

STANDARDS OF FORESTRY PRACTICE¹

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**For: The Pennsylvania Council of Professional Foresters
Committee on Practice Standards**

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I. INTRODUCTION

This document establishes standards for professional forestry practice. While these standards are written by foresters for the benefit of the profession, their ultimate purpose is to provide for the welfare of the public and forests in the practice of forestry. One of the differences between professions and other occupations is that professionals are expected to serve the public interest. It is vital to the forestry profession that foresters uphold the public's trust. In essence, foresters do this by protecting the health and productivity of the forests that they manage. This is a solemn task because the economic and ecological consequences of mismanagement may be large, and they may take decades to become apparent.

The importance of the role of the forester places obligations on those who serve in this capacity. There are no uniform prescriptions that guarantee successful forestry practices, nor do these standards attempt to prescribe or proscribe specific practices of silviculture or forest management. Also, prescriptions can be made obsolete by revisions in forestry theory and practice that occur as a result of new knowledge, ecological changes in the forest itself, socioeconomic trends, and changes in the legal framework within which forestry is practiced.

Forestry practices regularly improve as new knowledge becomes available. Foresters also learn from experience by evaluating the response of the forest to previous actions. For these reasons, it is not sufficient for foresters to simply maintain the skills and knowledge they developed through formal education. Foresters must continually strive for excellence and proficiency through reading professional literature, attending professional meetings, pursuing continuing education opportunities, and capitalizing on opportunities to learn from experience.

Much of forestry involves the application of ecological principles. The scope of the engagement may focus on a single component or product of the forest (e.g. timber) or it may encompass the entire forest ecosystem to the extent that it can be reasonably understood and managed. Foresters often use mathematical or computer-based decision models to predict the response of a single component or multiple forest components to management actions. Mathematical and computer-based prescriptions are an aid but not a substitute for professional judgment, which can frequently incorporate information about forest conditions, opportunities, limitations, and client objectives that cannot be used appropriately in standard decision models. Sound forestry demands as much knowledge of related resource fields as the forester can acquire and reasonably employ. It is the forester's responsibility to have the understanding and skills ordinarily possessed by other foresters practicing in the same or similar locality and under similar circumstances. It is also the forester's responsibility to use care, reasonable diligence, and personal judgment in the application of that knowledge.

In addition to protecting the health and productivity of the forests they manage, foresters uphold the public's trust by encouraging those who have insufficient information and skill to conduct forest activities, or those who are engaging in activities that endanger life, health, or property, activities that impinge on the general welfare, or activities that may result in a violation of law, to seek professional advice and guidance.

All foresters should follow these standards when engaged in assignments or other activities addressed by these standards. The standards establish specific

requirements for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of forestry activities. However, an instance of conduct inconsistent with a standard is not necessarily a cause for action or presumption that a legal duty has been breached. The standards are meant to provide foresters a structure for identifying and meeting expectations regarding the professional practice of forestry. They cannot be directly employed without consideration of the time, place, and circumstances of the actual forestry work, and they should not be construed as a basis for legal liability.

II. RULES

Rules establish the context for understanding and applying the standards of forestry practice. Other laws and regulations may also apply to forestry practice.

A. Supervision Rule. The forester engaged by a client (see definitions below) is considered to have responsible charge of the assignment. A forester in responsible charge who supervises the work of other professionals or non-professionals performing forestry work shall assume responsibility for compliance with the standards set forth in this document.

B. Landowner Exception Rule. The provisions of these standards do not apply to a landowner who performs forestry activities on his or her property.

C. Supplemental Standards Rule. Regulatory agencies having the power of eminent domain, or asset management organizations, may issue standards that directly govern the practice of forestry on lands under the control of those agencies or organizations. Adherence to the standards set forth in this document does not relieve the forester and client from identifying and applying any such supplemental standards.

D. Definitions Rule. The following definitions are applicable to certain words contained in this document. Other relevant definitions may be found in Helms (1998)¹.

Assignment – A task or project accepted by the forester from a client, with the result that the forester assumes some of the interest of the client.

Client – A person, persons, or entity who engages a forester and for whom forestry services are rendered. Where the services of the forester are provided to an entity (corporation, trust, partnership, estate, etc.) the client is the entity, acting through its legally authorized representative.

Engagement – The relationship between client and forester obligated by contract, retainer, employment, pledge, or promise.

Forester – A professional engaged in the science and profession of forestry. Foresters are commonly credentialed by states or other certifying bodies and may be licensed, certified, or registered indicating specific education and abilities (SAF).

Forestry – The profession embracing the science, art, and practice of creating, managing, using, and conserving forests and associated resources for human benefit and in a sustainable manner to meet desired goals, needs, and values (SAF).

Forestry Practice – The application of forestry principles and techniques to professional services such as forest inventory, forest management planning, timber appraisal, the direction and supervision of silvicultural activities, the use and protection of forested areas, and the evaluation of the economic and biological consequences of forest management activities. Services may take the form of consultation, investigation, evaluation, or planning.

Scope – The purpose, range of applications, and opportunities covered by an engagement. Scope is commensurate with client objectives, the complexity and significance of the assignments, and competency of the forester.

III. STANDARDS

A. Planning. The practice of forestry requires a level of planning involving both the forester and the client prior to commencement of work. The planning process may be formal or informal, but it must be performed deliberately. The extent of planning should be commensurate with the complexity and significance of the task to be undertaken.

¹ Helms, John A. (ed.). 1998. *The Dictionary of Forestry*. The Society of American Foresters. Bethesda, Maryland. 206 pp.

100. General.

100-1. Understanding and Correctly Employing Principles

A forester shall understand and correctly employ those generally accepted methods and techniques necessary to produce creditable forestry assistance or recommendations, consistent with the client's stated objectives.

100-2. Advocating for Improvement of the Forest Resource

A forester shall be an advocate for the immediate and long-term health and continued productivity of forest resources.

200. Establishing and Defining the Relationship with the Client

200-1. Defining the Scope of the Engagement

The forester and client shall mutually define, preferably in writing, the scope of the engagement, parties responsible for implementation, and the basis for evaluation. This shall be done before the commencement of forestry practice.

200-2. Acting as Faithful Agent or Trustee

A forester shall act independently and impartially as a faithful agent or trustee of the client's interest, within the bounds of legal and otherwise reasonable concern for the interests of the public and others affected by the actions of the forester. A forester shall avoid conflicts of interest when providing services to two or more clients.

200-3. Offering or Accepting Payment

A forester shall not offer or accept payment for the purpose of securing a forestry engagement. The definition of payment for this section shall be any valuable consideration that might reasonably influence a person to make a decision that he or she may not otherwise make.

300. Gathering Client Data

300-1. Identifying the Client and Determining the Client's Objectives and Priorities

The forester shall identify the client and other interested parties. The forester and client shall mutually define, preferably in writing, the client's objectives and priorities and the purposes of the tasks that are relevant to the scope of the engagement. This shall be done prior to making or implementing recommendations.

300-2. Obtaining Quantitative and Qualitative Information

A forester shall obtain sufficient and relevant quantitative and qualitative information and documents about a client and the client's property with respect to the scope of the engagement and the services being provided before making a judgment about what to recommend from the array of acceptable alternatives available.

300-3. Analyzing and Evaluating the Client's Information

A forester shall analyze relevant information to gain an understanding of the client's situation and then evaluate to what extent the client's objectives and priorities can be met by the client's resources and current course of action.

400. Developing and Presenting Forestry Recommendations

400-1. Identifying and Evaluating Forestry Alternatives

A forester shall attempt to identify and evaluate relevant, alternative forestry recommendations in an effort to meet or exceed the client's objectives and priorities.

400-2. Developing Forestry Recommendations

A forester shall develop specific written recommendations in an effort to achieve the client's objectives and priorities.

400-3. Presenting Forestry Recommendations

A forester shall communicate the recommendations in a manner that assists the client in making informed decisions. Techniques regarded as experimental or of uncertain nature shall be clearly documented in writing, and the anticipated outcome and risks shall be described.

400-4. Avoiding Errors and Omissions

A forester shall not knowingly present faulty or incomplete information needed by the client to make a reasoned judgment about the probable outcome of the forestry alternatives presented.

400-5. Observing Relevant Laws and Regulations

A forester shall inform the client of laws and regulations that may restrict the implementation of recommendations, including possible changes in tax liability as a result of implementing or failing to implement recommendations.

400-6. Exercising Due Care

A forester shall not render forestry advice or assistance in a careless, negligent, or deceptive manner.

400-7. Overruling of Judgment

A forester shall present clearly to the client the potential consequences of taking actions contrary to the forester's recommendation or judgment in matters pertaining to the engagement.

B. Implementation. Implementation standards address the work performed on the ground. Correct implementation serves principles of ecologically and economically sound forest management, and it promotes the public's trust in the profession by enhancing forest health and productivity.

500. Implementing Forestry Recommendations and Practices

500-1. Exercising Responsibility Consistent with the Assignment

A forester and the client shall mutually agree on the implementation responsibilities consistent with the scope of assignment.

500-2. Applying Appropriate Methods and Procedures

A forester shall use the appropriate methods, procedures, tools, materials, and services consistent with the client's objectives and priorities. Methods and procedures shall be demonstrably adequate to the task of the assignment and to the desired level of accuracy. A forester shall ensure that

the client is fully informed and in agreement with these applications.

500-3. Distinguishing Between Fact, Assumption, and Opinion

A forester shall clearly distinguish between fact, assumption, and opinion in matters relating to the engagement. These distinctions shall be made clear to the client in all relevant communications.

500-4. Administering Contracts

A forester who arranges a contractual agreement between the client and a third party for the purpose of executing the forester's recommendations shall explicitly inform the client of the need for contract administration to ensure compliance. Normally, this will be part of the forester's engagement.

C. Evaluation. The purpose of evaluation is to verify a satisfactory performance of the assignment because assignments may become subject to evaluation. Evaluation serves the principal that a professional is accountable for his or her decisions, and the forester shall be prepared to verify or substantiate his or her work.

600. Evaluating Forestry Practices

600-1. Defining the Provisions and Methods of Evaluation

Provisions and methods for evaluating and monitoring the assignment shall be mutually defined with the client during planning (200-1).

600-2. Retaining Records

A forester shall retain reasonably clear supporting information sufficient to identify the engagement's original scope, as well as other decisions and conditions relevant to its execution. This information may include, but is not necessarily limited to, data, calculations, descriptions of methods, plans, specifications, maps, drawings, and similar resources, procedures, and intermediate products. This information may also be as informal as an entry in a journal or on a calendar.

600-3. Completing the Assignment

Following completion of the assignment, the forester and client shall mutually consider and reconcile the plan with the outcome. The results of experimental or uncertain techniques shall be explicitly evaluated.