

# forest GUILD

## Policy Statement:

### **Forester Licensing**

(July, 2003)

*The Forest Guild supports the establishment and/or improvement of required forester licensing programs in all forested states, to help ensure the long-term conservation of ecological and economic values provided by managed forests.*

It is widely recognized that forests provide a diverse array of benefits, including clean water, wood, and various non-timber products that generate financial returns and help maintain local economies, wildlife habitat, and aesthetic values that contribute to a high quality of life. Nevertheless, a number of common practices conducted in the name of forest management continue to damage resource productivity and environmental values, to the detriment of local economies and quality of life. Such practices include indiscriminate clearcutting, widespread conversion of natural forests to short-rotation monocultures, and high-grading (removal of the most valuable trees without concern for residual forest stands and long-term forest condition).<sup>1</sup> Such abuses must be remedied in order to maintain the full array of benefits derived from forests. It was in response to similar abuses that the forestry profession itself arose in the United States in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Though historically largely ineffectual, professional forester licensing could be transformed into a powerful tool for the long-term protection of ecological and economic forest values.

**Existing forester licensing/registration programs do little to ensure that forests are managed in a sustainable manner.** Existing forester licensing programs vary widely in their requirements. In some states licensing is mandatory, while in others it is voluntary. Typically, these programs require some combination of testing, field experience, and academic degree. Most programs do not set expectations that licensed foresters practice sound silviculture or conserve non-timber values. Rather, these programs are designed primarily for the purpose of “titling” or allowing qualified persons to refer to themselves and sell their services as “forester.” Furthermore, in almost all states (California being a notable exception) one may conduct most if not all of the activities involved in forest management without a license so long as that activity is not referred to formally as “the practice of forestry.” As an example, in one state a license is required for a forester to practice “silviculture,” yet the harvesting of timber in the absence of formal silviculture requires no such standard. Such programs provide very little in the way of protection for the forest resource, or indeed for the forest landowners and other clientele that foresters serve.

**Protection of private and public benefits derived from managed forests could be substantially increased by requiring that forest management activities such as timber inventory, management plan development and silviculture be supervised by licensed foresters in adherence to thoughtful forest management guidelines.** Most importantly, requiring that a licensed forester supervise the planning and conduct of timber harvests will help ensure that forestry maintains and improves, rather than degrades, forest health, productivity, and the numerous benefits that well-managed forests provide.

Simply requiring that a licensed forester be involved in all forestry operations is not, by itself, sufficient. For forester licensing to be effective, the forester must be accountable for the results of forestry operations and be charged with managing forests in a sustainable manner. Licensed foresters must certify

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to Guild Position Statements on Silviculture for Natural Forests and High-Yield Production Forestry.

that timber harvests (other than conversion to non-forestry use) have been conducted in a manner that is consistent with sound silvicultural practices and best management practices to prevent erosion and sedimentation and conserve plant and wildlife habitat. If problems arise during operations, the forester should implement appropriate mitigation measures.

**Improved forester licensing programs must embrace the full range of activities that constitute forest management.** The definition of such activities must comprehensively and inclusively address the nature of the activity (e.g. “silviculture” includes the selection of trees for harvest, regardless of how it is done), rather than narrowly and restrictively focusing on terminology (e.g. “silviculture” only takes place if one chooses to refer to the activity as “silviculture”).

A licensed forester, or their designee, should oversee most aspects of forestry operations. This refers to the practice of managing forested landscapes and the treatment of the forest cover in general, and includes the application of scientific knowledge and forestry principles in the fields of management plan development, fuels management and forest protection, silviculture, forest inventories and resource assessment, forest economics, forest valuation and finance, permitting, and the evaluation and mitigation of impacts from forestry activities on watershed and scenic values.

**Qualification requirements for a license should establish a firm threshold but maintain flexibility.** Ultimately, seven year’s experience working under the supervision of a licensed forester should serve as a baseline (with seven serving as a rough rather than rigid guideline). A four year undergraduate degree in forestry or a closely-related field or master’s degree in forestry should count toward four years’ experience (with undergraduate and masters degrees not utilizable in addition to one another), and a two-year associate’s degree should count toward two years’ experience. Successful passage of a comprehensive written examination may count for an extra year of experience. Any “grandfathering” system should also require the licensee to have attained a reasonable level of experience.

“Experience” should consist predominantly of the following:

- Natural resource assessment
- Biometrics/mensuration/mapping
- Forest management planning
- Forest economics/valuation
- Silviculture and tree-marking
- Harvest logistics, layout, BMP’s, supervision, administration, closeout

**Licensing boards must be comprised primarily of professional forest managers and have the power to impose meaningful sanctions.** The main focus of licensing boards should be to ensure that forestry is practiced according to professional standards that sustains the forest ecosystem and its associated values. Thus, the majority of, if not all, members of licensing boards should be comprised of licensed foresters with adequate professional training and field experience. The licensing board’s enforcement powers must be well-defined, supported, and exercised in a timely fashion, with sanctions adequate to discourage violations.

**Summary.** The Guild supports the development and establishment of meaningful forester licensing programs. Because the vast majority of existing forester licensing programs are not linked to field practices, they largely fail to protect forest landowners seeking management assistance, the public, or forest resources. All forestry should be conducted under the supervision of a licensed forester who certifies that practices are being conducted in accordance with sound silvicultural and ecological principles. Requiring qualified foresters to be involved in all forestry operations and requiring that those foresters implement sustainable forestry practices could dramatically improve the practice of forestry and increase the yield of public and private benefits that flow from well-managed forests.