

Getting the most out of your woodlot

A landowner's guide to selecting and using a professional forester

A publication of the
PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF PROFESSIONAL FORESTERS

*The nation behaves well if it treats the natural
resources as assets which it must turn over to the
next generation increased, and not impaired.*

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 1910.

Questions, questions, questions . . .

Perhaps someone who would like to purchase the timber from your property has approached you. How can you know you will receive the possible greatest value and sustaining your forest's future productivity?

Maybe you view your wood lot as a potential source of retirement income or as an asset you can pass on to your children. How can you manage your forest so it meets your long-term objectives?

If you are interested in wildlife, you probably want to improve wildlife habitat on your property. How do you do it?

The list of questions a person can have about forestland they own is endless. Where do you turn for advice, information, and assistance you can trust?

. . . answers!

The best person you can turn to is a professional forester: an individual trained and experienced in forest management who has **your** best interests in mind.

Fortunately, landowners throughout Pennsylvania can find qualified professional foresters to provide the advice they need. Unfortunately, while Pennsylvania state government licenses and oversees the practice of over 30 different professions, the practice of forestry *is not* regulated in the Commonwealth. In fact, anyone in Pennsylvania can be called a "*forester*" and practice "*forestry*," even though the practitioner may not have appropriate education and experience. In addition, you do not automatically have the assurance that a person offering you forestry services will actually have your best interests in mind.

Service Foresters employed by the Bureau of Forestry of the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources are good sources of information. They can provide you with information on programs intended to assist forest landowners in the management of their forest land, such as the Forest Stewardship Program and the Forest Land Enhancement Program. Check the blue pages of your telephone directory to find the DCNR Bureau of Forestry office nearest to you. The Penn State University Extension

Service is another source of good information. You can contact them through your County Agent or by accessing the Penn State web site as follows: <http://www.cas.psu.edu/docs/CASDEPT/FOREST/Stewardship/1page.html>.

Making the best forest management decisions.

The vast majority of Pennsylvania's forests (75 percent, 12.5 million acres) are privately owned. More than a half million individuals own forestland in Pennsylvania. Eighty-five percent of private forestland owners do not have a written management plan for their forest.

Managing forestland requires time, experience, technical training, and judgment. As a landowner wanting to protect your forest values and meet your management objectives, you should consider hiring a professional forester.

Foresters are educated and trained to provide a variety of forest management services in addition to timber sale administration. Forest management plan preparation, timber appraisals, regeneration prescriptions, wildlife habitat improvement, timber stand improvement, designation of areas to be protected, and recreational and aesthetic improvements are just a few of the services a professional forester can provide. Research and experience have shown that carefully prepared and supervised timber sales typically return greater net revenue to landowners and maintain site productivity and reproduction potential.

A professional forester will assist you in prioritizing your objective related to your forestland and will offer alternatives within the limitations of the site and your ability to implement various management practices.

Identifying a forester who will represent your interests.

If you decide to seek assistance in managing your forestland, there are two important determinations you need to make at the outset:

First, does the individual you select have the knowledge and experience required to provide you with the best possible advice? Many individuals provide "forestry" services in Pennsylvania, but not all of them are adequately trained and experienced professional foresters. The Pennsylvania Council of Professional Foresters (PCPF) suggests that you ask about the individual's credentials, training, and professional affiliations. At a minimum, your forester should have a two-year degree from an accredited forestry program. In addition, it is highly desirable that the individual you select adhere to codes of conduct, best management practices, and standards developed by a professional forester organization. For example, ask if they adhere to the Standards of Forestry Practice developed by PCPF. While not mandatory, adherence to these Standards will help ensure that any assistance you receive will be done in a professional manner. (For a free copy of the Standards, contact the Council.)

Second, will the individual be representing your interests or those of someone else? Individuals who provide forestry services represent a wide range of interests. He/she can

be a *timber purchasing agent* who represent sawmills. He/she can be a timber broker who is in business buying and selling logs, or he/she can be a *private professional forester* (frequently referred to as a *consulting forester*) who works for you and focuses on your interests. You can get good forestry advice from an individual who is working for someone else, however, the only way to ensure that your interests are paramount in the mind of the individual providing you with forestry services is if he/she works directly for you.

Questions to ask when selecting a professional forester.

- *What is his/her educational background and level of experience?*

The PCPF suggests that foresters should ***either*** have a four-year degree from an approved forestry curriculum and at least four years of professional experience ***or*** a two-year degree in an approved forestry curriculum and at least six years of professional experience. In addition, the Council suggests that professional foresters participate in continuing education programs to ensure current understanding of the science and practice of forestry.

- *What are their professional affiliations?*

The three principal organizations active in Pennsylvania are the Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF); the Society of American Foresters (SAF); and the Pennsylvania Council of Professional Foresters (PCPF). These organizations promote high standards of professionalism through their membership requirements and their ongoing educational programs. These organizations require members to abide by codes of ethics or standards of practice. Membership also serves as an indication of a forester's level of professional commitment.

- *What, if any, professional certifications have they obtained?*

The principal *voluntary* certification a forester can obtain is that of *Certified Forester*®, which is a program administered by the Society of American Foresters (SAF). To receive this recognition, a forester must meet certain educational, experience and continuing educational requirements and pass an examination. For additional information, visit the SAF website:

<http://www.safnet.org/certified/cfprogram.htm>. In addition, some foresters may be licensed in other states that regulate the profession of forestry.

- *What references can they supply?*

Any potential consulting forester should provide you with a list of clients in your area who have engaged his/her services. The maintenance and improvement of all forest resource values on your property require your responsible investigation of the professional you engage. Visit nearby managed forestlands and talk to local conservation agencies about past forest performance.

- *What services do they offer and what is their fee structure?*

The final step: signing a contract.

Once you have found a forester with whom you can work, seal the agreement with a *written* contract or work order. It should include a description of the agreed upon services, an expected time frame for the completing the work, and the fees to be paid.

The fees charged and method of payment will vary with the type of management services provided. For example, commissions based on the gross receipts of timber sales are common, while others may charge on a set per acre or hourly rate.

Pennsylvania's forests: a valuable resource worth protecting.

Pennsylvania is one of the most heavily forested states, with nearly 60 percent of the state's land area, totaling 17 million acres, covered by forests. These forests are a vital resource for sustaining Pennsylvania's economy and environment. The timber and forest products industry is the fourth largest manufacturing industry in the state, employing over 90,000 workers in 2,500 firms, and contributing almost \$5 billion annually to the state's economy. Nationally, Pennsylvania ranks number one in hardwood production and forest-based recreation is the largest component of the Commonwealth's second largest industry, tourism.

A legislative proposal to license foresters in Pennsylvania

The Pennsylvania Council of Professional Foresters (PCPF) has developed a legislative proposal to license individuals who call themselves "foresters" and offer "forestry services" in Pennsylvania. Currently, over 30 professions — ranging from doctors and accountants to barbers and marriage counselors — require licenses in Pennsylvania. Because of the high level of educational attainment and experience required to provide the best possible forestry services, PCPF believes that practicing forestry in the Commonwealth should require a license.

PCPF's proposal would set minimum standards for educational attainment and experience for professional foresters. To receive a license, and after an initial grandfathering period, individuals would have to pass a competency examination. Once licensed, professional foresters would have to meet continuing educational requirements to ensure that they maintain currency with scientific and other developments.

Licensure of foresters is an important consumer protection measure. It will help to protect landowners' interests. It will help to protect Pennsylvania's forest products industry by increasing sustainable forest management practices. And it will help protect the forests and environment so we can pass the Keystone State's great woodland heritage on to future generations.

If you support licensure of foresters in Pennsylvania, call your state Senators and Representatives and ask them to do likewise. If you do not know who your legislators are, contact the Office of the Secretary of the Senate at 717/787-5920 and the Office of the Clerk of the House of Representatives at 717/787-2372 and they'll connect you.

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