

*Excerpts from*  
**The Professional Foresters Law  
and the role of the  
REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL FORESTER  
In Managing California's Forests**



**January 1, 2003**

**A public informational statement by the Professional Foresters Examining Committee**

**PURPOSE** - This document is written for the general public by the Professional Foresters Examining Committee. Its purpose is to explain the role of Registered Professional Foresters in the context of California's lands, laws, and professional licensing requirements. The Professional Foresters Examining Committee was created under law by the California State Board of Forestry and Fire Protection to take charge of the registration, examination, and the licensing of Registered Professional Foresters. The Board of Forestry and Fire Protection is a Governor-appointed body within the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection with diverse powers and responsibilities that are spelled out in law. Created in 1885, it was the first such body in the nation. The Board is responsible for developing the general forest policy of the state, for determining the guidance policies of the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and for representing the State's interest in the management of non-federal as well as federal forest land in California.

## **CALIFORNIA'S FORESTS**

A forest is a complex interrelationship of soil, air, water, climate, trees, plants, fish, wildlife, grazing animals, and people, together with their machines and structures.

California possesses vast and valuable forest resources. The State ranks second in the Nation in total forest land. It has a wide range of climates, elevations, slopes, geology, and vegetation conditions, so its forest resources are naturally quite diverse as well as very precious. The variety is manifested in the large stands of timber, including 21 species of hardwoods and conifers that are native only to California, as well as in the thousands of species of plants, fish, and wildlife that inhabit these forested landscapes.

California's forested landscapes encompass some 39,674,000 acres, nearly 40 % of the State, and include commercial timberland, parks, wilderness, chaparral, and woodland. Approximately 45% of these lands are administered by the federal government as National Forests, 42% are under private ownership, with the remainder (13%) administered by the State and various public agencies. From these acres come nearly all of the State's fresh water, about 30% of the lumber and plywood used in California, much of the range for cattle and sheep, invaluable habitat for game and wildlife, and some of the most spectacularly beautiful scenery and recreational opportunities to be found anywhere.

Because of the increasing demands being placed on California's forest resources, a careful balance must be kept between human uses and the environment in order to sustain its natural wealth. This sustainability can only be achieved through the proper application of forestry principles and sound natural resource management practices.

## **FORESTRY**

Forestry refers to the science and practice of managing forested landscapes and the treatment of the forest cover in general, and includes, among other things, the application of scientific knowledge and forestry principles in the fields of fuels management and forest protection, timber growing and utilization, forest inventories, forest economics, forest valuation and finance, and the evaluation and mitigation of impacts from forestry activities on watershed and scenic values.

Humans lay a heavy burden on forest resources which provide people with many essential goods from drinking water to paper products. Forests can provide a wide range of renewable commodities provided that proper management is taken. Registered Professional Foresters are charged with the care and management of California's forests.

## **THE REGISTERED PROFESSIONAL FORESTER**

A Registered Professional Forester (RPF) is a person knowledgeable in a wide range of studies such as biology, ecology, entomology, geology, hydrology, dendrology, silviculture, engineering, business administration, forest economics, and other natural resource subjects. RPFs use their well-rounded education and experience to maintain the sustainability of forest resources like timber, forage, wildlife, water, and outdoor recreation to meet the needs of the people while protecting the biological integrity and quality of the forest environment.

RPFs perform a wide variety of activities. RPFs organize and direct systems of control for forest fires, insect pests, and tree diseases. They determine the environmental impacts of management decisions, and plan for maintenance of wildlife habitat. They prescribe thinning for an immature stand of trees or removal of defective trees for stand improvement. RPFs measure the volume of standing timber, appraise market value, plan harvests, and administer the sale of the forest products.

Foresters also help plan for recreational uses of the forest including the maintenance of its natural beauty. They are called upon to revegetate, enhance, or restore overused, burned, or abused forest sites and recreational areas. In addition, Registered Professional Foresters must be well-versed in federal, state, and local laws affecting forestry practices in California in order to administer them properly.

In order for a professional forester to fulfill their responsibilities with regard to a particular activity on a site, the professional forester may need to utilize the services of other qualified experts, such as archaeologists, botanists, civil engineers, ecologists, fisheries biologists, geologists, hydrologists, land surveyors, landscape architects, range scientists, soil scientists, or wildlife biologists

Because forestry activities can have a significant impact upon the ecology of California's forests and the quality of the forest environment, the State legislature enacted the Professional Foresters Law in 1972, which provides for the licensing of professional foresters and certified specialists.

### **PROFESSIONAL FORESTERS LAW OF 1972**

California's Professional Foresters Law (PFL) became effective on January 1, 1973. The PFL outlines the guiding principles and responsibilities of Registered Professional Foresters and provides the State with vital professionals who are knowledgeable in developing and carrying out forest management plans. The law requires all persons who wish to call themselves "professional foresters" or to act in the capacity thereof, to register and become licensed.

With the passage of the PFL, the Legislature declared the existence of a public interest in the management and treatment of the forest resources and timberlands in California and regulates all persons who practice the profession of forestry. The intent of the Law is to provide a source of forest management experts-- knowledgeable, trained, experienced and skilled in the scientific fields relating to forestry.

#### QUALIFICATIONS:

The terms and conditions for becoming a Registered Professional Forester are explained in greater detail in the California Code of Regulations. Minimum qualifications include:

- a) Good moral character and a good reputation for honesty and integrity.
- b) Seven years of experience in forestry work (three years of which must be having charge of forestry work or be under the supervision of an RPF). An increasing level of responsibility and experience must be demonstrated.
- c) Pass the comprehensive examination administered by the Professional Foresters Examining Committee (PFEC) with a score of 75% or greater.

A person may substitute a Bachelor of Science in Forestry degree or a Bachelor of Science degree with a Major in Forestry for four years of work experience. A Master of Forestry, in combination with a Bachelor of Arts or Science degree majoring in a field other than forestry, can also be used in lieu of four years of forestry work experience.

#### RESPONSIBILITIES:

Being a Registered Professional Forester or certified specialist carries with it many responsibilities. The term "Registered Professional Forester" is defined in the Professional Foresters Law as:

*"..a person who, by reason of his or her knowledge of the natural sciences, mathematics, and the principles of forestry, acquired by forestry education and experience, performs services, including, but not limited to, consultation, investigation, evaluation, planning or responsible supervision of forestry activities when [such] professional services require the application of forestry principles and techniques."* [PRC §752]

The RPF's primary concern, irrespective of private or public interests, is to enhance the control of air and water pollution, the preservation of scenic beauty, the protection of watersheds by flood and soil erosion control, the production and increased yield of natural resources, including timber, forage, wildlife, and water, and outdoor recreation, to meet the needs of the people. Consequently, it is necessary that the individual keep currently informed of professional matters, techniques and equipment, their uses and limitations, and applicable laws and regulations.