

1-1-2002

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Recommended Citation

Seiler, John R. and Aust, W. Mike (2002) "Online forest biology and tree identification graduate class for public school educators," *Natural Resources and Environmental Issues*: Vol. 9, Article 38.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/nrei/vol9/iss1/38>

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AN ONLINE FOREST BIOLOGY AND TREE IDENTIFICATION GRADUATE CLASS FOR PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATORS

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ABSTRACT: As a result of certification and accreditation standards, public school teachers are often required to take graduate education courses. However, it is often difficult for these teachers/students to take courses in residence at campuses. Further, there is often a shortage of specialized courses in their area of teaching. There is also a demand for natural-resource-based classes since, in Virginia, many of the standards of learning can be effectively taught using examples from forests. In response to the above issues, we developed an entirely online graduate course that covered forest biology, management, and tree identification. In the summer of 2001, 24 students successfully completed the course. Students were required to learn to identify 80 trees and shrubs in nine separate groups. They were also taught tree growth and structure, reproduction, carbon uptake, water relations, growth regulators, cold hardiness and dormancy, soils and site productivity, and silviculture. The course content was delivered on three CD-ROMS and administration occurred through a Web site. Nine cumulative tree ID quizzes were given online as well as two comprehensive exams covering the tree biology topics. We will present the basic structure of the course, class administration, share insights and student feedback.