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Trends in Undergraduate Enrollment in Natural Resources at NAPFSC Institutions, 1980-2003

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Undergraduate enrollments were obtained by degree programs in natural resources for a representative sample (n=30) of universities having membership in the National Association of Professional Forestry Schools and Colleges (NAPFSC). Nationally, enrollments dropped to a low point in 1987, increased sharply to a maximum in 1995, and then decreased steadily through the present (2003). This trend differed little among geographic regions. Reasons for this seemingly cyclic behavior in enrollment trends are not known, but may be related to basic aspects of the economy and their influence on career choices made by prospective undergraduates. Interestingly, the most recent downturn in enrollments occurred while many natural resource programs were diversifying their degree offerings to include non-traditional subjects such as environmental studies and science, applied ecology, conservation and ecosystem science, and urban forestry. This downturn does not bode well for agencies and organizations who, with sharp increases in retirements, are projecting a strong demand for natural resource graduates over the next five years.

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