



UI Extension Forestry Information Series II

Forest Management Planning No. 17

Choosing a Consulting Forester

Chris Schnepf

Forest management decisions can have large, lasting impacts on forest health and growth. Most landowners benefit from having professional foresters helping to guide those decisions. To that end, University of Idaho Extension provides workshops, field days, publications, videos, and other forms of education for family forest owners. Idaho Dept. of Lands foresters inspect forestry operations for compliance with state laws and provide limited on-site forestry assistance. The Natural Resources Conservation Service also provides some forestry assistance, particularly as related to cost-shared forestry practices such as thinning or planting.

All of these sources of forestry assistance can help forest owners explore and articulate their forest management goals. However, for more comprehensive assistance in applying forestry, forest owners should consider contacting a consulting forester.

Consulting foresters are professional foresters who are available to the general public for a fee. Unlike other sources of forestry assistance, consulting foresters can serve as the landowner's legal representative. Consulting foresters offer a wide range of services, including:

- Comprehensive written forest management plans;
- Timber sales, including planning, tree marking, choosing and supervising loggers, contracts, and marketing;
- Forest inventory ("timber cruising") and related assessments;
- Tree planting, including ordering seedlings, lining up planting crews, and related vegetation management;
- Timber stand improvement (TSI) efforts such as

- thinning or pruning;
- Support for landowner participation in forestry cost share programs, carbon credits, and other forest management incentive programs;
- Advice to landowners and their accountants on tax issues associated with forest management;
- Prescribed fire and other treatments to reduce forest fire risks;
- Forest valuation – particularly valuable in cases of forest damage or theft, and in making decisions about forestry investments;
- Weed and other invasive species control;
- Locating and maintaining property boundaries (working with professional surveyors as needed);
- Computer mapping, geographic information systems (GIS), and other geospatial technology services;
- Forest insect and disease assessment and treatment; and
- Wildlife habitat management.



Consulting foresters often line up and supervise tree planters.

Photo by Chris Schnepf, UI Extension

Consulting foresters are particularly helpful when harvesting timber. Most family forest owners only sell timber once or twice in their lives. A logging job can improve or degrade forest health & other values for a long time. Studies of private timber sales have found that consulting foresters' fees are typically paid for by the increased profits returned to the forest owner, increased forest owner satisfaction with the job, and assistance on related issues (e.g. tax treatment of timber harvest income).

Locating and choosing a consulting forester

Generally people employed by universities or public agencies cannot recommend specific consulting foresters. A few states have licensing programs for foresters similar to systems for lawyers or engineers. Idaho does not have a licensing program, so we have to rely on other credentials to assess expertise. Some common terms and organizations used to describe forestry credentials include:

- **Forester** – A forester is most often defined as someone who has completed a bachelor's of science (BS) degree from a college or university which has been accredited by the Society of American Foresters (SAF - see below).
- **Forestry Technician.** A forestry technician has completed an associate's degree ("2-year degree") in forestry from a college which has been accredited by the SAF.
- **Society of American Foresters (SAF)** – The primary national association of forestry professionals. Most members are foresters with four-year forestry degrees, but some are forestry technicians or employed in field closely allied with forestry. To confirm whether a forester is a current SAF member, is a "certified forester" (see below), or whether a given college or university has been SAF accredited, call (866) 897-8720 or go to <http://www.safnet.org>
- **Certified Forester (C.F.)** - A certificate (administered by the SAF) available to individuals who: have a bachelors degree, or higher, in forestry or a related degree with forestry coursework; have five years of professional forestry experience; adhere to state and federal forestry laws; and complete 60 hours of forestry professional development every three years. Certified foresters must also pass a comprehensive written exam. For more information call (301)

897-3690 or go to <http://www.safnet.org/certifiedforester/index.cfm>.

- **The Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF)** is the national professional association of consulting foresters. Among other requirements, members must have a four-year forestry degree; go through a 1-3 year "candidate" period; complete a basic consulting forestry educational course; be principally employed as a consulting forester; have over five years of practical forestry experience; adhere to an ACF code of ethics; and complete specific, work-related continuing education credits every two years. To confirm whether a forester is a current member, call (703) 548-0990 or go to <https://www.acf-foresters.org/>.

These credentials are not guarantees that an individual forester will best meet your needs. There are other important questions to ask. How much experience do they have? What do public agency foresters or other references say about their work? Are you comfortable that they will be responsive to your values and goals? It is also valuable to ask other forest owners about the forester's quality of work. An excellent place to do this at meetings of the Idaho Forest Owners Association or with landowners involved in the Tree Farm program.

You should also watch for conflicts of interest. A consulting forester should be independent, working strictly for their client's best interest (e.g., they should not buy logs from you). Industry foresters, sometimes referred to as "mill foresters", often provide good forestry advice and assistance to forest owners, but their primary interest is usually to buy logs for the mills which employ them. Any forester you work with is ethically obligated to clearly disclose any potential conflicts of interest.

Consulting forester fees vary. Depending on the tasks being accomplished, they may charge by the hour, acre, or a set fee for a type of service. For timber sales, a percentage of the net return to the landowner (usually from 5 to 15%) is the most common arrangement in Idaho. Fee calculations are usually adjusted for travel time to the job site, property size, timber values, and other factors. Get estimates from more than one consulting forester if possible. After making your choice, get a detailed written contract with a consulting forester, just as you would with a logger, which clearly delineates fees and other expectations.

Many forest owners are reluctant to do much to their forest, because they are concerned about damaging it or they believe they should let it grow naturally. But many Idaho forests are not growing naturally, due to past harvest practices and a 100 year legacy of fire exclusion. At this point, many Idaho forests need some management to get them back on a “natural” trajectory or to meet other forest owner goals. To accomplish this, a consulting forester is an invaluable source of help.

A revised directory of consulting foresters serving Idaho forest owners will be available on the UI Extension forestry web site in the coming months.

About the Author: Chris Schnepf is an Area Extension Forester and professor at University of Idaho Extension.

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Consulting foresters are especially helpful with timber sales.

Photo by Chris Cchnepf, UI Extension