



Professional Forestry Education in the State of Washington

A Joint Position Statement of the
Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) and the
Inland Empire Society of American Foresters (IESAF)¹

Position

In the State of Washington, the Society of American Foresters (SAF) advocates that professional forestry education be provided at universities or colleges. Sustainable management of Washington's forest resources for the benefit of current and future generations requires dedicated career professionals who have been prepared for their responsibilities through education in the broad field of forestry.² As a profession, forestry relies on nationally accredited education standards. The Society of American Foresters is the national accreditation body for such education programs (see SAF, 2013).

The WSSAF and IESAF believe that:

- sustainable stewardship of the state's 22 million acres of forest lands is most likely to be accomplished when leaders and managers employed by forest landowners have the benefit of a professional education in the broad field of forestry supported through national accreditation;
- it is essential to society at large and landowners in particular that forest management functions and services be provided by foresters and other natural resource professionals, who adhere to high standards of professional ethics and practice, and who are proficient in multi-stakeholder collaboration, communication, and critical problem solving;
- there is a need for research in cooperation with—or performed by—higher education institutions within the State;
- students in the State of Washington should be encouraged to pursue opportunities and employment in the broad field of forestry; and
- both accredited two year forest technology and four-year forestry degrees are necessary, complementary, and provide for a range of employment opportunities.

¹ The Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) operates in the western part of the state; the Inland Empire Society of American Foresters (IESAF) operates in the eastern part of the state and also in northern Idaho. A previous version of this position statement was approved by the WSSAF and IESAF Executive Committees on May 20, 2008, with an expiration date of May 20, 2013. A revised version was approved by the WSSAF Executive Committee on August 26, 2013, and by the IESAF Executive Committee on September 25, 2013. This position statement will expire on September 25, 2018.

² The "broad field of forestry" consists of those biological, quantitative, managerial, and social sciences that are applied to forest management and conservation; it includes specialized fields such as agroforestry, urban forestry, industrial forestry, nonindustrial forestry, and wilderness and recreation forestry (SAF, 2008).

Issue

The WSSAF and IESAF are concerned that citizens of the State of Washington are no longer able to obtain a bachelor's degree at an in-state SAF-accredited forestry program. In-state institutions have eliminated key forestry courses, hence losing their SAF accreditation. Recent severe state budget reductions have caused our universities to eliminate key program components. However, measurements of effectiveness based solely on criteria internal to a university fail to adequately consider forest landowners' need for professionally educated leaders and managers. In addition, these actions minimize the substantial economic contributions in the State of Washington made by working forests (see WSSAF, 2011) and associated industries.

The University of Washington (UW) currently offers SAF-accredited forestry education only at the master's level (Bradley, 2008). Washington State University (WSU) eliminated its forest management program effective December 2011 (Blatner, 2012). The UW intends to apply for SAF accreditation of its baccalaureate degree concentrations in Sustainable Forest Management as well as Natural Resource Management in 2016 when its Master of Forest Resources degree is scheduled for re-accreditation (personal communication with UW forestry program director Tom DeLuca, March 2013). WSU has recently established a Forestry Program Restoration Task Force (personal communication with WSU forestry program associate director Keith Blatner, August 2013). Meanwhile, those Washington residents who attend college in another state to obtain an SAF-accredited bachelor's degree will typically experience higher tuition fees, and higher living and travel expenses, which increase overall education costs.

While Washington's research universities have reduced or eliminated undergraduate forestry education, several community colleges continue to provide two-year forest technology programs, and graduates holding an associate degree are able to begin careers as forest technicians or continue on for a bachelor's degree at other higher education institutions. The SAF currently accredits the two-year forest technology programs at Spokane and Green River Community Colleges; in addition Grays Harbor College offers a two-year forest technology program that is not SAF-accredited. Several of the state's community colleges are beginning to offer four-year bachelor of applied science (BAS) degrees in various disciplines (SBCTC, 2013) in addition to two-year associate degrees, so there is potential for BAS degrees in Forest Management being available, which may or may not seek SAF-accreditation.

Background

"Quality forest management begins from a strong educational foundation and having the right tools and resources is just the beginning" (SAF, 2013). Furthermore, quality forest management provides society as well as forest landowners with economic and environmental benefits and values, summarized as follows.

Economic benefit of jobs—One of the primary contributions of forestry education can be considered to be the economic benefit derived from commercial timber harvest from working forests, which provides jobs and a supply of wood products for the region and at the national

level. To sustain the forest resource and the economic benefits derived from working forests, the state's forest industries require highly trained, professional forest managers.

From a regional or national perspective, the strength of the economy is usually related to the number of existing jobs. University graduates attain higher pay than average, and professional forestry jobs generate a number of subsidiary jobs that do not require a university education. Furthermore, active forest management provides a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities that benefit the citizens of Washington and make an important contribution to the tourism industry.

Value Recovery—An educated, professional workforce of foresters maintains higher quality in the forestry enterprise. Quality shows up in the value of the timber when standing (a result of good reforestation and silvicultural practices) and when it reaches a purchaser (a result of good harvesting practices and clever product development).

Environmental Benefits—Actively managed working forests produce secondary environmental benefits, and professional foresters can enhance those benefits, including carbon storage, clean air, clean water, reforestation, wildlife habitat improvement and protection. Foresters ensure that best management practices and state forest practice regulations are followed, and that forest operations help maintain natural forest systems.

References (note: all webpages were last accessed August 22, 2013)

Blatner, Keith A. 2012. "Big changes at Washington State University." *Western Forester* (March/April) 57(2): 14.

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