

Choosing a Forester

Choosing the right forester has important long-term consequences for your property. The advice a forester gives, and the advice you choose to pursue, can effect your woods for 30, 40, 50 years -- or longer. The forester will visit your property, talk with you about your expectations and create a forest management plan that reflects your goals.

Educating Yourself

Before you can choose the right forester for you, you first need to know:

- what you **can do** on your property, and
- what you **want to do**.

To better understand your forest land and your options, tap into local resources to help you discover your property's potential.

- **The Watershed Agricultural Council's Forestry Program**
The Forestry Program can also help you with a Watershed Forest Management Plan or other cost-share programs.
www.nycwatershed.org

- **Workshops**

- **Master Forest Owners (MFO)**

Master Forest Owners are trained landowners who will walk your property with you, share what they see, answer questions, give advice and introduce you to others who can help.
www.dnr.cornell.edu/ext/mfo

- **Catskill Forest Association (CFA)**
www.catskillforest.org

- **New York Forest Owners Association (NYFOA)**
www.nyfoa.org

- **New York State Department Of Environmental Conservation (NYS DEC)**
www.dec.ny.gov

- **Neighbors**

Armed with basic knowledge about your woodland's potential, you decide on the right approach for you and your property and seek out the right professional for the job.

Understanding Your Forest's Potential

Before interviewing a forester, create a pre-plan that outlines your forest land goals. List your expectations both short and long term. You can do many things with your property. For example, you may want to:

- Sell your timber or other natural resources,
- Thin out areas to encourage hardwood tree growth,
- Improve the surroundings for hunting,
- Attract more wildlife by creating a habitat corridor, or
- Stabilize water courses to reduce erosion and improve water quality.



Deciding what you can and want to do with your woodlands, ahead of time, will help you select the right forester for the job. Subsequently, a forester can answer many questions and recommend approaches to:

- timber harvest work,
- trail design and drainage issues,
- property and natural resource appraisals,
- tax basis determination and forest property tax programs,
- forest health issues, and
- wildlife management and aesthetics.



The forester ultimately translates your rough, pre-plan into a detailed, long-term approach to healthy forest management.

Finding a Forester

New York State does not require foresters to carry a license. There are, however, other ways to evaluate a forester's professionalism and experience.

Education and training: A forester should have a two- or four-year college degree in a science field, preferably forestry. Foresters on the WAC's Watershed Qualified Forester (WFQ) list meet this level of education.

Professional affiliation: A forester should be a current member of the Society of American Foresters (SAF), New York Institute of Consulting Foresters (NYICF), or the Association of Consulting Foresters of America (ACF). These organizations provide standards of professional conduct, training opportunities and conferences for additional learning. A forester who belongs to these groups is demonstrating a commitment to continued professional development.

Certification: The Society of American Foresters offers a certification program (the SAFCF), which requires certified foresters to:

- meet the profession's educational requirements,
- have five or more years of professional forestry experience,
- adhere to standards of professional practice,
- pass a rigorous competency exam, and
- participate in continuing education.



Special agreements: Dozens of foresters work with the NYS DEC as Cooperating Consulting Foresters. These foresters have agreed to maintain ethical and educational standards, in compliance with the New York Cooperating Forester Program policy.

Experience and referrals: An experienced, qualified forester will be proud to share his work and plans created for other landowners.

- Review the WAC Forestry Program Watershed Forester Qualified list and Forester Profiles at: www.nycwatershed.org/lc_foresters.html.
- Review the list of NYS DEC Cooperating Consulting Foresters.
- Ask the forester for references and past job experience.
- Ask to tour a recent job, and if possible, ask an MFO with good field experience to accompany you on the tour. Get their impressions, ask questions about what you observe, learn the terminology, what practices were used and what future growth can be expected.

- Follow up with provided references to see if landowners' circumstances were similar to yours.
- Ask fellow forest owners which foresters they know and recommend.
- Contact the NYS DEC regional office in your area, Cornell Cooperative Extension, or your county Soil and Water Conservation District with questions you may have.
- Call the WAC Forestry Program with your questions, (607) 865-7790, ext.101.

Asking Questions

When hiring a forester, ask questions during the interview, such as:

- How long have you worked as a professional forester?
- Where have you been working and with what kinds of forests? How does this qualify you to help me?
- What is your educational background?
- Can you provide me with any references from previous clients and/or agencies?
- What services do you provide?
- Of the services you provide, what two do you consider to be your best or ones you most enjoy?
- Do you see my property being conducive to managing for items outlined in my pre-plan? If so, why? If not, why? (Ask this question after the forester has visited your property.)
- Are you a current member of Society of American Foresters (SAF), New York Institute of Consulting Foresters (NYICF), or the Association of Consulting Foresters of America (ACF)?
- How many clients do you have?
- Do you have other people, either employees or subcontractors, that do some of your work?
- What training have you attended recently?
- What are your fees (per hour, per acre, commission on a timber sale)?
- Are fees negotiable?
- Would you sign a contract that details the services you will provide?
- Are you associated with a saw mill or wood products firm?
- If a logger is needed to complete any recommendations, will you recommend a specific logger?
- Will you work with a specific logger, if I've already selected one to work with?

Once you've selected a forester to create a plan for your property, consider this a long-term professional, relationship between you, your forester and your forestlands. Walk your property with the forester and ask questions. Agree on a planning approach and be sure to draw up a contract with your forester. Once the plan is complete discuss the recommendations with your forester.

A forest management plan is only as good as your goals and planning. Take time to choose a forester. Highly qualified professionals are ready to help you maximize your forest land's potential. If you have any questions, contact the Forestry Program at the Watershed Agricultural Council at: (607) 865-7790, ext. 101.

Watershed Agricultural Council
Forestry Program
www.nycwatershed.org

