

# State Programs to Credential Foresters

## A Position of the Society of American Foresters

Initially adopted by the Society on November 14, 1985, subsequently revised and extended by Council on December 16, 1996. When the position statement expired on December 16, 2001, it was revised and extended again on December 5, 2004. It was then revised and extended again on June 13, 2010 and will expire on June 13, 2015 unless, after subsequent review, SAF Council decides otherwise.

### Position

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) supports rigorous forester credential programs as implemented through state-level forester licensing and mandatory registration requirements. SAF defines an effective forester credential as demonstrating professional competency through five key elements: (1) professional forestry education, (2) examination, (3) professional experience, (4) continuing forestry education, and (5) adherence to a standard of professional practice. Because of the wide range of forest types and environmental conditions in which foresters operate, and the variation in state laws and regulations that affect forest practices, state governments are the appropriate authorities to administer and enforce forester credentials. The SAF Certified Forester (CF) is a national credential available to all professional foresters through a program embodying the five key elements of a rigorous professional credential.

### Issue

Forester credentials provide for the public health, safety, and welfare of society by defining a level of professional competency needed for individuals to practice scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management. Strong forester credentials therefore are an important mechanism to ensure that private and public goals from forest management are achieved and that public confidence in the profession is promoted and maintained.

Forest operations can affect forest health and condition for decades and even centuries. For example, timber harvesting and other management practices can influence the value that forest owners receive for their timber and the residual value of the forest stand, as well as environmental values such as water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and landscape aesthetics. Forest management activities include the planning and supervision of timber harvesting and road construction, use of pesticides and prescribed fire, and many other management actions that can have a substantial and long-term effect on the environment. Potential benefits of using trained and credentialed foresters include helping communities address natural resource issues and conflicts in cities in towns, bringing the benefits of trees and healthy forests to urban areas, protecting water quality supplies through the application of best management practices and engineering, and assuring a steady flow of goods and services from forestlands.

Ensuring that individuals are adequately trained and qualified to develop and implement scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management prescriptions is thus an important contribution to public health, safety, and welfare. In addition to forestland owners and the public, professional foresters themselves benefit from credentialing programs by ensuring that individuals with inadequate training or skills do not misrepresent the forestry profession to prospective clients or the public. All foresters suffer when an individual client or the public is adversely affected by the actions of unqualified practitioners.

## **Recommendations**

Forestry is a dynamic and demanding science, and those who practice it must be well-trained and dedicated to keeping their skills and knowledge current. Forester credential programs recognize and enforce a forester's competence through standards of education, experience, practice, and through records of continuing education. Credentials can also include demonstration of knowledge through examination and adherence to a standard of professional practice and/or code of ethics. Specific considerations for states when building a forester credentialing program include the following:

- **Education:** A degree from an SAF accredited institution or equivalent (see “Grandfathering”).
- **Examination:** States that adopt the CF program are encouraged to supplement it with state-specific knowledge and/or experience requirements to ensure foresters’ familiarity with state and local forest practices laws, regulations, and conditions. This could involve passing a written and/or oral examination.
- **Experience:** 5 years professional forestry experience (see “Grandfathering”).
- **Continuing Education:** The Continuing Forestry Education (CFE) component of the SAF national credentialing program is effectively the universal standard for continuing forestry education requirements in most states.
- **Standard of practice/code of ethics:** For example, the Society of American Foresters Code of Ethics or other societies as applicable such as the Wildlife Society or Fisheries Society code of ethics.
- **Enforcement mechanism:** States are the appropriate authority to administer forester credential programs; for example, State boards of Forestry.
- **Other Considerations:**
  - **Reciprocity:** Such programs should include provisions for reciprocity among states to enable individuals credentialed in one state to practice forestry in another state with equivalent credentialing requirements. Through state adoption of the CF program, reciprocity would be greatly streamlined.

- **Grandfathering:** To increase the benefits associated with forester credentialing, the SAF strongly recommends that state licensure statutes and regulations be applied consistently across all employment sectors (i.e., private consultants, public forestry agencies, and forest industry). Should grandfathering be politically necessary, we suggest a window versus a permanent relaxing of education standard. It is also recommended that “integrative professional knowledge” gain is provided via formal education and continuing education opportunities. Integrative professional knowledge includes topics such as communication, problem-solving, and interdisciplinary integration.

As of 2004, seventeen states have implemented a forester credential through licensing or registration programs, defining who may provide forestry services to the public as well as the nature of the services they may provide. Several other states are considering implementing forester licensing or registration statutes. With the maturation of the SAF Certified Forester (CF) and Continuing Forestry Education programs (CFE) several states have either adopted or are considering adoption of components of the CF and CFE programs for integration into state-level credentialing programs. For example, South Carolina, Georgia, and Maine have adopted the CF examination for their state-level exam. And numerous states use the CFE program for state-level continuing forestry education requirements. A full listing of state forester credentialing programs is listed on the SAF website (see references).

Because the SAF Certified Forester program possesses all of the above mentioned attributes, the CF program is well designed for state recognition as the foundation for defining minimum professional competency in state-level forester licensing and registration programs. The SAF Certified Forester® program represents an established professional forester credential suitable for state adoption in implementing forester licensing and registration programs. The SAF Certified Forester® program establishes and maintains proof of the professional competence needed to practice forestry. Its requirements and professional standards equal or exceed those of the several states that now have forester licensing and registration programs. It is recommended that states developing such programs review the SAF CF program and consider adapting its features to credential foresters in their jurisdictions.

## For Further Information

Block, N.E. 2000. Credentialing and Accrediting Programs. *Journal of Forestry* 98(4): 18-22.

Mortimer, M. and D.H. Jenkins. 2003. Forests at the Fringe: Sustaining Private Forests by Avoiding Perverse Incentives. *Journal of Multistate Taxation and Incentives*. 12(10):28-37.

Mortimer, M.J. 2002. Legal and Ethical Components of Forester Licensing: An Insider's View. *Journal of Forestry* 100(8): 29-32.

Society of American Foresters. 2004. *Certified Forester Program*. Available online at <http://www.safnet.org/certifiedforester/index.cfm> (accessed August 2004).

Stine, R.R., Archey, W.E., Brown, M., Flannery K., Malmshiemer, R.W., Norland, E., Smith, P.G., and M.A. Williamson. 2001. Forester Registration and Licensing. *Journal of Forestry* 99(10): 35-41.

State Forester Credential Programs listing:

([http://www.safnet.org/fp/documents/state\\_quick\\_reference.pdf](http://www.safnet.org/fp/documents/state_quick_reference.pdf)).

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## About the Society of American Foresters

The Society of American Foresters, with over 15,000 members, is the national organization that represents all segments of the forestry profession in the United States. It includes public and private practitioners, researchers, administrators, educators, and forestry students. The Society was established in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot and six other pioneer foresters.

The mission of the Society of American Foresters is to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry; to enhance the competency of its members; to establish professional excellence; and to use the knowledge, skills, and conservation ethic of the profession to ensure the continued health and use of forest ecosystems and the present and future availability of forest resources to benefit society.

The Society is the accreditation authority for professional forestry education in the United States. The Society publishes the *Journal of Forestry*; the quarterlies, *Forest Science*, *Southern Journal of Applied Forestry*, *Northern Journal of Applied Forestry*, and *Western Journal of Applied Forestry*; *The Forestry Source*, and the annual *Proceedings* of the Society of American Foresters national convention.