

## COLLABORATING WITH A FORESTER

Periodically, public agencies for which forest management is not a primary focus have a need to engage a forester to solve a problem, conduct a project, or otherwise further the agency's mission. In general, such needs may include:

- Systematic inventory and planning of tree or forest resources
- Management or creation of forested habitat or recreation conditions
- Restoration of damaged or degraded ecosystems
- Planning to determine possible courses of action given complex constraints

New Jersey's forests and permanently preserved open spaces are dynamic ecosystems that are reliant on certain types of disturbance (natural or simulated) to maintain ecosystem function, vitality, and wildlife populations. Examples of forestry on agency lands include, but are not limited to:

- Management of trees in high-use recreation areas
- Recreating historic forest conditions
- Mitigation or control of forest- or tree-damaging pests
- Mitigation of wildfire risk
- Promoting imperiled wildlife and plants through habitat improvement
- Tree planting in riparian corridors, abandoned farmland, and urban and community forests
- Control of exotic invasive plants



*Allegheny SAF foresters at a training in a West Virginia park five years after discovery of emerald ash borer.*

Sustainable forest management can stimulate different recreational opportunities, such as:

- Picturesque views
- More diverse wildlife viewing
- Increased floral diversity
- Better exploring opportunities
- Different terrain for biking and hiking
- Improved fishing

Foresters are uniquely trained amongst environmental and ecological scientists, with skills that include:

- Developing or refining goals and objectives
- Assessing current forest ecosystem conditions
- Working with inventory/assessment data from other naturalists or ecologists
  - Planning within constraints such as wetlands, endangered species, historic resources, other agency policies, and budgetary constraints
  - Projecting forest ecosystem conditions under multiple management regimes into the future to help choose the optimal course of action
- Work with and supervise agency staff or contractors to accomplish projects

The Society of American Foresters is the professional society for foresters. SAF:

- Credentials foresters (Certified Forester®) and will soon credential urban and community foresters

(Certified Urban & Community Forester®)

- Conducts and co-sponsors trainings and disseminates other scientific and technical information to its members to keep their knowledge up-to-date
- Helps to bridge the gap between members who are in research/academia and members who are practitioners
- Holds all members to the Code of Ethics

Many of our members are familiar and comfortable with working collaboratively with one or more agencies or other stakeholders to find practical paths forward. However, whether your agency is looking for a forester to take the lead on a project, or to serve as a member of a team to solve a problem, it helps to have the following information to share when trying to select a forester to work with:

- A clear statement regarding the problem or situation at hand
- The legislative mandate for the agency
- Any available background information on the property in question, including previous inventory, management or master plans, or known protected or sensitive resources

In order to be an effective partner, a forester should be able to demonstrate an understanding of the forest science involved with the situation at hand, experience in solving similar problems, and possessing the personality traits needed to work on a team. The following are offered for your consideration when interviewing a forester.

In a state where anyone who can type something into Google can claim to be an “environmental expert,” it is critical to identify a knowledgeable professional.

- Does the forester have a degree in forestry from an SAF-accredited school? If not, did they earn a degree in natural resource management or ecology, evolution and natural resources from

Rutgers University, or environmental science from Stockton State College?

- Since the half-life of technical forestry information is about 5-7 years, have they attended trainings related to the situation at hand?
- Do they hold the CF credential, or are they a Certified Tree Expert?

Many times, a forester is bridging the divide between agency staff that has the theoretical skills, but not the practical experience, in completing or facilitating complex forest management/stewardship projects.

- How long has the forester been in business?
- What similar projects has the forester been involved with? What insights were gained as a result?
- Can references be provided?
- Have any complaints against the forester been filed with DEP State Forestry Services or SAF?

Forestry is a very demanding technical field that involves managing for positive outcomes given multiple ecological and economic constraints. It is also as much of an art as a science. Combine that with the forester’s intense love for forests, and you get a very unique culture.

- Has the forester worked collaboratively before on a major project where clients or stakeholders have held divergent opinions?
- Based on your interview, does the forester have the ability to bring divergent opinions closer together?
- Based on your interview, would the forester abandon scientific principles to conform to consensus view rather than try to influence or educate?
- Does the forester communicate effectively? (If possible, also obtain a writing sample.)

*For other information, useful links and downloads, or to contact us, please visit the NJ Division of the Allegheny SAF on the web at [www.njforests.org](http://www.njforests.org).*