

**H.355: An Act Relating to Licensing and Regulating Foresters**  
**Written Testimony of Danielle Watson**  
**Assistant Director of Government Affairs and External Relations**  
**Society of American Foresters**  
**House Committee on Government Operations**  
**April 9, 2015**

The Society of American Foresters (SAF) is the national scientific and educational organization representing 12,000 forestry and related natural resources professionals across the United States. Founded in 1900 by Gifford Pinchot, SAF is the largest professional society for foresters in the world. Our members include professionals in public and private settings, researchers, CEOs, administrators, educators, and students. Through accreditation, certification, research, and advocacy, SAF promotes science-based, sustainable management and stewardship of the nation's public and private forests.

Just as forests are fundamental to our nation, so too are the professionals who study, manage, and protect these precious resources to sustain their environmental, economic, and social benefits for generations to come. With over 80% of Vermont's forests being privately owned, individuals and families rely heavily on experienced professionals to provide forest management education and services. The future of the State's forests is in the hands of these landowners and the foresters who advise them.

**SAF Supports Licensure in Vermont**

SAF strongly supports the rationale and recommendations in the Sunrise Report and believes that the licensing of foresters through H. 355 is a positive step for Vermont—benefiting and protecting the public, the profession, and the environment.

The practice of forestry is a significant professional responsibility and assurance of minimum eligibility requirements is necessary to protect the public. The public and the environment benefit from licensure in at least three ways:

- An understanding and appreciation of the breadth and complexity of forest ecology requires significant education, training, and experience. Licensure protects the public from inexperienced and unqualified individuals.
- The promotion and enforcement of State policies and laws requiring good forestry practices is important to protect the public health, safety, and welfare. Licensure reinforces existing laws and policies in the State designed to conserve forestlands and protect their economic and ecological well-being.
- Many individuals and families are unaware of forest management options and their potential short-term and long-term impacts. Licensure increases awareness of the role of foresters and good forestry practices.

The forestry profession also benefits from licensure in at least three ways:

- It protects the profession by ensuring that individuals with inadequate training or skills do not misrepresent foresters. All foresters suffer when a client or the public at large is adversely impacted by the actions of unqualified practitioners.

- It increases public trust in foresters by establishing minimum competency requirements and enforceable standards of professional conduct.
- And again, licensure increases public awareness of foresters and forestry—opening opportunities for additional engagement and collaboration.

SAF has experience supporting other state licensure programs, including Maine, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Georgia. We have worked with these states to develop processes and procedures that best meet their unique needs and concerns. Moving forward, SAF is eager to work with Vermont to establish a system that is accurate, efficient, and cost-effective for both Vermont and SAF.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to helping advance this legislation and hope that it will become a model for other states.