

Regional Partnerships Deliver on Value

BY BRIAN KLEINHENZ

When I first started working in Alaska, I read an amazing account of a timber cruiser in the late 1930s. This forester was dropped off on the north end of a remote island in early June. He was given a rough map, a few weeks' worth of canned food, and the promise of resupply twice in that summer via air drop. This pioneer walked the berth and width of that island all season collecting timber inventory data along the way. He spent all summer in contact with not a single soul, and after being picked up on the beach at the far end of the island in the fall, spent all winter working up his data. In this digital age, few of us can even imagine being left alone long enough to do all this. Where were his deadlines? Why didn't the world stop turning when he missed his daily backup to the cloud? Many foresters relish our alone time and cherish the peace of the woods. However, we are very lucky to have comradery and companionship with our fellow professionals in a way impossible to that early Alaskan timber cruiser.



Foresters throughout the country are more connected than ever. We often work on regional and national scales, and changing locations several times during a career is commonplace in both the public and private sectors. The Northwest Office of the Society of American Foresters is an excellent example of how our profession has embraced this new reality of connect-

edness and used that energy to enrich the traditional chapter, state, and national levels of SAF organization.

In the Pacific Northwest, our four state societies have banded together to form a joint administrative structure in the form of the Northwest Office (NWO). In a climate of stagnant membership, it has been very useful for the societies to pool resources and share services. The NWO has two primary deliverables. The first is the *Western Forester*, our very own regional publication that covers issues relevant to forestry professionals in the Pacific Northwest. This has been a hugely popular publication both with members and advertisers. Second, the NWO provides a common source for administrative services. The NWO maintains an active website, interfaces with National SAF, hosts conferences, serves as a stable point of contact for questions from members and the public, and facilitates communication between the various levels of SAF's organizational structure.

Together the Oregon, Washington State, Inland Empire, and Alaska Societies can support a stable, professional staff to provide continuity in knowledge and services that a volunteer base struggles with. With a modest annual budget of around \$80,000, the NWO delivers excellent service and maintains an office at the World Forestry Center in Portland, Ore. Member assessments along with revenue generated by NWO publications and activities make this possible. A 17-member committee with representatives from all four societies guides the activities of the Northwest Office. This committee leverages a broad

range of experience to coordinate efforts on things like policy action and fundraising in a very effective manner. One of the most progressive efforts is the annual leadership conference organized by state societies with support from the NWO. We collectively recognize the importance of nurturing and supporting the next generation of leaders within the forestry profession and dedicate special annual training for this purpose.

As a member of the Alaska Society and Juneau Chapter, I have found that participation in the Northwest Office has enriched and expanded my experience with SAF. While regular chapter meetings are still the bedrock of my interface to SAF, exposure to the NWO has provided opportunities for collaboration and leadership at a larger scale. It creates a much tighter knit and more effective Society. In many ways, the NWO has served to bridge the gap between local reality and national context. Our actions, position papers, fundraisers, and events are all much better with the input of regional and national partners.

A century ago our vocation was characterized by individuals working alone in the forest. Now we are collaborators and innovators finding ways to work across geography. We can be proud that our Society is keeping pace with these exciting times. I encourage each of you to support our very own Northwest Office and get to know the network of energetic individuals that share your passion for forestry. Your dues and energy make this all possible. By reading the *Western Forester* and engaging in regional events you will supercharge your career and forge some valuable connections that will enhance your personal and professional life. ♦





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