

# Forestry<sup>The</sup> **Source**

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## It's Time to Change the Name of the Society

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After reviewing the Volunteer Organizational Structure (VOS) Task Force report, it is clear that as other natural resources-related societies and professions grow, SAF suffers annual losses in membership. The attrition of students from traditional forestry programs mirrors the Society's losses. Two trends illuminate these facts. First, members are migrating to other natural resources-related societies. Second, students are enrolling in fields closely allied to forestry, because they either perceive "traditional forestry" or the term "forester" as being too narrow in scope or because they associate these terms with negative images. Although this suggests a cultural problem, it is also one of perception—to which the Society's name substantially contributes. Thus, the Society should act—first, by changing its name.

Too often we hear discussions in classes, at work, at SAF meetings and conventions, and at other social gatherings about what our profession is, what defines it, who is to be included, and what it should be called. These ongoing debates suggest that tradition, ego, image, and territorialism have thwarted possible solutions.

As the VOS report states, "the [Society's] key challenge... is to determine 'who we are' and 'what we want to be' as a professional organization." The report also indicates that "SAF has not capitalized on the broadening field of forestry, and by not doing so it has, in fact, created its own competition—competition that now threatens the future existence of the profession of forestry, the Society, and the concept of 'foresters.'" This reality leaves us with only one clear option: decide "who we are" and "what we want to be," or continue to diminish as progress in natural resources management, along with changes in societal values, renders SAF's image and traditions irrelevant.

Foresters take pride in their work and expertise, and rightfully so. We understand forest resources and possess the skills to enhance and sustain these resources for myriad social and ecological benefits. However, we now live in a world that requires foresters to have a solid understanding of other natural resources and biological disciplines, of social sciences, and of humanities to remain effective and relevant in today's complex working environments and environmental conditions. Ironically, we include these words in our definition of the broad profession of forestry, yet we have not demonstrated this shift to others in the most visible part of our Society—our name.

The USDA Forest Service and academic institutions, for example, have embraced a more holistic and inclusive definition of forestry. Such entities are already adapting to a modern paradigm of integrated ecosystem/landscape natural resources management. Traditional forestry schools are changing their names, curricula, and the compositions of their staffs. Because of research advances and societal changes, progressive institutions recognize that forestry has evolved beyond timber management.

It is time to acknowledge that changing the name of the Society offers benefits that far outweigh the risks. A few of these benefits include:

- Improving our perception and relationship within the Society and with outside interests
- Involving and using those who have an impact on the forestry profession
- Increasing our membership and range of natural resources related professionals
- Boosting our science-based knowledge, as well as our ability to influence
- Better representing the diverse skills and opinions of today's SAF members.

Regardless of the benefits, we must ask ourselves whether we are more willing to fight for an organization in the name of "foresters," or to fight for an organization and profession that promote sound forest and natural resources management.

Thus, we propose changing the name of the Society to the American Society of Forestry. This change embraces our traditions, while acknowledging the evolution of our profession. It is the necessary catalyst for "real change" that we have long avoided, and it will demonstrate to our members and outside interests that the Society is truly a progressive institution that will be prepared to address natural resources issues in the future. Regardless of what the new name becomes, our passion to restore vigor and respect to our broad profession of forestry leaves us convinced that this is the very next action SAF must take.

Our hope is to present a new name for Council vote at the 2006 National Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. We ask for your support. Look for petitions to sign in the near future.

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