

# Future Challenges for Foresters

## Outcomes and Actions

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## Executive Summary

In the highly urbanized communities of the Northeast, people have difficulty understanding the full range of goods and services provided by the surrounding forests. While these same folks enjoy viewing wildlife, recreating in the outdoors, and are accustomed to clean fresh water, they fail to recognize the vital connection between these values and the surrounding forest. Urbanization has become both a challenge and an opportunity for the professional forester.

A retreat was held in June 2006 to begin a dialogue on the future challenges facing professional foresters in the New England and New York State Societies. The following comments, identified by retreat participants highlight the tough issues as well as opportunities that foresters will encounter between now and the year 2020.

- "There is limited land base (parcelization) and increasing competition for its use."
- "There is a perceived adversarial feeling between forestry and conservation/preservation groups."
- "A disconnect of society from the land."
- "There is an aging forester population."
- "There is increasing polarization and fragmentation within the profession."
- "We have to contend with global economics and world trade."

Action items, identified during the retreat, underscore the need for the forestry profession, and particularly SAF, to be proactive. Forest management in the near future will be different throughout the region, but nowhere more so than in areas experiencing rapid population increases. Foresters are going to have to know more than silviculture and will have to develop stronger professional partnerships to maintain their value to society.

Professional foresters will need to become more marketable and develop a diverse set of skills to be successful into the future and relevant in 2020. An end effect may be that foresters might be of more service to the broader public as members of interdisciplinary management teams. To that effect, the organizational structure of SAF with its chapters, divisions, state societies, and national staff all can play a part in providing continuing education, training, and a network serving as both a personal and professional support system to foresters throughout the region.

## The Retreat Background and Process

Over the last eighteen months, there have been multiple opinion/editorial submissions in both professional publications and national magazines on the future challenges for **foresters**, not forestry nor the Society of American Foresters, but the core profession.

For instance, Carl Reidel's book review of "Wars in the Woods: The Rise of Ecological Forestry in America" by Samuel P. Hays, in the *Northern Woodlands/ Spring 2007* magazine issue, has this insight – *"Here he (Hays) examines the traditional positions of the American Forest and Paper Association, the Society of American Foresters, the National Association of State Foresters, and the various forestry schools, all of which seem unresponsive to public opinion or emerging environmental science." In the final chapter, he (Hays) concludes that mainstream forestry is a "profession that has become immobilized by its own self-created public isolation."*

Also M.K. Luckert's recent 2006 article in the Journal of Forestry (JOF) 104(6): 299-306 titled *"Has the myth of the omnipotent forester become a reality of the impotent forester"* considers whether foresters have heeded the advice contained in a previous 1966 JOF article by R.W. Behan, which stressed that the role of professional foresters in the United States was not to tell the public how to manage their forests, but to manage according to society's goals.

It is *déjà vu* all over again.

On June 6, 2006, a facilitated retreat was held at the New England Forestry Foundation facilities in Littleton, Massachusetts for the New England (NESAF) and New York (NYSAF) State Societies of American Foresters, with twenty SAF members participating and representing a diverse cross section of the profession.

The retreat members concentrated their efforts on the following four objectives.

- 1) Provide a unified voice on what a forester is and what a forester should be.
- 2) Discuss what would be needed to create a strong sense of wanting to be SAF members among professional foresters.
- 3) Establish a foundation for a programmed process of professional development in a region undergoing rapid urbanization.

4) Develop a white paper describing what professional foresters must do to overcome the challenges of managing forestland forward to 2020.

The retreat was funded by a grant from the 2006 SAF Foresters Fund with matching in-kind support from all Chapters/Divisions of NESAF, NYSAF, and from Leo Laferriere, 2006 District VI Council Member.

Previous drafts of this "white paper" summarized the conclusions of the retreat discussions. It was made available to all NESAF and NYSAF members in the hope of encouraging further discussion. The retreat results were also presented and discussed at the Maine Division's fall meeting, the Granite State Division's winter meeting, the Connecticut Chapter's winter meeting, and finally at the NESAF's 2007 winter meeting. The ultimate goal was for the broader membership to add breadth and depth to the desired outcomes and to develop a prioritized strategy that SAF, primarily through its local units, can implement in coping with the expected changes to the natural resources and the profession in the Northeast.

### **Challenges and Action Items**

During the retreat, participants identified specific challenges they anticipated meeting in managing lands in the Northeast forward to the year 2020. As part of the challenge identification, possible actions were then identified to resolve those challenges. As a result of discussion and commentary over the last six months, the action item listing has now been coalesced to a prioritized narrative. Following some of the action items are numbers and letters in parenthesis, these are an additional cross-reference, indicating that this suggested action helps resolve more than one challenge.

#### **Challenge 1: Altering the Public Image of Forestry**

**Challenge 1A: The public has a weak or negative image and little understanding of forestry. It needs to know "who we are and what we want to be."**

The most consistent response and recommendation to this challenge is to create and/or identify a new nationally recognized spokesperson, i.e. a new Gifford Pinchot to be an ambassador for forestry (2C). Concurrent is the development of a national message about what forestry is, a sound bite that is proactive, repetitive, and that the public can latch onto, i.e.,

“got milk”, “wood is good”, “have you talked with a forester today”, or “We got trees, we need these: FORESTERS” (1C, 3B). This action is by necessity national in scope and expensive in scale, but this should not be a roadblock from seriously developing a proactive communication plan.

The second action item was to increase a forester’s presence in the news media with news releases and opinion/editorial columns. This is an effort all members and all levels of the organization take an active role in. The “Forestry Source” already compiles and prints a select listing every month of news items that feature SAF member media moments. So while the idea isn’t new it can take on greater impetus by members delving into their more local and accessible hometown media options and the NESAF and NYSAF newsletters providing their own version of a regional “Media Moments.”

The final action that garnered support is the idea of promoting pre-harvest walks with a variety of stakeholders, including: abutters, local town leaders, press, and legislators (1C, 3A). A forester talking about the pending harvest, minimizing the impacts, and promoting the improved stand condition would further allay fears about sustainability.

**Challenge 1B: There is a perceived adversarial relationship between forestry/foresters and ‘environmental’ organizations that seem to have the public ear.**

From an internal viewpoint the general action is to improve public confidence on the value of forestry/foresters and this can be implemented in a variety of approaches and scales. These methods are not expensive and the best approach is picking targets of opportunity to provide a base of success to grow on. Education, communication, and innovation are all suitable tools to use in talking to the consumer/public about the benefits of forestry.

Above all else, foresters need to be adaptable to all of the different values, interests, and capabilities of organizations and individuals who use in one manner, shape, or form the same landscapes that foresters do. The first caution is that our involvement must have continuity and come across with enthusiasm, cooperativeness, and commitment. The second caution or awareness is the fortitude to rebut and denounce those messages that downgrade forestry and lower the confidence of the public.

### **Challenge 1C: There is an identified disconnect between the land and the people.**

The forestry profession has the opportunity and the skills to connect people back to the land, but in doing so, foresters need to go to where the people feel comfortable. Action on this challenge is also doable from the chapter level on up and may be implemented through joint workshops with the Audubon Society, Ruffed Grouse Society, National Wild Turkey Federation, and many others. By emphasizing our willingness to work with existing agencies or groups to accomplish these outreach efforts, we as foresters have the chance to understand other viewpoints, learn new techniques, and potentially build a stronger network of strategic coalitions.

The other desirable action would be a focus on the K-12 education system, providing outreach and outdoor opportunities to learn about natural resources. Foresters can help in this reconnection, involving themselves through several choices, like Project Learning Tree (PLT), Envirothon, 4-H, or the Boy/Girl Scouts of America.

### **Challenge 2: Altering the Structure of the Forestry Profession**

#### **Challenge 2A: Create a strong sense of wanting to be a member of SAF amongst professional foresters. How to make belonging to SAF a major professional expectation?**

Numerous ideas and actions were proffered in meeting this challenge. The most consistent idea is cultivating an informal interaction at the local level, where just like politics; the true value of the SAF profession is more transparent and tangible. One member spoke fondly of the monthly chapter meetings that he attended elsewhere, experiencing the sharing of a meal, news, and tidbits for just an hour or two (2C).

Running a close second, was the need to impress upon employers that there is a strong benefit for their employees to belong to SAF and to encourage their attendance at various meetings and conferences. The continuing education opportunities serve equally well for both the employee and the employer.

Finally in regards to new members there are several steps at various organizational levels that can be taken to involve, integrate, and

welcome them in regards to their recent choice. These include holding a brief orientation session for new SAF members at the annual meetings, including the SAF organization chart; chapters might offer a free 1-year membership to new members and for active officers; provide workshops that are affordable, germane, and accessible; identify up and coming "young" foresters and involve/nurture them for leadership opportunities. The idea is that SAF has a philosophy you personally believe in, it provides a creative and valuable interaction with your peers; reinforcing that you are not being left alone in our fast moving and changing society; and that SAF is a member's own personal and professional support system.

**Challenge 2B: There is strong sense that the profession of forestry has become fragmented leaving some foresters feeling marginalized.**

Expressed during the retreat was the frustrated comment that, "Other professionals are eating our lunch", and the need to increase the respect provided to a professional forester.

In response, we should not take our ball and go home. Foresters must be at the lobbying and/or stakeholders table and stay there in order to be recognized as a full-time and interactive player in the continuing race for the resources.

Every professional forester does not need the same identical skills package. A college education should provide a strong base and then continuing education becomes the focus of obtaining the development in new skills, as the science and practice of forestry continues to evolve. Another consideration is that foresters in their resource management often encounter conflicting interests. When a forester needs more than traditional forestry skills, e.g. wetlands protection and rare species habitat conservation (3A), it may be preferable to collaborate with other natural resource professions that have this specific training.

Foresters should make the most of the opportunities presented by maintaining a focus on the relevant issues that most threaten forest sustainability, as this is our home ground and sustainability should be our major core message to deliver.

New York, Connecticut, and Maine have already implemented one of the action items in forming a "Council of Forestry." This is an association of affiliated interest groups, i.e. Farm Bureau, Forest & Parks, and Forest Product Associations that meet and work collectively through the same identical issues facing all of them. The larger voice of the council is more easily recognized and listened to in the legislative and policy development process.

**Challenge 2C: The educational needs of the SAF membership are diverse. How to identify the professional forester skills needed to be both current and in advance to 2020, and then adopting those new tools into both the collegiate and continuing education venues?**

Several action items were favored to address and meet this challenge. The first three focus on the college level and recommend that the educational process should stress professional integrity and ethics; instill a foundation of being environmentally literate while advancing community involvement; and provide training in participatory decision making, conflict resolution, and communication skills. In effect broaden and interject forestry into natural resource, landscape, and social sciences, not just managing trees.

The second is a more novel self-taught continuing education approach to create a local SAF organization, with fewer rules, allowing very small groups to meet more often informally and to create a unified voice. Ideally, these small scale meetings could meet monthly at the convenience of the group.

The final two suggestions are in conflict and need further focused discussion to resolve their divergence as a suggested action. The first is that a degree from an SAF accredited forestry school is beneficial and should be promoted. This is countered by the thought and stated preference for less stress on accreditation metrics and more emphasis on a result-oriented, outcome-based education that produces a qualified SAF Certified Forester.

**Challenge 3: Adjusting to External Influences and Business Trends**

**Challenge 3A: A continuing trend in the Northeast is parcelization and fragmentation, as development and increasing populations split land into increasing smaller units. At some point it will affect and in some cases eliminate forest management opportunities.**

Despite the fact that Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont are three of the top four most heavily forested states in the country respectively at 90%, 84%, and 78%; and that the remaining states of interest (New York, Massachusetts, Connecticut, and Rhode Island) all range from 58% to 62% forested, the following action items all focus on retaining and enabling the continued management of forest resources in areas with a decreasing

tract size. Professional foresters need to reinvent and invest in forestry practices that accommodate a future limited land base, parcel size, and competing demands brought about by parcelization through several approaches. For a consulting forester, the simple technique for reducing your risk is adapting and being responsive to your client's needs.

Another method is to maintain a broad perspective and be ready to serve as a leader helping stakeholder groups solve problems associated with parcelization. The final thought is to continue to educate and inform the public of the value and benefits provided by large contiguous tracts of forestland, especially through the promotion and flexibility provided by the current array of conservation easement options.

**Challenge 3B: The wood market place is shifting with global resource economics playing an ever increasing role in forest product competition. As noted by Dr. Mila Alvarez at the 2006 NESAF annual meeting "Shifts toward private ownership and entrepreneurship around the world, since the 1970s, are continuing to challenge forest managers in New England."**

To retain competitive equity for Northeastern forest products in a global market, the American consumer must be educated on the benefit of forestry and the value of purchasing US made wood products. We need to promote a parallel focus to community sustainable agriculture, emphasize local forestlands and primary/secondary processing facilities, and encourage consumer choices to think globally, but act locally. These choices will make more sense with an analytical viewpoint toward a complete life cycle assessment and forest sustainability basis.

**Challenge 3C: Fewer large timber-related firms are hiring professional foresters.**

SAF cannot control and direct who employers hire for their natural resource positions. However, SAF can promote and communicate to the resource employment market that professional foresters provide added value to their management teams and encourage the hiring of credentialed foresters. Also, SAF can promote within the professional organization, that competition, with current high standards and an ethical underpinning, is an acceptable practice.

Another option is to become involved in local civic and governmental organizations that control and influence land development, promoting and communicating the value and benefit of forestry

The last action item for this challenge is to promote more employer involvement in SAF by providing free exhibit space at meetings or periodic free advertising in the NESAF News Quarterly

**Challenge 3D: There is an increasing effort to locally legislate forest management activities.**

At its various organizational levels, SAF should build coalitions with foresters being at the table, staying at the table, and being recognized as a player when discussions concerning forestry and land development are on the agenda. Our intent is to stay strongly involved in integrating and solving forester/logger/landowner issues.

To facilitate that involvement, we must invite the various organizations of towns, assessors, Nature Conservancy, land trust, etc to our local meetings, allowing them to deliver their message to our members, and in return seek invites and a call-back to their meetings.

## ATTENDEES at the "FUTURE CHALLENGES of FORESTERS" RETREAT

June 6, 2006

William Bentley, CT  
Charles Bingaman, NH  
Thomas Degnan, Jr., CT  
Paul Dolan, RI  
Michael Fleming, MA  
George Frame, NH  
Brett Guglielmo, NH  
Charles Hersey, NH  
Peter Howland, NH  
Richard Johnston, NH

Anne Marie Kittredge, MA  
Leo Laferriere, VT  
Kenneth Laustsen, ME  
Edward O'Leary, VT  
Christopher Pryor, MA  
Lawrence Rousseau, CT  
James Savage, NY  
Mervin Stevens, NH  
Benjamin Urquhart, MA  
Craig Vollmer, NY

### Suggested Additional Reading:

Behan, R.W. 1966. *The myth of the omnipotent forester*. Journal of Forestry 64:398-407.

Hays, Samuel P. 2006. *Wars in the Woods: The Rise of Ecological Forestry in America*. University of Pittsburgh Press.

Louv, Richard. 2005. *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*. Algonquin Books.

Luckert, Martin K. 2006. *Has the Myth of the Omnipotent Forester Become the Reality of the Impotent Forester?* Journal of Forestry 104 (6):299-306.

Reidel, Carl. Northern Woodlands/Spring 2007 Book Review of Samuel P. Hays. p. 63-64.

SAF Strategic Plan and Suggested Actions 2007 – 2011.  
(<http://www.safnet.org/who/Strategicplan07.PDF> )

Simonds, Daniel, Group Leader. NESAF 2006 Winter Meeting. "Open Space" Break-out session – Career Changes for NE Foresters. April 4, 2006.  
(<http://www.nesaf.org/PDFs/2006AnnualMeeting/OpenSpace/Career%20changes%20for%20New%20England%20Foresters.pdf> )