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The Issue of SAF Membership: An Elite or Broad Organization?

In 1948 a group of consulting foresters sought to become a division of the SAF (something akin to one of our working groups); however, Henry Clepper, then SAF's executive secretary, believed that there were too many divisions already, so he decided not to approve the proposal. The result of that denial, according to the organization's history, was the birth of the Association of Consulting Foresters (ACF).

Today, there are two strong professional organizations representing professional foresters in the United States, the SAF and the ACF, and the decision that led to the creation of the latter has had a significant effect on SAF's evolution and development. In retrospect, it appears that the decision that led to the ACF's creation was made with little concern for its potential implications. Whether that is indeed the case is a matter for historians, but what's not up for debate is the fact that so called safe decisions, intended not to "rock the boat," may have greater consequences than more proactive alternatives.

Last March, the SAF Council approved development of an accreditation program for Natural Resources Management (NRM) programs. These are not the old conservation majors of long ago—typically, NRM programs have rigorous science and math requirements, as well as resource management major requirements just as sophisticated as forestry's. The Council's approval was based on the findings of the Task Force on Accreditation of Terrestrial Ecosystem Management Programs, which recommended accreditation of NRM programs because it saw a void—not unlike the one in 1948 that resulted in the ACF—both for some sort of credentialing of NRM programs and their graduates, and for a professional society to give NRM graduates a home. The Council agreed and voted in favor of the accreditation of NRM graduates. Now, in the wake of the Council's decision, a second void has appeared: Where are these newly credentialled professionals going to find a home? Will they organize their own professional society like the founders of ACF, or will an existing society embrace them? The questions seem kind of foolish, since you'd expect the professional society that offers the accreditation to also become the professional home.

SAF membership has been declining by about 3 percent annually. That continuing trend has created an SAF that is not sustainable. The SAF Council is working hard to reverse the trend, and the Society has welcomed professionals from the "broad area of forestry" for quite awhile. However, these closely allied professionals have not been flocking to SAF and do not see us as a professional "home." To see what we mean, consider SAF's recently developed accreditation program for urban forestry programs. The early trend is not encouraging, which suggests that developing accreditation programs without developing the organizational infrastructure to

embrace those who enroll in them is self-defeating. After all, would you want an accredited degree from a professional society that did not have membership categories and organizational divisions that embraced your professional discipline?

The professional societies and educational programs that encompass forestry and other natural resources management subject areas are changing fast. According to a 2010 study of undergraduate enrollment within the National Association of University Forest Resource Programs (NAUFRP) by Terry Sharik and Patricia Layton that highlights current trends in natural resources education, in 1980, forestry programs accounted for about 47 percent of natural resources program enrollment, wildlife and fisheries about 16 percent, NRM about 15 percent, and others (wood, recreation, water, soils, range, etc.) about 22 percent. In 2009, forestry was down to 22 percent, wildlife and fisheries was up to 22 percent, NRM rose to 37 percent, and others were at 19 percent. Now, combine these numbers with recent Bureau of Labor Statistics that project 20,500 employed in NRM in 2018 and 12,500 foresters in the same year.

Given this data, the critical question for SAF members is whether we should try to broaden our Core Val-

ues, Mission, and membership, while simultaneously holding fast to our forestry identity and heritage.

The SAF Council has been addressing these strategic planning issues via the framework outlined in *Good to Great*, a book by Jim Collins (HarperCollins Publishers, 2001) that describes the planning process used by successful organizations. The core process addresses three circles: what the organization is passionate about, what the organization is best at, and what drives its economic engine. Collins calls this the "Hedgehog Concept," and our broader view of SAF envisions a hedgehog like the one in Figure 1, where we best connect all three circles to reinforce each other in determining SAF's future.

Obviously, the Council must address the implications of accrediting NRM programs, as doing so will lead to a set of "falling dominoes" that goes something like this: SAF fills the void for accreditation of NRM programs; a second void develops, and some organization fills the need for a home for these professionals; if SAF also fills the second void, the question is, "To what extent SAF will have to change?" Is SAF willing to make the necessary changes, including developing broader Core Values and writing a new Mission Statement as shown in Figure 1? That is a question for the membership. But the question also needs to be addressed forthrightly and in terms of our strategic plan.

President Dziengeski recently summarized this situation very succinctly and asked, "Who do we want and need as members?" He described two options that contrasted the organizational dynamics well, while recognizing there are many options. We'll refer to them as an "Elite SAF" and a "Broader SAF." The first option means an SAF with traditional forestry graduates and a few allied professionals as members. Membership of this SAF would be small, close to what we have now (although we don't know exactly when membership will bottom out). The other option is a broader SAF that truly embraces all allied professionals. It would not just include NRM graduates, but likely would incorporate some related professional societies. Could we even reverse that decision of 1948 and find a home for ACF within SAF? Table 1 illustrates possible differences between the two options.

Of course, forestry is distinctive in that it alone emphasizes forest sustainability and management of that resource's ecological, economic, and social parameters. Foresters are the experts on forests and timber, and society's fundamental need for wood and timber is the foun-



Table 1: The Possible Differences between the Options of an "Elite SAF and a "Broad SAF"

| Attribute | Elite SAF | Broader SAF |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Membership (steady state) | 10-12,000 | 25-30,000 |
| Dues Revenues | \$1,000,000 | \$2,500,000 |
| Staff (service) | Minimal low level of service | Full staff; high level of service |
| Staff (quality) | Low (eventually, low pay) | The best (will catch up with us) |
| Clout on Capitol Hill | Moderate, (high on timber issues) | High (high on all resources issues) |
| Forest policy | High | Much higher (members add clout) |
| Publications | Perhaps maintain current level | Expand number or quality |
| National Convention | Somewhat smaller; Continued timber focus | Expanded, broader programs and exhibitors |
| Forestry | Current structure | Professional divisions |
| Chapters | Many disintegrating | Reinvigorated |
| Certification | CF | CF and CNRM |

("Membership" continued on page 11)

University of Idaho SAF Student Chapter Holds Seminar Series on Current Natural Resources Issues

Faced with waning interest in and dwindling attendance at its bi-weekly meetings, the SAF Student Chapter at the University of Idaho decided it needed to do something if the chapter was going to survive. So, after much discussion, the chapter's remaining members decided to launch a Graduate Speaker Seminar series, which they hoped would spur greater interest in the chapter and its activities, bring people from the university's natural resources-related disciplines together, and get graduates and undergraduates together to discuss scientific topics.

The chapter's efforts paid off so well that, Anthony S. Davis, co-faculty adviser to the student chapter and an assistant professor in the College of Natural Resources, believes that this approach could "serve as a model for other chapters faced with declining participation."

"Attendance at meetings was weak; we were down to fewer than 10 people at our meetings," he said. "Our leadership group convened and felt that a unique approach like this might be a way to draw on the curiosity that seems to run throughout our student body. Now, attendance has been between 25 and 40 people, and membership is up to more than 20 students."

Each seminar highlights a graduate student's research in a natural resources-related subject, such as forestry, fisheries, wildlife, and range science and management. Then, after each presentation, there



A graduate student presents his research to University of Idaho students during an installment of the recently developed Graduate Student Seminar series. The university's SAF Student Chapter launched the series as a way to increase attendance at its meetings.

is an informal question-and-answer session with the speaker.

Graduate students in the SAF chapter appreciate the opportunity to hone their public speaking and presentation skills.

"As a graduate student, I was given a chance to work on presentation skills and become more familiar with the breadth of cutting-edge research of my peers," said Chad Hoffman, a doctoral student studying fire science.

Davis agrees and says the experience is invaluable, especially for those students

who haven't had the chance to present their work.

"Our graduate students are able to present in front of an audience that is interested in the subject matter, aware of many facets of natural resources, and non-threatening," said Davis. "For some graduate students, this may be their first time having to not only present their research, but defend it through a question-and-answer session. By increasing their comfort level in front of an audience, our graduate students will be more effective at communicating their findings."

The seminars are a boon to undergraduates as well, said Davis, because they give undergraduates a chance to see many of their TAs, supervisors, and friends in a professional setting, which helps them understand that research is conducted by "real people"—and that they are not so far removed from it.

"By having graduate students present and defend their research to an informed audience, they develop as early mentors and leaders," said Davis. "At the same time, it connects our undergraduate students to cutting-edge research, which helps prepare them for the real world and provides a strong balance for the theory that they learn every day in classes. Exposing them, in real time, to research that they may hear about in classes, through work, or in the news demystifies it and promotes critical thinking."

The seminar series has also succeeded in bringing together students from the university's different schools, including the College of Natural Resources, the College of Science, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, and the Environmental Science program, and generated interest in the university's other clubs.

"One of my biggest passions as a student leader is encouraging undergraduate participation in clubs and pride in our college," said Trevor DeBell-Carlsson. "My goal for these seminars is to increase student awareness of what some of our best graduate students are doing, and to try and get undergraduates excited about some of the many possibilities clubs provide."

For more information, contact Anthony S. Davis, assistant professor of native plant regeneration and silviculture, director, Center for Forest Nursery and Seedling Research, Department of Forest Ecology and Biogeosciences, University of Idaho, asdavis@uidaho.edu.

Has your SAF chapter done something new and noteworthy? If it has, then let us know about it. Simply contact Society Affairs editor Joseph Smith at (866) 897-8720, ext. 134 or smithj@safnet.org.

(“Membership” continued from page 9)

dation of our profession. No forester is ever going to apologize for being timber-oriented. But members of SAF are much more than just tree or timber managers; we manage many more natural resources beyond trees. Our forestry curricula have expanded to reflect that, our codes of ethics recognize that, and our everyday practices reflect that. Our management has always been ecosystem management, and our focal point has always been sustainability. Unfortunately, the general public often does not realize that and, sometimes, associates us with the unregulated extraction of resources rather than their conservation. Also, even though we are interested in the human dimension (i.e., public perceptions and attitudes) of forest management, the general public has failed to recognize this. Timber harvesting is part of what we do; perhaps a broader membership and mission of SAF will help correct the unfavorable public perception toward forestry.

We see the Council wrestling with these decisions soon after the new accreditation program is implemented. Notice we are advocating that SAF make a conscious decision on this issue, rather than following the path fate may choose for us if we just decide to wait and see what happens. We have an opportunity here to define our own future. This is a huge decision that impacts our membership categories and the foundations of SAF. To be acceptable to the membership the organizational infrastructure must protect, enhance, and continue our traditions, fundamental forest management philosophy, and core values. That is an absolute requirement. If the changes we suggest as necessary cannot be made without meeting that requirement, this dog won't hunt. However, if we allow things to happen as they will, then we give up control of SAF's destiny. We'd prefer to keep what control we can in terms of SAF's destiny and

address the opportunity presented by accreditation of NRM programs as part of our strategic planning.

We recognize that we are proposing elemental changes for SAF. Another task force would be necessary to determine the organizational changes necessary to truly make a home for NRM graduates. Perhaps SAF would be mainly CFs and CNRMs, essentially having two divisions. There are lots of ways to make the adjustment. Would you welcome NRM professionals at your chapter meetings? If we did, it could save many of our declining chapters, boost attendance at national conventions to two or three times the current levels, and expand professional development opportunities for all SAF members. Of course, we also need to think about what we'd lose.

The SAF Council is interested in what members have to say about this. The *Source* has space allocated for the considerable letters this column may generate. Let the Council know what you think of this idea.

Send your thoughts to source@safnet.org or The Forestry Source, 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814-2198.

Straka is the council member from District 8; Brown is chair of the SAF Educational Policy Review Committee and chairs the Task Force on Educational Programs in Terrestrial Ecosystem Management; and Bullard is president-elect of the National Association of University Forest Resources Programs.

The National Association of University Forest Resource Programs (NAUFRP) is a group of forestry and closely allied NRM programs from 67 universities. It includes the SAF-accredited programs, plus a few more universities with major NRM programs. While there are roughly 50 SAF-accredited forestry programs, there are roughly 80 NRM programs within just the NAUFRP. Consider that nearly all the SAF-accredited programs are in the NAUFRP, but many more NRM programs exist outside of NAUFRP.

Student Video Contest: Why Trees Are the Answer

Do you have talent?
Do you have a video camera?
Then you can be a star!

Introducing the 2011 Student Video Contest (www.eforester.org/fs/index.cfm). We want students and student chapters to show us why you think Trees Are the Answer. Make a 60- or 120-second video, and you could win one of three awards.

Winning videos will be presented at the 2011 National Convention. Submit your videos by Friday, September 30, 2011.