



2010 Conservation Biology e-Newsletter and Website User Evaluation Survey

PROJECT REPORT

2010 Conservation Biology e-Newsletter and Website User Evaluation Survey

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1. INTRODUCTION

Are e-newsletters still valued as a source of information in the Web 2.x¹ world? Technological changes, inexpensive hardware, and faster connection speeds have all contributed to the growth and popularity of the Internet, allowing the traditional text-based newsletter to evolve into an indispensable communication tool that provides access to timely and relevant information. However, as the popularity of social networking sites and associated tools continue to grow, their potential to eclipse email communication as the preferred method of communicating with and staying current exists as Internet savvy users are able to access and publish a wealth of information on these sites. Some Internet pundits are declaring email and e-newsletters an archaic mechanism of staying connected, suggesting that e-newsletter use is diminishing as social networking sites like Facebook, MySpace, and Twitter gain popularity. Nevertheless, according to a recent study published by e-Dialog, 53% of respondents to the question “What prompts you to go to a social networking site (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Blog, etc.),” preferred to be notified via an email to their personal account about what is happening on their social networks². Even though new technology enables the users to stay connected via desktop and mobile applications, staying informed and connected through email cannot be understated, and it is still one of the key components of staying informed and connected to the Information Highway.

As long as the popularity of email communication remains strong, more and more social media sites will continue to leverage email newsletters, driving adoption of their platforms to build and grow online social communities. The strength and longevity of these communities will be in their ability to embrace current and future technologies to communicate and share content with members, especially now that mobile communication devices have the capability to stay connected to these communities. As the Internet evolves toward Web 3.0, the value of e-newsletters may increase as search engines become smarter and search results become more focused and relevant, which may result in e-newsletters on singular topics becoming more accessible to a wider user-base outside traditional communities of practice. Furthermore, e-newsletters are becoming a valuable marketing tool of the digital economy to disseminate information about current and upcoming products and to engage communities through product champions.

In summary, e-newsletters are still very much valued as a source of information dissemination in online communities because of the Internet’s ever changing landscape as it adjusts to new technologies and methods of communication and information gathering, which are constantly being adopted or discarded by average and Internet savvy users. E-newsletters are a constant, an increasingly reliable source of topical information for the Internet community.

¹ “Web 3.0 Concepts Explained in Plain English (Presentations).” July 29, 2010. <http://www.labnol.org/internet/web-3-concepts-explained/8908>

² “Email Drives Social Networking.” July 28, 2010. <http://www.marketingcharts.com/direct/email-drives-social-networking-13448/>

A modest estimate of the value of FORREX e-newsletters, the estimated return on investment (ROI) and net present value (NPV) is 5:1 and \$4.3 M, respectively, while the FORREX website value is estimated 278:1 ROI and an NPV of \$4,300 M when taking into consideration the cost of production against the productivity and innovation value to the end users³.

The Conservation Biology e-Newsletter (one of FORREX's electronic distribution lists) and the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology Web pages (an integral component of FORREX's website⁴) are Information Technology tools employed by the FORREX Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology Extension Cluster for increasing awareness of and access to experiential-, traditional-, and science-based knowledge on ecosystem management and conservation biology in British Columbia (see Figures 1 and 2). The Conservation Biology e-Newsletter is a free monthly service with a subscriber base of over 600 people, which constitutes an important method for distributing ecosystem management and conservation biology-related information to our target audiences. In addition, the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology Web pages, with an estimated average of 9,000 hits per year, is an important communication tool in making relevant contents and links available to our clients.

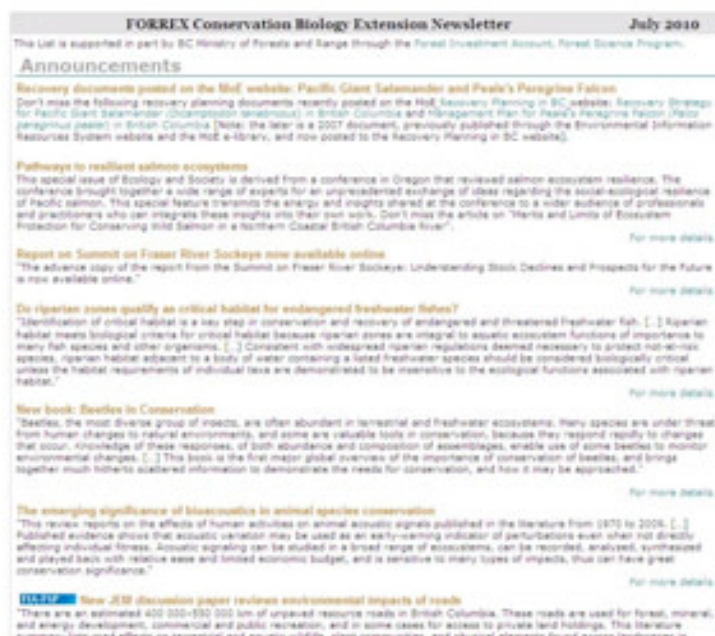


Figure 1. Partial view of the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter July 2010 issue.

³ Hollstedt, C. 2009. FORREX and the Provincial Extension Program Business Case. FORREX internal report. 21 pp.

⁴ http://www.forrex.org/program/con_bio/clust_ecosystems.asp



Figure 2. A snap shot of the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology homepage.

To ensure that the format, content, and scope of these communication tools are meeting the needs of users, an evaluation survey was conducted in 2010. The objective of the evaluation survey was to:

1. Assess the level of satisfaction with the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter and the FORREX Ecosystem Management and Conservation biology Website among e-Newsletter subscribers;
2. Identify areas of improvement for both online products;
3. Improve FORREX's understanding of client usage of these products in particular and the FORREX website in general; and
4. Gather user's feedback on the value of the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter as a stand alone product, versus its potential combination with other FORREX electronic distribution lists.

The articulation of the different questions contained in the survey was coordinated with previous⁵ and simultaneous⁶ electronic distribution lists and website user surveys implemented by FORREX in order to optimize comparability of results. The survey was conducted during June and July 2010 using an electronic, web-based survey system

⁵ Redding, T. 2009. 2009 WatershedEXT Electronic Mailing List and Website User Evaluation Survey. Project Report. FORREX. Kamloops, BC.

⁶ Wiensczyk, A.M. 2010. 2010 Forest Resources Dynamics Electronic Mailing List and Website User Evaluation Survey. Project Report. FORREX. Kamloops, BC. *In prep.*)

(www.zoomerang.com). This Project Report summarizes the results of this evaluation. Key survey results and responses are reviewed in Section 2, followed by the complete survey data in Section 3.

2. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The survey was sent to 613 subscribers (total subscribers at the time of survey initiation) on June 10, 2010, via email, and it was closed on July 16, 2010. A total of 66 responses were received, resulting in an 11% response rate. The low response rate may be related to the survey being conducted during June and July when many subscribers may be away from the office on vacation or fieldwork, and this low response rate seems to be consistent with the decreasing response rates to online surveys observed in North America in the last two decades.⁷

The summary of results includes the key points and the value in parentheses refers to the specific survey results being summarized. Please refer to Section 3 of this report for full detailed results on each survey question.

The first four survey questions aimed to gather background information about the respondents. The results show that:

- Most survey respondents are involved in ecosystem management/conservation biology-related activities within BC (see Q. 1 and Figure 3).
- The majority of respondents are affiliated with BC Provincial Government (35%), followed by natural resources consultants (27%), academics (26%), and the public (21%) (see Q. 2 and Figure 4).
- Primary fields/areas of practice of respondents were ecology (68%), habitat conservation (53%), biology (48%), species recovery (39%), forest management/stewardship (38%), ecosystem restoration/rehabilitation (35%), and research (32%), with other areas of practice represented at lower levels (see Q. 3).
- Primary areas of focus of respondents were research and knowledge extension (53%), monitoring (41%) and on the ground operational activities (34%) (see Q. 4).

⁷ See Sheehan, K. 2001. E-mail Survey Response Rates: A Review. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, Volume 6, Issue 2, January, 2001.

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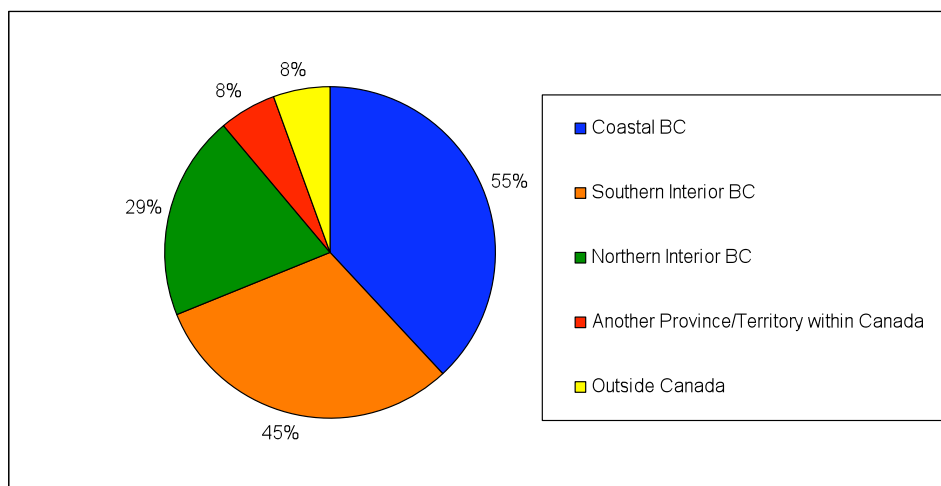


Figure 3. Geographical representation of survey respondents.

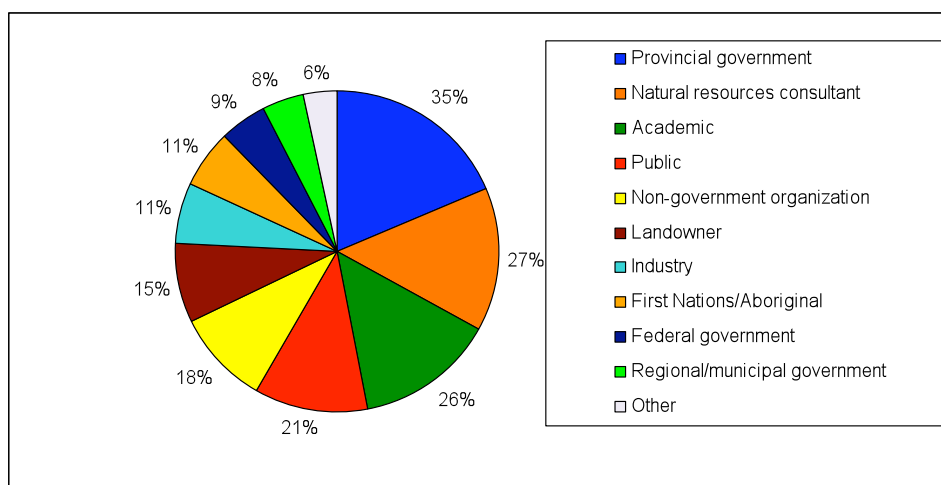


Figure 4. Survey respondents' affiliation.

Questions 5 to 19 of the survey provided relevant feedback on the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter. Overall, the feedback received was very positive and supports the current content quality, posting frequency, and length, as well as maintaining the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter as a stand-alone product. The following are brief summary points based on the survey results. For greater detail, please refer to the full results and written responses in section 3.

- The majority of respondents (70%) have been subscribers for more than 3 years (see Q. 5).
- 98 to 99 % of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter has
 - increased their awareness of relevant events;
 - helps them link to relevant new science-based publications and/or expertise;
 - connects them to things that they need to know;

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- has helped them keep in touch with current ecosystem management and conservation biology issues (see Q. 6, 7, 8, and 10).
- 87 % of respondents agree or strongly agree that the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter saves them time and helps them to do their job more efficiently (see Q. 9).
- 91 to 97 % of respondents qualified as good or excellent the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter's
 - overall performance and utility;
 - quality of information featured;
 - timely featuring of news, events and courses;
 - comprehensiveness of information; and
 - value of research publications summarized and highlighted (see Q. 11).
- 65% of respondents forward information from the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter often or occasionally to people they know who need to have access to this information (see Q. 12).
- 94% of respondents feel the monthly posting frequency is adequate (see Q. 13), while 83 % of respondents feel its length is just right (see Q. 14).
- Despite a majority of respondents also subscribing to other FORREX mailing lists (see Q. 17),
 - 98% of respondents consider somewhat important or very important to keep the current topical focus of the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter (see Q. 15);
 - 0% believe there is any content overlap or duplication issues between the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter and other distribution lists operated by FORREX (see Q. 18); and
 - 55% are unsure if they would stay as a subscriber if the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter was to be merged with other FORREX electronic mailing lists (see Q. 16).

The final question in this section of the survey (Q. 19) was open-ended, asking for comments and suggestions for improving the Conservation Biology e-Newsletter. The complete list of responses is included in Section 3, and key comments/suggestions are noted below.

- General support and “keep up the good work” comments.
- General support for keeping the current topical focus and a stand-alone product.
- Keep under check the length of contents.

The final section of the survey (Q. 20 to 24) included questions relating to usage and evaluation of the quality of the FORREX website in general and the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages in particular. Full results are provided in section 3, and key points are summarized below.

- 53% of respondents currently use the FORREX website when looking for information on natural resources management (see Q. 20).
- 27% of respondents visit the FORREX website about once a month, while 16% visit more than once a month; 34% visit less than once a month and 27% never visit the FORREX website (see Q. 21).

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- 54% and 17% of respondents have accessed the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology links and the Wildlife Habitat Decision Aids resources on the FORREX website, respectively (see Q. 22).
- The most highly accessed web resources outside the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology extension program are the BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management [JEM] (64%), LINK (41%), the FORREX Series and File Report publications (34%), and event listings (34%) (see Q. 22).
- 45 to 60% of respondents qualified as good or excellent the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages:
 - overall quality and utility of information available;
 - ease of finding desired information;
 - and up to date links;

However, 40 to 43% of respondents indicated that they had never visited the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages (see Q. 23).

The final question (Q. 24) was open-ended, asking for comments and suggestions for improving the FORREX website and the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages. The few responses received to this question, together with the responses received to Q. 23 indicate that FORREX needs to improve awareness of the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages and the information resources available through this component of the FORREX website.

3. FULL SURVEY RESULTS

Question 1. In which geographical area are you involved in Conservation Biology/Ecosystem Management activities? (Select all that apply.)

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Coastal BC	36	55%
Southern Interior BC	30	45%
Northern Interior BC	19	29%
Another Province/Territory within Canada	5	8%
Outside Canada, please specify*	5	8%

*Respondents who selected this option indicated the following locations: The Gambia, Africa; China, Mozambique, Vietnam, Indonesia; Chile and Tasmania; Puget Sound-Skagit (WA, USA).

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Question 2. Please select all affiliations that apply to you.

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Provincial government	23	35%
Natural resources consultant	18	27%
Academic	17	26%
Public	14	21%
Non-government organization	12	18%
Landowner	10	15%
Industry	7	11%
First Nations/Aboriginal	7	11%
Federal government	6	9%
Regional/municipal government	5	8%
Other, please specify*	4	6%

*Respondents who selected this option indicated the following affiliations: Forest Practice Board; Consultancy; Biologist; Eco-tourism.

Question 3. In which field/area do you primarily practice? (Select all that apply)

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Ecology	45	68%
Habitat Conservation	35	53%
Biology	32	48%
Species Recovery	26	39%
Forest Management/Stewardship	25	38%
Ecosystem Restoration/Rehabilitation	23	35%
Research	21	32%
Natural Resources Management Policy	18	27%
Land Use Planning	17	26%
Invasive Species Management	15	23%
Extension	12	18%
Range Management/Stewardship	9	14%
Forest Operations/Harvesting/Silviculture	9	14%
Watershed Management	8	12%
Coastal Management	8	12%
Tourism/Recreation	8	12%
Other, please specify*	7	11%
Regional/Provincial/National Park management	5	8%
Agriculture	4	6%
Mining	3	5%
Oil & Gas	3	5%

*Respondents who selected this option indicated the following fields/areas of practice: Ethnobotany; Public Advisory Group, CSA Sustainable Forest Management; Resource Economics; Fire Ecology and Management; Teaching university-level resource management/ecology students; Forest interpretation; Limnology, public education.

Question 4. *What are your primary areas of focus? Please select all that apply.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Research and knowledge extension	34	53%
Monitoring	26	41%
On the ground operational activities	22	34%
Strategic water and land management and leadership	21	33%
Education and training	20	31%
Advocacy and stewardship	17	27%
Developing and revising policy and legislation	9	14%
Other, please specify*	8	12%

*Respondents who selected this option indicated the following areas of focus: Implementing ungulate winter range and wildlife habitat areas under FRPA and associated habitat protection; Species at risk recovery; Plant species at risk recovery and monitoring; Sustainable forest management, stewardship; Information management; Species at risk assessments; Scoping, planning, environmental assessment; Interpretation.

Question 5. *How long have you been a subscriber to the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter?*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
>3 years	46	70%
1-2 years	15	23%
<1 year	5	8%

Question 6. *The Conservation Biology electronic newsletter has increased my awareness of relevant events.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Strongly agree	40	61%
Agree	25	38%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2%

Question 7. *The Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter helps me link to relevant new science-based publications and/or expertise.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Strongly agree	35	55%
Agree	28	44%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2%

Question 8. *The Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter has helped me keep in touch with current ecosystem management and conservation biology issues.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Strongly Agree	31	48%
Agree	32	50%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2%

Question 9. *The Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter saves me time and helps me to do my job more efficiently.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Strongly Agree	21	34%
Agree	33	53%
Disagree	7	11%
Strongly disagree	1	2%

Question 10. *The Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter connects me to things that I need to know.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Strongly Agree	30	46%
Agree	34	52%
Disagree	0	0%
Strongly disagree	1	2%

Question 11. *With respect to the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter, please rate the following*:*

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor
Overall performance and utility	34 52%	30 45%	1 2%	1 2%
Quality of information featured	36 55%	26 40%	2 3%	1 2%
Timely featuring of news, events, and courses	31 48%	31 48%	2 3%	1 2%
Comprehensiveness of information	27 42%	32 49%	5 8%	1 2%
Value of research publications summarized and highlighted	25 38%	36 55%	4 6%	1 2%

*Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.

Question 12. *I forward information from the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter to people I know that need to have access to this information.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Often	7	11%
Occasionally	35	54%
Rarely	18	28%
Never	5	8%

Question 13. *We generally send out postings once a month. Do you feel this posting frequency is*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Adequate	61	94%
Too frequent	1	2%
Not frequent enough	3	5%

Question 14. *What do you feel about the length of the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Just right	55	83%
Too long	8	12%
Too short	3	5%

Question 15. *Our postings are focused on Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology topics. There are advantages and disadvantages of being topically specific. To you, how important is it for the e-Newsletter to maintain this topical focus?*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Very important	47	71%
Somewhat important	18	27%
Not important at all	1	2%

Question 16. *Would you still subscribe to the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter if it were to be merged with other FORREX electronic mailing lists such as Forest Resource Dynamics, Aboriginal Forestry, Watershed Management, Information Management, and/or Socio-economics?*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Unsure, I would have to wait and decide	36	55%
Yes, I would still subscribe	25	38%
No, I would leave the list if the topic focus was expanded	5	8%

Question 17. *Do you subscribe to other FORREX electronic mailing lists? Please select those to which you are a subscriber.*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
FORREX (Forum for Research and Extension in Natural Resources)	32	68%
BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management (JEM)	22	47%
WatershedExt (Watershed Management Extension Program)	15	32%
Linking Innovation & Networking Knowledge (LINK)	15	32%
ForestDynamicsExt (Forest Resources Dynamics Extension Program)	7	15%
SocialScienceExt (Socio-economics Extension Program)	7	15%
AboriginalForestryExt (Aboriginal Forestry Extension Program)	4	9%
InformationExt (Information Management Extension Program)	1	2%

Question 18. *Do you feel that there is a significant overlap between the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter and other electronic mailing lists operated by FORREX?*

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Yes, but the overlap is minimal and not problematic	23	35%
No, I have not experienced duplication in content	22	34%
I do not subscribe to any other FORREX electronic mailing lists	20	31%
Yes, the duplication should be addressed	0	0%

Question 19. Please provide any further suggestions and comments to help us improve the Conservation Biology electronic Newsletter.

- I would like to see it stay separate and focused on topics the way it has in the past.
- Currently works well for what I'm looking for.
- Keep up the good work! Please don't merge lists - it is hard enough already to get good focused info on listservs these days.
- As a member of our public advisory group, and with no background in forestry, I find the newsletter to be a major source of information for my education.
- I wasn't aware of the information management extension program until right now but, now that I am, I will subscribe to it as it is very relevant. Regarding putting them all together, what I like about the way it is now is that it is very focused & I don't have look around for things or be distracted by really interesting articles in other areas. I do information management and am already maxed out of filtering through non-relevant information to my job.
- Training opportunities and seminar information is very important to me.
- Conservation Biology needs to address socio-economics issues directly. The compartmentalization of disciplines will not work for policy development.
- It is a bit too long and some of the articles are getting a bit far from "research" (bordering on "fluffy").
- Excellent product... makes keeping up-to-date much easier and less time-consuming!
- Good work, please continue!
- Good newsletter. Sometimes I am too busy to take it all in.
- Conservation Biology Newsletter is very helpful. In particular it is a critical source that allows undergraduate students and graduate students to access current issues and current information. The newsletter is an excellent educational tool.
- I love this newsletter and look forward to it. I also subscribe to the socio-economics one, too. Thanks for a great publication!
- More frequent publishing so the newsletter isn't so long.
- My problem is that when the Newsletter comes, it has too much information, so I tend to scan the first part and then file it for later, which of course never happens. I would rather have a very brief weekly Newsletter with just a few items each time.
- Please keep it going... it's an awesome resource, and thanks for all your hard work.
- Keep it up.
- The newsletter has been very helpful over the years, and the length and content are pretty much on target. Keep up the good work!
- I really like the format, easy to quickly scan and get further info through links. Once or twice links weren't working and the situation was resolved quickly by contacting admin. Thanks.
- Keep the way it is.

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Question 20. Do you currently use the FORREX website when you are looking for information on natural resources conservation and management?

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Yes	35	53%
No	31	47%

Question 21. How often do you visit the FORREX website?

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
Less than once a month	22	34%
About once a month	17	27%
Never	17	27%
About once a week	5	8%
Several times a month	5	8%
Every day	0	0%
Several times a week	0	0%

Question 22. Please indicate which of the following resources on the FORREX website you have accessed. (Select all that apply)

Answer	No. responses	% of responses
BC Journal of Ecosystems and Management (JEM)	38	64%
Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology links	32	54%
LINK	24	41%
FORREX Series and File Report publications	20	34%
Event listings	20	34%
Natural Resources Information Network (NRIN)	16	27%
Streamline Watershed Management Bulletin	15	25%
None	10	17%
Wildlife Habitat Decision Aids (WHDAs)	10	17%
Extension Program web pages (e.g., Forest Resources Dynamics, Aboriginal Forestry, Ecosystem Management, Conservation Biology, etc.)	9	15%
Mountain Pine Beetle Gateway	5	8%
The Compendium of Forest Hydrology and Geomorphology in BC	4	7%
Stand Establishment Decision Aids (SEDAs)	3	5%
Forest Resource Dynamics links	1	2%
Other, please specify*	1	2%

*Respondents who selected this option indicated the following: "I did not know this website existed".

Question 23. *With respect to the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages - found on the FORREX website, please rate the following*: (Please select N/A if you have never visited the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages)*

	Excellent	Good	Average	Poor	N/A
Overall quality and utility of information available	11 19%	24 41%	0 0%	0 0%	24 41%
Ease of finding desired information	9 16%	23 40%	2 4%	0 0%	23 40%
Up-to-date links	11	20	2	0	25
Overall quality and utility of information available	19%	34%	3%	0%	43%

*Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.

Question 24. *What changes or additional features would you suggest to improve the FORREX website and the Ecosystem Management and Conservation Biology web pages?*

- I rely on the newsletters and bulletins except twice at the start to see what FORREX was about. I shall visit it today to subscribe to the Information Management Program now that I know about it.
- I didn't know it existed; awareness and getting linked might be an idea.
- I did not know it existed.
- I have no comment.