

Planning a Career as a Forester

By TILDA MIMS

Education Specialist, Alabama Forestry Commission

"My daughter thinks she would like to be a forester. Do you have any materials she can read?"

"My child is doing a project on forestry for Career Day. Do you have any handouts?"

"My class is studying community helpers. I want a forester to visit my class and tell them a little about what a forester does."

PARENTS, teachers and students regularly visit Alabama Forestry Commission offices seeking information on becoming a forester. They are curious about job requirements, salary and, most importantly, what job opportunities will be available in the future.

However, many young people do not really understand what a forester does each day. They like the outdoors, and they believe that foresters spend their days out in the fresh air. They "like to hunt and fish," and believe that is sufficient cause to become a forester.

Often they are surprised to learn that a forester with the Alabama Forestry Commission may be dispatched to a wildfire in the wee hours, spend four hours before a computer monitor, fly a Southern pine beetle detection flight and testify in a court case—all in 24 hours! Forester jobs in private industry can be just as diverse.

Foresters may be found in the woods, in mills, in classrooms and in the halls of government. Forestry is a science that involves managing forest resources in an increasingly complex world. As society's needs for forest products and its attitudes about forest management rapidly change, we can expect the field of forestry to change as well.

Educational Requirements

A bachelor's degree in forestry is the minimum educational requirement for professional careers in forestry. Although sometimes a combination of education and experience may be acceptable to

some employers, job competition makes this option very difficult.

Most land-grant colleges and universities offer bachelor's or higher degrees in forestry; 48 of these programs are accredited by the Society of American Foresters.

While you do not have to be a forester to work in the field of forestry, you must have a specific education in forestry to be a **forester**. Fifteen states (including Alabama) have mandatory licensing or voluntary registration requirements that a forester must meet in order to acquire the title of "professional forester" and practice forestry in the state. Requirements may vary, but they usually entail completing a four-year degree in forestry, a minimum training time and passing an exam.

Foresters who wish to perform specialized research or teach should have an advanced degree, preferably a Ph.D.

Future Employment Opportunities

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of foresters is expected to grow about as fast as average for all occupations through 2008.

Presently, about two out of three foresters work for federal, state or local governments. The BLS states that of those workers, about 14,000 are employed by the federal government, mostly in the USDA Forest Service; about 9,000 work for state government, and 6,000 work for local governments.

Here are some additional predictions:

- Growth should be strongest in state and local governments and in research and testing services, where demand will be spurred by a continuing emphasis on environmental protection and responsible land management.

- Fewer opportunities are expected in federal government, partly due to budgetary restraints. Also, federal land management agencies, such as the Forest Service, have de-emphasized their timber programs and are increasingly focusing on wildlife,

recreation and sustaining ecosystems, thereby increasing the demand for other life sciences. However, the BLS projects a large number of foresters to retire or leave, resulting in some job openings between 1998 and 2008.

- Recent reductions in timber harvesting in the Northwest and in California will dampen job growth for private industry foresters in those areas. Opportunities will be better for foresters in the Southeast, where much forested land is privately owned.

- Rising demand for timber will increase the need for management plans that maximize production while sustaining the environment for future growth. Salaried foresters working for private industry and consulting foresters will be needed to provide technical assistance and management plans to landowners.

Research and testing firms have increased their hiring of foresters in recent years in response to demand for professionals to prepare environment impact statements and erosion and sediment plans, monitor water quality near logging sites, and advise on tree harvesting practices. Hiring at these firms should continue during the 1998-2008 period, though at a slower rate than over the last 10 years.

Salaries

Starting salaries vary depending on the job and academic achievement, but is considered to be about \$22,717 a year. State and local government salaries were generally lower than private industry or the federal government.

Median annual earnings of a forester in 1998 were \$42,750. The median annual earnings of foresters employed in state government in 1997 were \$37,500.

New Trends

The emerging trend toward growth and care of urban forests is opening new doors of opportunity to fulfilling careers. As more and more people are drawn into

the urban environment, the need to reconnect with nature is likely to expand, offering opportunities for people of all interests, backgrounds, and education and experience levels.

Someone who pursues a degree in forestry in 2000 may find themselves employed in a network of professions including arborist, cooperative extension specialist, environmental consultant, school teacher, GIS technician, landscaper, lobbyist, lawyer, nature photographer, nursery manager, transportation engineer, utility forester, wildland fire manager and writer.

Recommendations

For students evaluating forestry as a course of study, there are several strategies to make your resume more attractive once you enter the job market.

Develop excellent oral and written communication skills early. A recent survey by Auburn University's School of

Forestry polled 650 graduates on several issues, including skills they considered very important in their careers. The highest-ranking skills were oral communication (92 percent) and written communication (85 percent).

New products, equipment, techniques, and issues are emerging almost daily. To have a satisfying career in forestry, like any career, you must keep current. Talk often with forestry professionals, read forestry publications, attend seminars and get active in local forestry groups.

If you plan to work with chemical pesticides and herbicides, consider training and certification before you seek employment.

Look for internships and co-op jobs. These opportunities provide you with experience before you graduate, the chance to see what the work is really like and you may be hired by your employer after you graduate.

Develop proficient computer skills, become familiar with scanners, mapping programs and word processing.

Take courses in Geographic Information Systems. GIS is the use of computers to generate maps for water resources, wildlife distribution, land use planning, etc.,. It is rapidly becoming an extremely important factor in just about all areas of the environmental sector.

References

- American Forestry Association, P.O. Box 2000, Washington, DC 20013
Bureau of Labor Statistics;
www.bls.gov
Society of American Foresters, 5400 Grosvenor Lane, Bethesda, MD 20814;
www.safnet.org
U. S. Forest Service, USDA, P.O. Box 96090, SW, Washington, DC 20090-6090
www.urbanforest.org 

TREASURE Forest: 6 Steps to Success

Anyone owning 10 or more acres of forestland can be considered for the certified TREASURE Forest award. To be eligible, a landowner must do the following with respect to all their forestland in Alabama:

1. Identify one primary and at least one secondary management objective for the property based on the following list of choices: Timber Production; Wildlife; Recreation; Aesthetics; Environmental Education.

2. Possess or acquire a written multiple-use management plan for the property. Your local Alabama Forestry Commission office can help you identify options for obtaining a written management plan if one does not exist.

3. Actively practice multiple-use management on the property. Your local office of the Alabama Forestry Commission can supply you with information on the level of management activity necessary.

Once these items are in place, the following must occur to earn the award:

4. The property must be nominated by someone associated with one of the member agencies or groups of the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee. You may contact them and suggest a nomination if you feel your property or that of someone you know qualifies for the award.

5. The property must be inspected by a registered forester and wildlife biologist. Your local Alabama Forestry Commission office will arrange the inspection.

6. The nomination and inspection report must be submitted to the TREASURE Forest Subcommittee of the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee for review and approval.

7. If you would like to be considered for the certified TREASURE Forest award, or know of someone else who may qualify, contact your local office of the Alabama Forestry Commission or other member agency/group of the Alabama Forestry Planning Committee. These organizations are listed on page 2 of this magazine. They will be happy to assist you with the certification process.

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