



## **State Programs to Credential Foresters**

A Position of the Society of American Foresters

Initially adopted by the Society on November 14, 1985, revised and extended on December 16, 1996, December 16, 2001, December 5, 2004, June 13, 2010, and December 8, 2018. This position statement will expire in 2023 unless, after subsequent review, it is further extended by the SAF Board of Directors.

---

### **Purpose**

Promote professional competency in the practice of scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management.

### **Scope**

Define what elements the public should evaluate in determining the professional competency of individuals entrusted with forest management responsibilities while supporting SAF's Certified Forester® (CF) program and state licensing programs.

### **Position**

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) promotes professional competency in the practice of scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management through five key elements: (1) professional forestry education, (2) examination, (3) professional experience, (4) continuing forestry education, and (5) adherence to a standard of professional practice. The SAF Certified Forester® (CF) is a national credential available to all professional foresters through a program embodying these five elements.

SAF recognizes there is a wide range of forest types, environmental conditions and landowners' objectives under which foresters operate, and variation in state laws and regulations that affect forest practices. Thus, SAF supports governments that administer and enforce forester credentials or licensing programs that meet or exceed our five key elements of professional standards. The CF program represents an established professional forester credential suitable for state adoption in implementing forester licensing and registration programs. The CF program should be an integral part of every state's review of existing requirements and by states considering new licensing and registration requirements.

### **Issue**

Forester credentials provide for the public health, safety, and welfare of society by defining a level of

professional competency needed for individuals to practice scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management. Strong forester credentials therefore are an important mechanism to ensure that private and public goals from forest management are achieved and that public confidence in the profession is promoted and maintained.

Forestry starts with resource assessment and the identification of values including wildlife habitat, life stages, water resources, forest health, economic values, legal considerations, and landowner objectives. Professional assessments lead to well-designed management activities including silvicultural prescriptions, wildlife and plant prescriptions, planning and supervision of road construction and timber harvesting, use of pesticides and prescribed fire, and wildfire suppression. These forest operations affect forest health and condition for decades and even centuries and influence the many recreational, environmental and financial values that forest owners derive from their property. The benefits of using trained and credentialed foresters include helping communities address natural resource issues and conflicts in cities in towns, bringing the benefits of trees and healthy forests to urban areas, protecting water quality supplies through the application of best management practices and engineering, and assuring a steady flow of goods and services from forestlands.

Ensuring that individuals are adequately trained and qualified to develop and implement scientifically sound and socially responsible forest management prescriptions is thus an important contribution to public health, safety, and welfare. In addition to forestland owners and the public, professional foresters themselves benefit from credentialing programs by ensuring that individuals with inadequate training or skills do not misrepresent the forestry profession to prospective clients or the public. All foresters suffer when an individual client, landowner, or the public is adversely affected by the actions of unqualified practitioners.

## **Background**

Forestry is a dynamic and demanding science, and those who practice it must be well-trained and dedicated to keeping their skills and knowledge current. Forester credential programs recognize and enforce a forester's competence through standards of education, experience, practice, and through records of continuing education. Credentials can also include demonstration of knowledge through examination and adherence to a standard of professional practice and/or code of ethics. Whether you are a member of the public considering hiring a forester, an employer, or an association or government entity considering developing or improving a forester credentialing program, SAF encourages you to consider the following criteria:

**Education:** Credentialed foresters should attain a degree from an SAF accredited program, which demonstrates a solid foundation in the principles of forestry.

**Examination:** Programs are encouraged to supplement credentialing with state- specific knowledge and/or experience requirements to ensure foresters' familiarity with state and local forest practices laws, regulations, and conditions. This could involve passing a written and/or oral examination.

**Experience:** We recommend 5 years of relevant professional forestry experience as a minimum expectation. For those just entering the profession, apprenticeship with credentialed foresters as mentors is the preferred method to building one's experience history.

**Continuing Education:** Continuing Forestry Education (CFE) is mandatory for staying current on knowledge and improving ones' skills. The CFE component of the SAF national credentialing program is effectively the universal standard for continuing forestry education requirements in most states.

**Standard of practice/code of ethics:** Credentialed foresters need to learn and adhere to an established code of ethics, for example the Society of American Foresters Code of Ethics or other societies such as the Wildlife Society or Fisheries Society code of ethics.

**Enforcement mechanism:** SAF recognizes and supports governments that administer and enforce forester credentials

**Other Considerations:**

- **Reciprocity:** State programs should include provisions for reciprocity among states to enable individuals credentialed in one state to practice forestry in another state with equivalent credentialing requirements. Reciprocity is streamlined when states utilize the CF program.
- **Specialty Training Programs:** State and federal regulations may require specific training in elements of forest management, including but not limited to, prescribed and wild fire management, pesticide application and silvicultural prescriptions. These programs help to demonstrate competence in a specific discipline, and should be considered as supplemental to forester credentialing.
- **Weak or Absent State Regulations:** Employers, landowners and others should look to employ and reward foresters who distinguish themselves through participation in programs such as the SAF Certified Forester® program and state sponsored licensing/registration programs.