

Forestry diploma course at Nelson-Marlborough Institute of Technology to stop

The National Diploma in Forestry course at the Nelson Marlborough Institute of Technology will finish in November 2002. It will not be offered in the future because of insufficient enrolments to be viable. It is timely to briefly review the changes in this course.

The National Diploma in Forestry programme at NMIT started in 1997 because of local industry concern at the small number of South Island students who were going through the Diploma course in Rotorua. It was initially planned to be a 3-year course with a strong business management content, with the first 2.5 years covering the National Diploma course and the final 6 months covering two 200 level units from the NMIT B.Com. degree. By 1999, the curriculum for the National Diploma had been revised to include a significant number of business management units and the B.Com. units were taken out of the course.

A review of the NMIT Diploma course in 2000 recommended reducing the course length from 2.5 years to 2 years. This was implemented in 2001 by incorporating a number of second year units into the latter part of the year. It was possible because of the higher levels of academic ability within the class, a good depth of practical experience, and a strong commitment to work together as a group.

The Year 1 students had always worked a four-day week and were able to undertake practical work on their day off once they had acquired the necessary skills. It depended on finding a contractor who was able and willing to take on part-time workers. Labour shortages in the silvicultural work force made this much easier to achieve. In 2002, the Year 2 students had negotiated a three-day week to allow them to undertake additional practical work while completing assignments in their own time. This has been assisted by the development of course material over the last five years and the willingness of the local contractors and company staff to provide input into the course. This improved the integration of theory and practice and the benefits have shown up in the quality of assignments and in student's understanding of the material. In some ways, it has moved the course closer to its origins in block course for technical trainees.

It is not possible to identify all the factors that have contributed to the demise of the course, but these must include:

- Changing public perceptions of the forest industry;
- Extensive industry restructuring;
- Outsourcing of operations management;
- Changing career paths;
- Increasing specialisation in the workforce;
- Increasing competition for skilled school leavers;

- Student concerns over the costs and benefits of pre-employment training;
- Alternative training paths through the new National Certificates; and
- Adult Apprenticeship schemes.

In its five years, 27 students have finished the course. Those with good people management skills have quickly moved into management roles. It will be a challenge to find and develop competent operations managers in the future with a good understanding of both silviculture and harvesting, equipped with good practical skills, technical and business knowledge, with an understanding of the science that underpins sustainable forest operations and best management practices.

international news

Simpson's big plan – Conservation strategy released for 400,000 acres of timberland

The Simpson Resource Co.'s draft plan to manage more than 400,000 acres of its timberland on the North Coast has broken ground. The document, called a Habitat Conservation Plan, lays out Simpson's goal to manage 416,000 acres of land while protecting six species of fish and amphibians that live there. The 1,500-page tome covers tailed frogs to salmon and is the culmination of years of field study, paperwork and consultation with two federal agencies.

The conservation plan (available at <http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/>) will change how the company operates. Changes in winter operations, road maintenance and repair, and the way Simpson cuts timber are all part of the strategy.

- *Eureka Times-Standard*, August 20 2002.

Bush plan to thin forests walks tightrope of high costs and political opposition

President Bush's proposal to thin the nation's forests to prevent forest fires won cheers from fellow Republicans in timber country. But the high costs of thinning and the strong political opposition to both cutting old growth trees and suspending environmental laws could prove formidable obstacles.

The White House states "the forests and rangelands of the West have become unnaturally dense and are overloaded with the fuels for fires – underbrush and small trees." When the thick dry underbrush catches fire, flames leap from the forest floor to the tops of older, larger trees, touching off the canopy fires that have proven so difficult to contain. The cost of thinning forests can be staggering - \$2.7 billion for the 1.6 million acres of forest just in the rugged Klamath Mountains region of south-western Oregon, according to research by the U.S. Forest Service's Pacific Northwest Research Station (http://www.fs.fed.us/pnw/fia/ear/jfried/projects/fia_biosum/)

- *Eureka Times-Standard*, August 26 2002.