

## Selecting a Consulting Forester<sup>1</sup>

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Chris Demers and Alan Long<sup>2</sup>

Consulting foresters provide technical assistance in all phases of forest management for a fee. Their services include:

- surveying
- timber sales
- thinning
- planting
- herbicide and fertilizer application
- prescribed burns
- forest inventory
- management plan preparation
- wildlife habitat improvement

Both individual consultants and consulting firms can offer excellent assistance in all or most of these capacities. Although most consultants have a broad knowledge of resource management most also specialize in one or more types of services. Many consultants are also experienced in tax law and estate planning and can provide some level of assistance with those aspects of management.

Fee arrangements vary by the type of service. They may be charged on an hourly, daily or per acre basis, or the fee may be determined as a set amount for a complete project. For timber sales, the fee is often a percentage of sale receipts. Fees should be described in a letter, contract or proposal, and clearly understood, before work begins.

The State of Florida, unlike some other states, does not require consulting foresters to be registered, licensed, or certified under a uniform set of standards, which means that they have varying qualifications, credentials, and standards with respect to the way they conduct their business. It is therefore important to explore available services and choose carefully the individual or firm that can best help you meet your specific needs. The following are some things to look for in a consultant:

**Proper educational background and experience.** Consultants should have at least one degree in forest or natural resource management from an educational institution accredited by the Society of American Foresters (SAF). Foresters affiliated with the Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF) generally meet higher qualification standards than required by forestry registration boards in other states.

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Membership in ACF requires a B.S. in forestry and at least 5 years of practical experience. The average experience of ACF members is 25 years with 17 years in private practice. In addition continuing forestry education is required to maintain membership in ACF.

**Good communication skills.** Talk to the consultant personally and ask to see a sample proposal. Good writing skills are as important as oral skills if his/her recommendations are to be understood. Someone that has difficulty interacting with you or others will likely not be an effective consultant for you.

**Involvement in professional societies and activities.** In addition to ACF, membership in the Society of American Foresters, Florida Forestry Association, or the Forest Landowners Association indicates commitment to continued professional service, education and development.

**No conflicts of interest.** The ACF requires that all members have consulting as their principal business activity and that they avoid any conflict of interest, such as having an economic interest in a timber procurement entity.

**Honesty, integrity, and ethical conduct.** Many landowners find consultants through referral from an existing or past client. Ask for references and check them. Industry foresters and landowner associations can also recommend consulting foresters with whom they have had favorable experience. ACF members subscribe to a standard Code of Ethics that governs their professional relationships with clients and the public.

Depending on your objectives you may look for additional qualifications. For example, if you are planning to plant longleaf pine you will need a consultant with experience establishing this species due to its unique characteristics and special requirements. Check past plantings and look for a minimum survival of 65 to 70 percent.

The Florida Division of Forestry (DOF) produces a Florida Forest Services Vendor database, which contains available forestry service providers, contact information and the specific services they offer. The database can be accessed online at

<http://fsvd.fl-dof.com/>. A current list of ACF Consulting Foresters in your area can be found on the Web at <http://www.acf-foresters.org/>.

## References

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