



Professionals in Public Natural Resource Management Agencies

A Position Statement of the Society of American Foresters

Originally adopted by the SAF Council on October 29, 1996, subsequently revised and extended by the Council on December 16, 1996, December 7, 2003 and May 19, 2009. This position will expire on May 19, 2014, unless, after subsequent review, the SAF Council decides otherwise.

Position

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) believes that those who manage the nation's 336 million acres of National Forests and other public forest lands must be professionally qualified through both education and experience to fulfill their responsibilities. These qualifications not only include knowledge and skills in the broad field of forestry, but also the management and leadership skills necessary to be successful at all levels. These qualifications must continue to be refreshed and furthered through continuing education and cross-training efforts to sustain a high quality workforce. Most importantly, agency hiring and promotion practices must give priority to these key qualifications at all levels of the agencies.

Natural resource professionals have served capably under both politically appointed and elected agency leaders, maintaining continuity and professionalism in managing the nation's public forests while implementing resource management policies established by the Executive Branch and Congress or by state and local governments. It is critical that key leadership positions in the public agencies continue to be filled by those natural resource professionals with the appropriate leadership and management skills.

SAF recognizes that many federal, state, and local government forest management functions and services are performed by independent contractors, consultants, or other suppliers as a result of constrained budgets and other pressures. Although it is recognized that there may be cost savings and other efficiencies gained through contract services, decisions on when, where, and to what extent such contract services are utilized should remain a responsibility of, and be performed under the direction of, the career professional who are responsible for the stewardship of the nation's public forest lands, without undue encumbrances of additional bureaucratic processes. Where contract services include professional or technical forest management functions, SAF believes that it is essential that they be provided by natural resource professionals who adhere to the

same high standards of professional ethics and practice expected of public agency resource managers and scientists.

Issue

There is concern over the current situation in federal and state agencies hiring due to the numbers of forestry professional approaching retirement age, hiring and promotion policies intended to increase the types of disciplines involved in resource management decisions, and increased pressure to contract out or “outsource” some forest management functions. Therefore, the SAF must emphasize the importance of employing qualified natural resource professionals and contractors who have the educational background, expertise, and experience needed to manage public forests in a sustainable manner to provide the expected benefits and needs of the nation’s growing population.

Furthermore, there is concern over current hiring policies and practices that increase the potential for key leadership positions, as well as entry-level and field level positions, to be filled by persons who lack an accredited professional education in forestry or other natural resources disciplines. These hiring policies and practices include:

- ❖ **The federal Civil Service Reform Act of 1978, which created the Senior Executive Service (SES).** The Act changed the structure and hiring practices for high-level personnel in the Executive branch, preparing and enabling SES-level managers to fill upper management, supervisory, or policy positions in more than one federal agency. Career-reserved SES positions can only be filled by career appointees and may be assigned from within or outside a given federal agency. General SES positions can be filled by career, noncareer, or limited appointment (political appointment) personnel. In either case, the potential has increased that senior positions in the federal natural resource agencies may be filled by persons who lack a professional education in forestry or other natural resource management disciplines.
- ❖ **Reduced emphasis on professional qualifications for entry- and field-level positions.** Civil service requirements make no clear distinction between graduates of SAF-accredited and non-accredited forestry education programs. As a result, career positions in the Forest Service and other federal agencies may be filled by persons who lack complete professional preparation in the broad field of forestry.

Finally, budget constraints and Executive branch direction have also resulted in increased pressure on federal forest managers to contract out or “outsource” some functions that have traditionally been performed by federal agency employees. SAF recognizes that there may be cost savings and other efficiencies to be gained through increased use of contract services. However, where such services include performance of professional or technical forest management functions, it is essential that they be provided by contractors or other suppliers who employ qualified forestry professionals and that they be performed according to the same high standards of professional ethics and practice expected of public agency employees.