

Western Newfoundland Model Forest Urban Forest Ecology Walking Tour

Final Report

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Abstract:

The Urban Ecology Walking Tour was initiated by the Public Awareness and Involvement Working Group (PAIWG) of the Western Newfoundland Model Forest (WNMF). Its main purpose was to educate the public and school groups about the WNMF and forest ecosystems and forest management. A variety of staff members of Sir Wilfred Grenfell College lead by Keith Nicol put together the interpretative tour. Although the tour was poorly subscribed in August 2000, it was heavily used in September and early October when more than 900 students took part. The teachers, adults and students who took the tour reported that it was informative and interesting and the tour overall was very well rated.

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1.0 Introduction

The Western Newfoundland Model Forest (WNMF) is a partnership of varied stakeholders with the main goal of developing a process of sustainable forest management. A sub goal is “to build the capacity in society for people to contribute effectively to resource management”. Within this goal is the objective of providing relevant education programmes at all levels and of all types: formal, informal and professional development. To this end the Public Awareness and Involvement Working Group (PAIWG) of the WNMF decided to implement a forest ecology walking tour in the summer and fall of 2000. A tour had been run in the summer and fall of 1999 with considerable success. The main purpose was to allow the general public and various school groups to learn about the forest through a short walking tour. The area chosen was the Participark trails near the Forest Centre in Corner Brook which allowed participants to view an introductory video and then go on a guided walk. Although participation was minimal in August close to 30 school groups participated in September and early October. This school involvement was very successful and included over 900 students, a substantial increase from the previous year.

2.0 Tour Development, Implementation and Evaluation of the Tour

Staff Training-

The staff involved in the developing the tours included Professor Henry Mann (botanist), Dr. Bill Iams (geologist), and Dr. Michael Rutherford (soil science). Professor Keith Nicol was the project manager and was involved in coordinating all aspects of the project. The specialists listed above examined the Participark Trails for interpretative possibilities and they supplied a variety of interpretative materials. Keith Nicol also obtained information on a variety of other types of information related to the history of Corner Brook, history of logging in Newfoundland, Guidelines for Forestry Operations within Protected Water Supplies, material on folk remedies in Newfoundland, Beothuk Indians and their use of the forest, Nature Guide for the Pasadena Nordic Ski Club Trails, plus provided various guides dealing with trees and shrubs, wildflowers, and birds of Newfoundland. He also obtained thinned and unthinned tree discs from Corner Brook Pulp and Paper (CBPP) to illustrate the effects of silviculture on tree growth. All of this material was compiled by the tour guides to allow the participants to have a better understanding of:

- a)the historical significance of the forest and Corner Brook stream to the history of Corner Brook
- b)the basic geology and soils of this area
- c)the flora and fauna that one might see in the boreal forest of Western Newfoundland
- d)various human/forest interactions
- e)other relevant factors which depended in part on the age of the participants.

Two tour guides, Heather Nicol and Peter Smith were trained by Keith Nicol and the above mentioned staff. Through the month of August, these tour guides both worked individually on alternate weeks but through most of September and early October both tour guides worked at the same time since the school groups were generally large. The involvement of two tour guides working simultaneously in September and October was not initially planned for but is highly recommended if this project goes ahead in future years since some schools brought between 35- 50 students.

Tour Format

Two tours were planned each day - one at 9:00 am and another at 1:00 pm Monday through Friday, August 2 to October 6, 2000. Tour length was roughly 1.5 - 2 hours. The tours would normally start at the Forest Centre with an introductory 15 minute video about the WNMF. Then the participants would walk to the Participark Trail and do the 'lower' loop which is about 1 kilometer in length. At the end of the tour, participants would walk back to the Forest Centre or catch the bus in the parking lot of the Participark. The scheduled times were altered on request by teachers or clients wishing to do the tour at other times. Younger students (up to grade 6), would start at the Participark to reduce the walking time from the Forest Centre. On conclusion of the tour the students were given appropriate information on the WNMF, posters, information concerning the pine martin, a WNMF-CD for older classes and a word puzzle sheet for younger classes.

Tour Management

The tours were booked through a dedicated phone line to the WNMF. This allowed interested individuals or groups to book a tour. The phone line had a message about the tour and booking information. The phone line was monitored at least 3 times a day to receive messages and respond to the people who had booked a tour. This system of booking tours worked well and is suggested as a good way to proceed in the future if this programme is planned again.

Public Relations and Promotional Material for the tours.

Promoting awareness of the tours is essential to getting people involved in the tours. This was approached in several ways. First of all, a brochure was created to promote the tours through the 4 main hotels in the city and at the Corner Brook Visitors Chalet in July 2000. This brochure was designed to target visitors to the city who might be interested in the tour. Two hundred copies were printed and a sample brochure is attached in Appendix 1. Secondly, the Western Star was contacted and they did a news story on the tours (see Appendix 2). Thirdly, notices about the tours were run several times a week in the Western Star in the Community Calender (see Appendix 3) for the month of August. Lastly, 4 ads were run in the Western Star on each Saturday in August promoting the tours (see Appendix 3). These dates were chosen since it was assumed that the Saturday paper would get more readership and that it would be seen by a

larger audience than weekday papers. All schools in District #3 were contacted by fax in early September with information about the tours and how to book them (see Appendix 4).

Tour Participation and User Response Surveys

Despite the considerable promotion and advertising about the tours, the number of people that availed of the tours in August was quite small-only 26 people participated. This is up considerably from the previous year when just 6 people participated outside of 2 'official' tours that were run in August, 1999. Although the summer turnout is low it does allow time to get materials together and to run the tour in small groups in anticipation of the larger groups in the fall.

Once school resumed, interest in the tours jumped remarkably. After the District #3 schools were contacted, 11 schools responded and bookings were solid from September 18 to October 6.

These 11 schools had over 900 students participated which is a substantial increase from the previous year when 700 students took the tour. It is likely that even more schools might have taken part except that the tours ended on October 6, 2000 due to personal reasons for one of the tour guides. The previous year the tours were extended until October 25. Table 2.1 shows the list of schools and the number of students involved.

User response forms were given out to determine reaction to the tour from the students, adults and teachers. This was done to be able to better plan future tours based on what participants preferred or found interesting. Summary sheets of these questionnaires are found in Appendix 5 but some details are presented below. Note that not all participants filled out questionnaires since some students/adults left before filling them out.

Notes on Teacher's Response to the Tours:

1) Over 80% thought that the students either had a good or excellent understanding of the different aspects of the tour.

2) Sixty percent thought that the ecosystem component was of most interest to students.

3) Ninety percent thought that the tour was interactive enough for students.

4) Ninety percent would recommend the tour to friends and family and 90% rated the tour as good or excellent.

5) There were several individual comments which are enclosed in the package of questionnaires.

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Notes of Adult's Response to the Tours (this was filled out by anyone over the age of 15):

1) Ninety-eight percent thought that the tour was helpful in developing an understanding of the W. Newfoundland ecosystem.

2) Almost 95% thought the tour was helpful in understanding forest management issues.

3) Over 77 % thought the pre tour presentation length was good. Over 75% thought the walking tour length was good.

4) Over 93% thought the tour was enjoyable and over 95 % thought it was informative.

5) The pre-tour presentation was liked the least and the ecosystem component was ranked as the most enjoyable.

6) Over 95% ranked the tour as good or excellent.

7) Almost 90% would recommend the tour to their families or friends.

Notes on Children's Response to the Tour (age 8-14)

1) Most children thought the tour was both the right length and FUN.

2) Close to 70% thought that the most interesting aspect was the trees/wildlife/soils aspect of the tour.

3) The least liked aspect was the pre-tour presentation.

4) Over 90% thought the tour was good or excellent.

5) Over 95% would recommend the tour to friends and family.

As an incentive to encouraging students, adults and teachers to fill out the questionnaires, a variety of WNMF t-shirts and other prizes were given away on a random draw basis at the end of tour schedule.

3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are offered for consideration if the tour is to be undertaken in another year.

1. It is recommended that since general public's interest is minimal as the tour now stands but is very popular with schools that the tour either be completely re-thought out as to how to better attract the general public or simply concentrate on the schools. If the latter is the case then the contractor could be hired for just the months of September and October which might be more cost effective. It is recommended that 2 guides be hired for this school session since the class sizes are generally quite large.

4. References Cited

1. Western Newfoundland Model Forest Urban Forest Ecology Walking Tour, Terry McNeil, Final Report, Project # 0435-1, November 2, 1999.

