

# *Taking a Stand:* SAF Position Statements

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These days, there's no shortage of challenging and often controversial public issues related to forests and their management. Wildfires, clearcutting, federal forest management and other big issues capture the attention of decision makers and the public alike. Such issues and public interest can lead to proposed laws, ballot initiatives, and administrative decisions that can greatly affect both forest resources and how they can (or can't) be managed by professional foresters.

SAF's broad membership and mission to advance the science, education, technology, and practice of forestry allows it to be a vital voice for professional foresters on important public issues. And among the SAF "nuts and bolts" for using this voice is the position statement. This article briefly discusses the nature and origin of SAF position statements, and the process used to develop them. Hopefully, this information will help SAF members develop and use SAF positions as a positive influence on opinions and decisions affecting America's forests and our profession.

## ***What does a position statement look like?***

An SAF position statement is a formal comment on an important public issue related to forestry. The statement may speak to a broad issue like wildfire hazards in public forests, or to a specific policy proposal such as a legislative bill or ballot initiative that would ban clearcutting. Although format varies, a typical statement includes a core position, brief description of the public issue, and some key background information to support the position. The real strength of an SAF position statement lies in its ability to influence public opinions and decisions through a succinct, science-based, professional viewpoint.

## ***Who can develop a position?***

SAF positions statements can be developed at the national, state, division, or chapter level. Although national, state or division level statements are most common, some local chapters have developed their own positions. For example, the Siskiyou Chapter of the Oregon SAF developed a position on a controversial federal timber sale (Sugarloaf) in their area. And because of its unique implications for local areas of the Tongass National Forest, the Cook Inlet Chapter of the Alaska SAF adopted a position on President Clinton's Roadless Initiative.

### ***What's the process?***

SAF Bylaws (II-D and E) provide explicit information for developing position statements at both national and local levels. SAF units with a standing policy committee often have this group lead the development of position statements; otherwise an ad hoc committee may be appointed. It's especially important that those involved have appropriate knowledge and skills to address the issue in a professional manner. The national office reviews draft position statements from all unit levels to ensure consistency with national position statements and the SAF policy process.

Final adoption of national statements is secured by a two-thirds vote of the SAF Council, while unit statements must receive a two-thirds vote of the unit's executive committee. Although not required by the SAF process, Oregon SAF has taken a full membership vote on most of its state position statements, to further strengthen their credibility and potential impact. Once approved, most position statements remain active for five years, but duration may vary with the issue.

### ***We've adopted a position - now what?***

Use it! At a most basic level, position statements (and the process of developing them) help SAF members better understand their own organization and what it stands for. Hopefully, this can foster communication and unity among current members and also serve as a recruiting tool for potential members. Still, the main goal of developing position statements is to influence the opinions and decisions of decision makers and the public about important forestry issues. And for this to happen, the position statements or their key points must reach these target audiences.

### ***Some related ideas and success stories:***

Oregon SAF assembled all its positions into a booklet that is shared with legislators and other decision makers. The Inland Empire SAF web site has fully formatted pdf links for clear and easy printing of its positions. The Siskyou Chapter shared its "Sugarloaf" position with a local newspaper, resulting in an editorial that directly reflected its views. Oregon SAF quickly developed and submitted positions on two controversial ballot initiatives, allowing each to be the first listed and seen by citizens in the statewide voter's pamphlet. Although the impact of these statements is unclear, voting results for both initiatives reflected the OSAF positions.

### ***Some SAF Position Statements On-line:***

National:	<a href="http://www.safnet.org/policy/statements.htm">http://www.safnet.org/policy/statements.htm</a> - national
Alaska:	<a href="http://www.aksaf.org/">http://www.aksaf.org/</a> (see individual chapter links)
Inland Empire:	<a href="http://www.iesaf.org/">http://www.iesaf.org/</a>
Oregon:	<a href="http://www.forestry.org/policy/index.html">http://www.forestry.org/policy/index.html</a>
Washington:	<a href="http://www.waforestry.org/policy/policy.html">http://www.waforestry.org/policy/policy.html</a>

Northern California: <http://www.humboldt.edu/~norcal/positionstate.html>