



Defining Peer-to-Peer Learning

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Research and experience show that when people need to make a decision about their land, they often turn to a trusted friend, neighbor or family member. Peer-to-peer learning offers an excellent opportunity to efficiently inform landowner decisions.

What is peer-to-peer learning?

Peer-to-peer learning involves landowners sharing their knowledge and experience with one another. It can happen through existing social networks or facilitated peer learning opportunities. Peer-to-peer learning:

- Spreads information through formal or informal social networks;
- Involves two-way (or more) communication;
- Recognizes that every participant can be a teacher and a learner;
- Is community- and participant-driven; and
- Can occur through either an ongoing forum or one-time exchange.

What is not peer-to-peer learning?

- Lectures or traditional expert-driven workshops;
- Fee for service; or
- One-way communication through fact sheets, publications, or websites.

Benefits of peer-to-peer learning

People are more likely to hear and internalize messages, and thus to change their attitudes and behaviors, if they believe the messenger is similar to them and faces the same concerns and pressures. Peer-to-peer learning provides locally relevant information when landowners need to make a decision about their land, delivered by the people they naturally turn to for information. Peer-to-peer learning is effective because peers:

- Understand the goals, issues, and pressures of that landowners face;
- Have direct experience regarding forest management and protection;
- Are seen as credible, unbiased, and trusted sources of information;
- Have specific local knowledge, such as recommendations for trusted professional service providers or sources of assistance;
- Speak the same language and can help each other distill information to the critical pieces needed to make a decision; and
- Are easy to contact when important decisions need to be made

Peer to peer learning can take place...

- Formally through woodland owner organizations, cooperatives, master volunteer programs, or learning circles;
- Informally, such as neighbors talking over the fence or at the local coffee shop; or
- Through Internet-based tools, such as discussion boards.

Role of the Resource Professional

Intentional development and support of self-sustaining peer networks by agencies, nonprofits, Extension, and others can be an efficient and effective way to engage landowners and inform family forest decisions. This can occur either through development of new networks or support of existing, independent networks.

Resource and outreach professionals have important roles as conveners, facilitators, and / or source of information. Professionals can create learning spaces where landowners can meet, exchange ideas, and share experiences and information. Alternatively, professionals can tap into existing, independent networks to offer information as requested.

Who else should get involved in peer-to-peer learning?

Engaging a large number of family forest owners with diverse goals will require new partnerships. Local grassroots organizations are often excellent partners in convening peer-to-peer learning opportunities and information networks. Diverse partners such as watershed groups; religious organizations, clubs, recreation, woodland, or wildlife associations; or civic associations will help attract landowners that have not yet been reached by or attracted to traditional forestry messages. In addition, these groups also often have well-established networks.