# Professional Forestry Education in the State of Washington

A Position Statement of the Washington State Society of American Foresters

and the Inland Empire Society of American Foresters

Originally adopted by the Executive Committees of the two units of the Society of American Foresters operating in the State of Washington on May 20, 2008. This position will expire on May 20, 2013 unless, after subsequent review, the Executive Committees decide otherwise.

## Position

In states with substantial forest resources, like Washington, the SAF advocates that professional forestry education be provided at public land grant universities and/or other comparable educational institutions. Sustainable management of the nation'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. As a profession, forestry relies on nationally accredited education standards. The Society of American Foresters (SAF) is the national accreditation body for such education programs. The SAF believes that

- sustainable stewardship of the nation's 336 million acres of forest lands is most likely to be accomplished when leaders and managers employed by forest land management organizations have the benefit of a professional education in the broad field of forestry;
- it is essential that technical 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
- because forests are highly variable and land ownership patterns and forest management policies differ considerably across the nation, managing forests to provide the goods and services people expect in a particular region or state can best be accomplished by professional foresters educated in that region or state.

## Issue

The SAF is concerned that citizens of the State of Washington in the near future will no longer be able to obtain in-state professional forestry education at the undergraduate level. The University of Washington now offers SAF-accredited forestry education only at the master's level (Bradley 2008). At Washington State University, according to Daniel Bernardo, dean of the College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, despite a "rich history of forestry at WSU, … the forestry major will be eliminated" (Jones 2008).

Actions at both universities are driven by administrations that are rightly concerned about providing cost-effective higher education. However, measurements of effectiveness based solely on criteria internal to the university, such as number of students enrolled, overlook the substantial economic contributions in the State of Washington made by forests and forest products manufacturing industries (Pyles & Douglas 2007). In addition, such internal criteria fail to adequately consider the need for professionally educated leaders and managers by forestland management organizations (SAF 2003). Administrators at Washington State University appear to have not fully considered forestry's contribution to the health of the State's forests, the quality of life of its citizens, or the economic output from the forest industry. In 2005, Washington's forest sector generated approximately $16 billion in gross business income, and provided 45,000 jobs paying wages of $2 billion (Partridge & McGregor 2007, p. 27).

## Background

One of the primary contributions of forestry education can be considered to be the economic benefit derived from the forest industry, which provides jobs and a supply of wood products for the region, and at the national level, the net export market value of raw and manufactured wood products (Pyles & Douglas 2007). To sustain the forest resource and the economic benefits derived from wood products, the state's forest industries require highly trained, professional forest managers. In addition to the internal institutional parameters used to evaluate forestry education, external factors could be used to measure the societal benefits of forestry education.

**Economic benefit of jobs —** From a regional or national perspective, the strength of the economy is 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. Further, forest management provides a wide variety of outdoor recreational opportunities that both 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 —** Forestry enterprises produce secondary environmental impacts, but professional foresters can reduce those impacts. Foresters insure that best management practices are followed, that forest operations meet the requirements of the state's forest practices regulations, and help to maintain natural forest systems.

**Worker safety —** Foresters engage in professional planning and management that contributes to safer working environments that otherwise are a cost to the forest enterprise and society.

## References


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