelier's Demonstration Forest Program**

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## **Introduction**

James Madison's Montpelier in Montpelier Station, Virginia, offers heritage tourists first-hand opportunities to visit the seminal leader's estate and learn about Madison's legacy. Forests within the historic landmark afford an excellent setting for wide-reaching natural resource educational programs. Virginia's Link to Education About Forestry (LEAF) program partners are presently working with estate staff to develop a working, sustainable forest intersected by an interpretive trail to display sustainable forestry practices. The working forest will provide opportunities to introduce diverse heritage tourists to sustainable forestry that they otherwise would not encounter. In addition, it will allow local forestry educators to use a well known and attractive location for local educational initiatives.

Montpelier visitors were surveyed during the summer of 2008 to learn more about potential audiences. Demographic, attitudinal, and intentional data were collected. Data will provide insight about attendee interest and perspective regarding the importance of sustainable forestry education. Moreover, it will provide an understanding of attendee opinions about forest management and resources. Researchers expect that results will outline the scope of potential audiences in terms of geography and disposition.

## **Hypotheses**

Researchers hypothesized a positive correlation between interest and participation among respondents. Also hypothesized was that demographics will help characterize

willingness to participate in sustainable forestry education. In addition, researchers hypothesized that males, respondents from rural areas, those previously exposed to forestry education programs, and forest land owners will be more interested in sustainable forestry education. These respondents were also hypothesized to report a greater sense of importance about sustainable forestry management, be more willing to participate in sustainable forestry education, and see greater value in using forest to provide valued products.

## **Methods**

A researcher surveyed visitors in the Annie DuPont Formal Garden or the National Landmark Forest Overlook. The researcher randomly selected one survey site per day and administered surveys during a two-hour increment. The researcher approached all visitors and asked them to participate in a survey about forestry education at Montpelier. Each participant received a twenty-question survey.

Eight questions targeted interest in and opinions about the importance of sustainable forestry education individually, for schools, and for society. Four questions focused on the respondent's interest in sustainable forestry education if offered at Montpelier. The next set of questions inquired about the respondent's forest values. Questions asked about gender, region, development of living location, education, age, amount of acres owned in forestland, and number of forest educational programs attended in lifetime provided important demographic characteristics.

To compare responses with active Extension audiences, researchers will similarly survey attendees at Virginia Forest Landowner Education's annual fall Forestry &

Wildlife Field Tour Series. This will allow researchers to compare responses from people already participating in forestry education program to those potential audiences at Montpelier.

### **Expected Results**

Survey data will provide a helpful overview of Montpelier visitors and their willingness to participate in sustainable forestry education. Comparisons of Montpelier visitors and participants in Extension programs may indicate that forestry education reaches only a specific demographic group. Researchers expect that future sustainable forestry education at Montpelier will help spread much-needed knowledge about forestry to typically underserved groups.

Anecdotal data suggest that researchers will find strong visitor interest in learning about sustainable forestry. Montpelier's Landmark Forest already attracts visitors to estate forests. Researchers believe most visitors to this area of the estate have will also want to learn about other types of forests and their uses. However, if results show low interest and participation in sustainable forestry, questions will arise about how best to engage visitors in forestry education. Either way, survey results will help Montpelier and LEAF design sustainable forestry programs to connect Montpelier visitors to sustainable forestry and the importance of managing our forested lands for our future generations.