

Selecting a Consulting Forester

Choosing a private forester to assist you in managing your woodlot is an important process in addressing the challenges you may face in sustaining multiple benefits and resources from your forest. Currently in Pennsylvania, anyone can legally claim to be a forester or forestry consultant, regardless of training, certifications, or experience. Therefore, the decision you make today in hiring a forester to assist you in managing your property can either positively or negatively impact your ability to reach set goals and interests for your forest. A trusted professional forester can be utilized for the life of your ownership to carry out management planning on the property, implement recommendations within the plan, and assist you with other important aspects of your forest, such as tax planning and estate planning. The following are some guidelines for forest landowners to consider when hiring a forester.

- **Obtain lists of foresters in your county**-Contact your local DCNR Service Forester to obtain an up to date list of foresters that do business in your county. This list will provide contact information, services offered, and potentially professional certifications the forester has obtained.
- **Contact several foresters on your list.** Ask them about:
 1. **Professional Certifications**-Membership in the Association of Consulting Foresters, Society of American Foresters Certified Forester Program, or Pennsylvania Council of Professional Foresters. These organizations promote high standards of professionalism for members along with a code of ethics.
 2. **Education**-Foresters should have at the minimum a 2 year degree in forestry and be able to provide documented proof of this degree upon request.
 3. **Work experience**-The forester should have documented experience of carrying out the types of services you wish to carry out in the management of your forest. Ensure the forester always is representing your goals and interests first and foremost.
 4. **Local references**-The forester should be able to provide at least three references for forest landowners they have done business with in the past. Contact these references, ask them if they were satisfied with the job that was done, and if possible, consider touring the properties where the work was done. Ask these references if the project was carried out as per a professional forest management plan, such as a Forest Stewardship or Tree Farm Plan.
 5. **Join a local Woodland Owners Association**-Twenty Seven organizations exist in PA at this time, made up of woodland owners whom are informing themselves about sustainable forest management. Many of these landowners will be able advise you on foresters that will represent your best interests in the local area. Contact your local DCNR Service Forester for more information on local Woodland Owner Associations.

Secure a written contract-Ensure you secure a written, legal work contract, with fees, services, obligations, terms, and principal parties clearly identified. You may wish to ask an attorney to review the document before signing it.