

Forester licensure: what is it?

PENNSYLVANIA COUNCIL OF PROFESSIONAL FORESTERS

Our proposal:

increase forester responsibility
by amending the state law that currently provides for the regulation and licensure
of the professions of engineering, land surveying, and geology
to include the profession of forestry.

What is professional licensure?

Pennsylvania and all other states regulate various professions to ensure that services provided to the public meet basic standards. Currently, Pennsylvania regulates more than 30 professions, ranging from doctors and pharmacists to barbers and auctioneers.

In the case of the profession of forestry, states' credential-granting programs serve as a means for a state governmental agency to identify individuals who have met specific standards of professional education and experience deemed necessary to provide forestry services in that state.

What is the difference between "licensure" and "certification?"

Generally speaking: *Certification* can be granted by either a governmental or non-governmental entity; title protection is granted to individuals who have met predetermined qualifications; those without the title may perform the services of the profession, but may not use the title. *Licensure* requires that individuals must meet certain standards imposed by the state in order to perform the services of the profession. Governance of the application of the standards of forestry practice is assigned to the State Registration Board for Professional Engineers, Land Surveyors, Geologists, and Foresters within the Pennsylvania Department of State

Is forestry a profession that merits state regulation and licensure?

Absolutely. The level of knowledge, skill, and judgment required for the profession of forestry is as great as virtually any other profession currently regulated in Pennsylvania. Forestry is a profession that, if properly practiced, includes the application of many disciplines. Most professional foresters have completed rigorous academic training in biology, ecology, forest inventory, planning, appraisal, silviculture, mensuration (forest measurements and forest survey techniques) and other areas. Because of the nature of the work they perform, foresters can have a profound impact on the environment and the state's timber supply for decades to come.

The profession of forestry is especially important in Pennsylvania. Pennsylvania is one of the most heavily forested states in the nation, with nearly 60 percent of the state's land area, totaling 17 million acres, covered by forests. These forests are a vital resource to sustaining Pennsylvania's economy and environment. The timber and forest products industry is the fourth largest manufacturing industry in the state, employing over 90,000 workers in 2,500 firms, and contributing almost \$5 billion annually to the state's economy. Nationally, Pennsylvania ranks number one in hardwood production. Forest-based recreation is the largest component of the Commonwealth's second largest industry, tourism.

The vast majority of Pennsylvania's forests (75 percent, 12.5 million acres) are privately owned (almost 514,000 individuals own forest land in Pennsylvania). Eighty-five percent of private forest land owners have no written management plan for their forests.

Because of these facts, the importance of maintaining various forest values, including sustainable supplies of timber for Pennsylvania's forest products industry, in a manner compatible with the values and benefits that *Penn's woods* generates for the Commonwealth's tourism and outdoor recreation industries, it is essential that our forests are managed according to sound scientific principles. Individuals practicing forestry in Pennsylvania should be expected to possess the knowledge, experience, and judgment to ensure that our forests remain healthy for generations to come.

Who are the users of foresters' services?

Individuals, investors, industrial and institutional landowners, and government agencies are all users of foresters' services. Individuals who own forest land are least likely to be aware of the services offered by professional foresters and the benefits these services can provide. This is an especially important issue in Pennsylvania where such a large percentage of the state's forest land is owned by private individuals. Individual forest land owners frequently are not aware of the long-term impacts their decisions can have on the forests, environment, economy, and society.

What public need would be met if foresters were licensed in Pennsylvania?

The greatest public need that would be met if foresters in Pennsylvania were licensed would be to provide for the accountability of the profession and to promote public confidence in it.

The public and individuals seeking forestry services receive the greatest benefit from programs that credential foresters. The actions of a forester, particularly in prescribing management practices, can affect the land for decades. These actions, especially if they involve timber harvesting, can affect the value received for timber, water quality, fish and wildlife habitat, and the esthetics of the forest landscape for both the present and many years in the future. Forest management prescriptions may involve the use of pesticides, fire, or other management tools that can have a substantial effect on the environment if misused.

Does a process exist in Pennsylvania to handle complaints about foresters' services and to resolve disputes?

No such process currently exists in Pennsylvania, other than the civil legal system.

For additional information about the proposal to license professional foresters contact:
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The nation behaves well if it treats the natural resources as assets which it must turn over to the next generation increased, and not impaired.
THEODORE ROOSEVELT, 1910.