



Using A Forester On My Land

Who Is A Forester And When Would I Need One?

A forester is trained in forestry—the art and science of managing forests sustainably. In the past, sustainable forest management primarily meant managing forests as a sustainable natural resource by harvesting trees judiciously and strategically to maintain forest health. Now, however, foresters are trained to manage woods for a variety of purposes, including recreation, aesthetics, biodiversity, and conservation.

Foresters are trained to understand how different parts of your woods (the trees, wildlife, soils, water, etc.) interact and how they can be nurtured in a way that meets your needs. Foresters are also familiar with local laws, know what markets exist for different forest products and services, and can help manage the legal and financial aspects of woodland-associated activities. With their technical expertise, you can accomplish more on your land than you might be able to do alone, and you'll be less likely to make expensive mistakes.

There are at least four occasions when you may benefit from hiring a forester:

- ✓ Doing an initial assessment and valuation of your woods upon purchase
- ✓ When you plant trees
- ✓ When you thin trees
- ✓ When you harvest trees

The decisions you make at these times are crucial to the long-term health of your woods and it makes sense to invest in a forester's advice.

For example, when you are planning a harvest, a forester can:

- Inventory and appraise your timber stands
- Project forest growth and future value of the standing timber
- Determine which trees should be harvested at the current time
- Market your timber and make sure you get a fair price for it

- Recommend a logger whose techniques and equipment are compatible with the topography and soils on your property.

In this, foresters are like timber sales managers, but a timber sales manager who is not a trained forester may not have sufficient knowledge of and sensitivity to your woods' current and future ecological health.

At planting time, foresters provide invaluable guidance on what to plant, when and where. These decisions should be based on the geography and ecology of your woods, but also on your vision for the woods and the value you derive from them now. Foresters have the knowledge to ensure that your investment in new trees yields maximum value for you.

Most landowners also use foresters for other activities such as creating management plans, boundary line surveys, road construction, and habitat improvement. Many landowners contract with foresters for periodic management and maintenance activities. Much like your pediatrician takes responsibility for the health of your children, including wellness checks, vaccinations, early detection and treatment of illnesses, a forester can monitor your woods and provide what is needed to keep them healthy. He/she will also bring your attention to threats and opportunities and help you find ways to address them.

Which Type Of Forester Do I Need?

You can access the services of many different kinds of foresters, who work in different types of organizations and may have slightly different skills and approaches. Depending on what you need, you might work with any of the following types of foresters.

Service Forester

Many state forestry agencies have **service foresters** that work with landowners to improve forestry on the ground. Service foresters are assigned specific counties and tend to have a good sense of local conditions, and the threats and opportunities they present. Service foresters can also help you access government grant and cost-share programs. In many states, service foresters do free walk-throughs with woodland owners and offer advice for health maintenance and woodland improvement. In some states, service foresters can also write management plans. Some states do charge fees for their services.

It is always good to contact your local county or district service forester for help first. However, because budgets are stretched, it may be a while before he or she can slot you into the schedule. Also, in most states, they do not actually perform services such as

writing management plans or assisting with a timber harvest. So, you may need to work with an independent or consulting forester to implement your service forester's advice.

Consulting Foresters

A **consulting forester** is an independent professional who works under contract to help woodland owners manage their woods. You can hire a consulting forester to work on a specific project (such as thinning a stand or managing a timber sale), or you can hire him/her to provide ongoing management services. Consulting foresters provide a more comprehensive suite of services than state service foresters, and often have a network of loggers and other service providers to implement forestry projects.

Extension Foresters

You might also have access to two other kinds of foresters in your area--extension foresters and industry foresters. **Extension foresters** are employed by local college/university extension services and their role is primarily educational. They create materials and give public talks about specific forestry issues but rarely offer individual advice or services to woodland owners.

Industry Foresters

Industry foresters are employed by timber or forest product companies to provide free counsel and services to woodland owners in their area. Some companies see this as a cost-effective way to ensure that the landowners from whom they purchase raw material are managing their woods sustainably, thus ensuring future supplies of raw material. Industry foresters were fairly common up till about a decade ago; now, their numbers have declined precipitously and their services are available only in very few places.

How Do I Choose A Consulting Foresters?

The most important thing to remember when hiring any service professional is that they will be working for you. So make sure to **choose someone that listens to you, understands what you need, and with whom you can build a good working relationship**. Many client-forester relationships that start with a single project become long-term relationships where the forester works to ensure the health of the woods for more than one generation of owners.

Second, it is important to check on a forester's qualifications.

- Ask a potential consultant if they are **registered**. A registered forester is a person who is qualified to engage in the practice of forestry and holds a current valid license issued by a

qualifying agency. Unfortunately, forester registration statutes vary by state, and aren't always mandatory. Sixteen states sponsor some kind of credentialing process for foresters (for details see below). Often you can file a complaint about poor service through the same government agency that implements the registration.

Credentialing Consulting Foresters

Alabama has a licensing statute, which means that foresters have to meet certain criteria before they can practice. Additionally, the Society of American Foresters certifies foresters who have at least a bachelor's degree from one of the 50 forestry programs accredited by the Society or from a forestry program that, though not accredited by the Society, is substantially equivalent. In addition, the candidate must have 5 years of qualifying professional experience, pass an examination and maintain their certification with continuing education credits.

- Next, enquire after the consultant's **educational qualifications**. Usually, consulting foresters have at least a bachelor's degree in forestry, biology, natural resource management, environmental sciences, or a related discipline. (In rare cases, foresters that started out in the Federal government may not have a Bachelor's degree.) Several foresters also have Master's degrees, which might be an attractive plus if relevant to the project you have in mind.
- Also check if the consulting forester is a **member of a professional association** such as the Society of American Foresters (SAF), the Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF) or the Professional Forest Guild. This is not necessary, but membership indicates that a forester takes his or her profession seriously and tries to stay well-networked and up to date with new
- If the Consulting Forester will be implementing a project in your woods, ensure that they and their contractor **has the necessary insurance**. At a minimum, contractors should have automotive and commercial general liability, and they should comply with workers' compensation laws. Consultants should carry Errors and Omissions (professional liability) insurance. Hiring a contractor and/or subcontractor without insurance could mean you will be held personally liable for an accident on your property

Finally, the best way to predict how a professional will work for you is to see how they've worked for others like you. So make sure you **ask a forester for a few references**, preferably where they've worked with similar landowners on similar projects. Follow up with those landowners to see how satisfied they are with the forester's work and whether they plan to use him or her again for future projects.

How Do I Find And Hire A Consulting Forester?

One way to find a good forester is to ask your friends and neighbors to suggest someone that they have worked with (but be sure to check their qualifications). You can also use one of the following directories.

- ✓ Sign up for a My Land Plan account and you can search for Foresters near your land
- ✓ Find a Society of American Foresters Certified Forester
- ✓ Find an Association of Consulting Foresters member by state
- ✓ Find a Professional Forest Guild Member by service offered

Once you have chosen a consulting forester, you have to work out how and how much they will be paid. There are several ways to structure this relationship. Most consultants have a range of rates depending upon the forestry service to be provided, the property size, travel distance and time required. A forester may charge by the hour, day, acre or the job. With timber sales, consultants often charge by a percentage of the gross sale income. Some foresters may have a minimum fee for specific services.

When you have worked out the terms of employment, be sure they are incorporated into a written contract and signed by you and your consultant forester.

Learn More

- Alabama State Board of Registration for Foresters: <http://www.asbrf.alabama.gov/>
- Alabama Forestry Commission's County Offices: http://www.forestry.state.al.us/afc_county_office_location_maps.htm
- Alabama Forestry Commission Service Providers: <http://www.forestry.state.al.us/ServiceProviders.aspx?bv=5&s=0>
- Alabama Extension Forestry and Natural Resource Program Leaders:
 - Alabama A & M University: Rudy Pacumbaba rop0001@auburn.edu
 - Auburn University: Nancy Loewenstein LOEWENJ@auburn.edu
 - Tuskegee University: Ronald Smith smithrc@mytu.tuskegee.edu
- Alabama Chapter of the Association of Consulting Foresters: <http://www.alacf.com/>
- Professional Foresters: <http://www.aces.edu/natural-resources/forestry/foresters/>
- Find A Forester Near You on MyLandPlan.org, create your account at www.mylandplan.org/signup