

A Consumer's Guide to Professional Forestry Assistance

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Forest owners often search for help when they want to improve their land or make some income from a timber sale. What criteria can you use to decide who can best serve you? There are many forms of forestry credentials to help you determine who is most qualified to help you. It is helpful to understand some of the terms.

- **Forester** - A forester is someone who has earned a bachelor's or higher, degree from a college or University which has been accredited by the Society of American Foresters (SAF - see below).
- **Forestry Technician** - Forestry technicians often have a two-year degree (commonly called an associate degree) in forestry or a related natural resource area. They can provide a number of basic applied forestry services such as tree planting, slash treatment, and thinning. They can be a member of the Society of American Foresters.
- **Society of American Foresters (SAF)** - A 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. The SAF fosters professionalism among foresters and has a code of ethics SAF members must follow. To confirm if a forester is a current member of SAF, is a "certified forester" (see below), or whether a given college or university has been accredited by the SAF, contact the SAF at: 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD, 20814-2198. Phone: 301-897-3690
- **Certified Forester (C.F.)** - A certified 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. The program is administered by the SAF.
- **Consulting Forester** - Someone with a bachelors degree, or higher, in forestry who provides forest management recommendations and related services for a fee (e.g., percentage of a timber sale, per hour, per acre, etc.). A consulting forester represents the best interests of the landowner who employees them and helps

that landowners achieve their forest management goals.

- **Licensing/Registration** - Some states require licensing for practicing foresters. Idaho currently has no laws requiring licensing or registration for foresters or forestry technicians.
- **Wildlife Biologist, Range Manager, Etc.** - Foresters are trained to work with a variety of forest values, but are usually strongest when it come to managing trees and other forest vegetation. If you have a strong interest in managing wildlife or similar specific resources, consider contacting a professional that has been trained in that natural resource discipline. Some consulting firms employ individuals with expertise in these areas. Regardless, check for related credentials as you would with foresters (e.g., The Wildlife Society instead of SAF).

Shop Around. Before choosing a forester, shop around! How much experience do they have? What do public agency foresters, landowners, or other references have to say about their work? Are you comfortable that they will be sensitive and responsive to your forest land values and goals?

Check on forestry credentials. Be sure to check on degrees, professional association memberships and other forestry credentials. In the absence of formal licensing or registration laws, active membership in professional organizations and certification are particularly valuable criteria. Both often require significant dues and demonstrated continuing education. Note, however, active professional association membership or certification are not guarantees that an individual forester will best meet your needs. Furthermore, foresters without these credentials may still be very capable.

The Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF) is a national professional association of consulting foresters. Among other requirements, members must have a four-year degree from a recognized forestry program; 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, contact the Association of Consulting Foresters at: 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Suite 300, Bethesda, MD 20814-2198. Phone: (301) 530-6795.

Watch for conflicts of interest. Be sure to check for any potential conflicts of interest. A consulting forester works strictly for their client's best interest (e.g.: they should not buy logs from you). Industry foresters (or "mill foresters") may have ample forestry credentials, and often provide good forestry advice and assistance to forest owners, but their primary interest is usually to buy logs for the wood processing mills which

employ them. Regardless of how they are employed, any forester is ethically obligated to clearly disclose any real or potential conflicts of interest.

Put agreements in writing. Whichever forester you decide to work with, make sure the services to be performed and reimbursement are noted in a written agreement or contract. It is often good to check with an attorney to review such documents before signing them. A variety of Extension publications are available to help you ask the right questions.