

DRAFT 2

Credentialing and Registration of Foresters

A Position of the Washington State Society of American Foresters

Position

A forester is a uniquely qualified professional, with at least a bachelor's degree in forestry, generally a graduate of a college or university-level forestry program accredited by the Society of American Foresters. Landowners who seek a qualified forester to provide advice on the management of forest land and resources often need the ability to access a registry of professional foresters who offer their services to the public. Recognizing this need, the Washington State Society of American Foresters (WSSAF) advocates use of a system that is equitable, administratively efficient and cost effective, and, therefore, advocates use of existing forester registration systems as opposed to licensing of foresters. To achieve this goal, WSSAF recommends use of the existing forester certification programs administered by the Society of American Foresters (SAF) and the Association of Consulting Foresters. State and local government agencies and non-profit organizations that provide information and advice to private forest owners are encouraged to refer them to the registries of qualified professional foresters that are maintained by these two organizations. Utilizing these existing registration systems will minimize the cost of registration, while providing private forest owners with an improved ability to locate and contact professional foresters who can provide the services they require.

Issue

Several states require licensing or registration of foresters and have creating state boards to administer their forester licensing systems. Many of these systems were created before SAF established its Certified Forester® (CF) credential and an a system to administer its forester certification process. Since then, one state has adopted SAF's forester certification system as the basis for its state forester licensing program, and other states are considering doing the same. The issue of forester licensing has been raised in the state of Washington, which prompts SAF to provide a position statement on this subject.

Since the practice of forestry on state and private forest lands in Washington state is subject to the state's Forest Practices Act and its implementing regulations, most foresters believe that licensing of foresters is unnecessary. Others, including some consulting foresters, believe that, notwithstanding the state's comprehensive forest practices law and regulations, there are too many cases where persons who lack professional forestry education and experience are offering forestry services to private forest owners. Consequently, some private forest owners are not receiving competent advice in managing their forests lands, and may be limiting their economic opportunities or risking damage to public resources as a result. Improving the ability of private forest owners to access a registry of professional foresters will increase the likelihood that forest management services are provided by persons who are professionally qualified to offer their services to the public.

Background

Since the 1930's, the Society of American Foresters has accredited forestry education programs offered at colleges and universities in the United States, and has recognized those who have graduated from such programs as qualifying for professional membership in SAF. In order to further strengthen the professionalism of foresters, SAF in 1994 developed its Certified Forester® (CF) program, a voluntary, nationwide certification process that grants the CF credential to

foresters who meet the profession's academic and professional experience benchmarks, pass a rigorous written examination, complete continuing education requirements, and adhere to professional standards of practice.

Several states in the eastern and southern United States, as well as California, have established state registration or licensing programs that describe the qualifications required for those who offer professional forestry services to the public. Typically, these qualifications include similar criteria to those included in SAF's Certified Forester® (CF) program. However, with the exception of California, most of these states lack the comprehensive forest practice laws and regulations that private forest owners must adhere to in Washington state. Therefore, in Washington state, minimum standards for the practice of forestry, together with requirements for protection of public resources, is expected of all private forest owners, whether or not they employ other individuals to assist in the management of their forest lands. However, anecdotal information provided by consulting foresters indicates that many (some) private forest owners are receiving advice from individuals who lack professional forestry credentials, and as a result may be foregoing economic opportunities or risking damage to public resources in the course of managing their forest lands.

In the case of forestry, using competent individuals (professionals) can cause a substantial improvement in the outcome of management activities such as reforestation (Royer 1985), harvest quality (Cubbage *et al* 1987), post-harvest stand structure (Cubbage *et al* 1985), and economic value (Cubbage *et al* 1985, Jackson 1985). In the Cubbage study, landowners assisted by professional foresters received as much as 87 percent more for their timber than those not assisted. In a Minnesota study, landowners who used a service forester received 40 percent more for their stumpage than landowners who did not (Henly *et al* 1988).

(Note: Need to list below the citations used in paragraph above in same format as is used in SAF national position statements and in the Journal of Forestry.)

End