

## Memorandum

TO: State Society, Division, and Membership Chairs

FROM: Lori Gardner, Director of Member Services and Marketing, Louise Murgia, Affiliate Services Manager

SUBJECT: Results of Market Research Pertaining to Local Involvement

A majority of members feel that their local SAF unit is a primary or important reason that they are Society members, according to a member survey conducted by AWP Research in April 2001.

SAF launched a comprehensive research program in late-2000 to gain a better understanding of membership recruitment and retention issues and to collect data to help create strategies to reverse a gradual membership decline. The survey instrument was driven by the results of the 2000 Annual Convention focus groups, past member needs assessment surveys, and the strategic initiatives presently underway at SAF. The surveys were mailed to a random sample of 3,871 Professional Members. Members responded very well, with 1,683 useable responses received by late-May.

The survey focused on four major issues: SAF interaction and value; public awareness/communication; publications; and professional diversity. While the results of the entire survey are available upon request, the purpose of this memo is to convey to you what members told us regarding the importance of their local units, and to encourage increased member interaction.

### SAF Interaction and Value

Most respondents (62.5%) say they primarily interact with SAF through the mail by reading Society materials. Attending local meetings/events is the only other method receiving a notable response, selected by 28.5%. Respondents are generally satisfied with their primary interaction method, with 56.2% ranking their satisfaction on either the first or second point of a five-point scale. The highest satisfaction is seen among those who primarily interact with SAF electronically (average score of 3.9 out of a possible 5.0). There is lower satisfaction among those who primarily interact via the mail — while not excessive, it suggests that while mail is the method used the most, members may be using this method by default rather than by active choice. This conclusion is also supported when respondents indicate their preferred interaction method — nearly 40% gravitate toward face-to-face interaction methods, defined as local meetings, attending events, and other such actions. Only 22.6% gravitate toward "indirect" methods, defined as U.S. Mail, e-mail and the Internet. The remaining 36.9% prefer a blend of both methods. The younger members are most apt to select indirect methods, although they still prefer face-to-face interaction. Those who presently interact with SAF directly through local or national meetings want to keep it that way. In contrast, **those who presently interact using indirect methods show a clear preference to include some direct contact.**

When members rate the importance of their local SAF unit, defined as the state society, division or chapter, to the overall value of their membership, a **majority of respondents say their local SAF unit is a primary or important reason they are a Society member**. About 20% say it adds minor value and 11.4% say it is of no consequence to their membership

### ***Implication***

These findings point up the need to continually make personal contacts with members at the local levels (state society, division, and chapter). Local leaders should make a special effort to contact **new and transferred** members to encourage attendance at events, to determine their areas of interest, and to find out how we can better meet their needs. To illustrate the importance of this, we recently purged 2,123 members for nonpayment of 2001 dues. Of those members purged, 78.5% were members for 1-9 years.

### **Meeting Member Needs**

While a majority of members feel that SAF is doing at least an acceptable job in meeting their needs at this point in their career, there is clear room for improvement. Overall, SAF receives an average score of 3.2 out of a possible 5.0. The Society scores the highest among those in federal government settings, academicians and retirees; it scores the lowest among forestry consultants and those in private industry. Satisfaction scores show an interesting variation based on professional experience — scores are generally high for those just starting in the profession, drop for those with 6-15 years of experience, and climb up again for those with 16 or more years of experience.

### ***Implication***

Local units are encouraged to develop educational programs targeted to consultants and members who work in private industry. This may help increase satisfaction among these groups. The national office will also look into national programs and services that will increase satisfaction. Local units should personally contact members who represent these groups to determine how SAF could better meet their needs.

### **Primary Association**

More than seven of every ten respondents (72.6%) consider SAF to be their primary professional society/association, defined as the group that best meets their professional needs. The Society/member bond is closest among those in government work settings and for retired members, with more than 80% of these individuals selecting SAF as their primary affiliation. In contrast, only 55.6% of the forestry consultants consider SAF their primary group. As seen with satisfaction ratings, there is a definite dip in the number of members with 6-15 years of experience who consider SAF their primary society. State

forestry associations are the most commonly mentioned group by those who do not consider SAF their primary society/association. This category, encompassing many different groups, is mentioned by nearly one-quarter of the respondents. The Association of Consulting Foresters is the most popular national group, mentioned by about 12%. Other popular groups include the California Licensed Foresters Association, the International Society of Arboriculture, The Wildlife Society, The Ecological Society of America, the Forest Resources Association and the Forest Stewards Guild.

### *Implications*

Some state societies sponsor joint annual meetings and programs with the above organizations. This is a great opportunity to showcase SAF's projects and programs in an effort to increase membership. If your unit does not sponsor joint annual meetings or events, you may want to consider it in the near future.

### **Retention**

Most respondents (62.6%) say they will "definitely" renew their membership, and an additional 31.2% say they will "probably" renew. Less than two percent are planning on dropping their membership. Renewal plans follow the pattern previously seen with satisfaction, with those in private industry settings and those with 6-15 years of experience being the most "at risk" member groups. Interestingly, nearly half of those who do not feel SAF is their primary association plan on definitely renewing their membership. Cost is the most significant barrier to renewal by a wide margin, cited by nearly 70% as one of their renewal decision factors and by 37.1% as the single most significant renewal factor.

### *Implications*

Cost is often cited as one of the primary reasons for nonrenewal. If you attended the SAF Leadership Academy recently, you may remember speaker Mark Levin. He stressed the importance of communicating "value" to membership. It is important to continually work to promote the "value" of SAF membership. When you can demonstrate that value far outweighs the cost, you can counter this reason for dropping membership.

### **Observations by AWP Research**

It is interesting to note the lack of significant interest members have in increasing their indirect contact methods (i.e., mail, Internet, etc.) with the Society. Unlike trends affecting some other professional societies and associations, SAF members are highly interested in interacting through local channels. This interaction preference should be a prime area to explore among students to determine if these findings are a function of the survey's demographics (i.e., a median age of 48) or a function of the nuances of the profession. **Regardless, it's clear the local/direct interaction is of prime importance**

**to membership retention, and an area to which SAF needs to continually devote resources.**

It's encouraging to see the strong competitive position SAF has with other groups, with nearly three-quarters feeling SAF is their primary association. SAF scores significantly lower, however, among forestry consultants and those in private industry, both in terms of primary affiliation and overall satisfaction. Those in private industry are also more apt than other segments to cite the perception that SAF does not adequately represent their employment sector as a reason for potential non-renewal. There are also specific competitive organizations, most notably the Association of Consulting Foresters that target these individuals. Given that private industry and consulting foresters are a significant percentage of SAF members, specific services stressing practical, hands-on information should be targeted and publicized to show these members what the Society can and does offer them as members.

### **Resources for Local Units**

The following resources available from the national office are designed to help local units connect with members. For more information contact Louise Murgia, (301) 897-8720, ext. 118 or [murgial@safnet.org](mailto:murgial@safnet.org).

**Surpassor Tips.** Sent weekly via e-mail to members of HSD-list exchange in addition to all membership chairs. To receive copies, contact Louise.

**Recruiting Tips.** The SAF website has great membership recruitment and retention resources.

[www.safnet.org/members/memideas.htm](http://www.safnet.org/members/memideas.htm)

[www.safnet.org/members/recruitment.htm#units](http://www.safnet.org/members/recruitment.htm#units)

[www.safnet.org/members/recruitment.htm#tips](http://www.safnet.org/members/recruitment.htm#tips)

**Membership Development Grants.** Grants in the amount of \$500 are available from the national office to support recruitment and retention efforts at the local level. The form can be found at [www.safnet.org/members/developfund.htm](http://www.safnet.org/members/developfund.htm)

**PowerPoint Presentations.** SAF has created PowerPoint presentation to showcase membership to potential student members and employers. The presentation can be downloaded from the SAF website at [www.safnet.org/members/memberdev.htm](http://www.safnet.org/members/memberdev.htm)

SAF is also developing new programs to increase interaction between members and potential members. These programs include the "ambassador program" to identify key

SAF representatives at places of employment, a mentoring program, and a recruitment incentive program for student chapters. Details will follow on these in the near future.

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