

**National Program/Center for Workforce Diversity
for the Natural Resource Professions**

Minorities, including women, have been historically underrepresented in the natural resource professions, such as forestry, wildlife management, fisheries and hydrology. If the workforce of the natural resource professions does not reflect the society that they serve, their ability and credibility to serve will be greatly reduced. Additionally, the ability to serve successfully is greatly impaired when over half of the potential talent pool is not available. Over 20 years ago, professional societies, such as the Society of American Foresters (SAF) recognized the need to increase workforce diversity. The SAF has both a standing Committee on Cultural Diversity and a Council Committee on Cultural Diversity. The National Association of University Forest Resource Programs (NAUFRP) has a Diversity Officer on their Executive Board, while agencies such as the USDA/Forest Service have been attempting to increase their diversity through their Multicultural Special Initiatives. Some forest industries (e.g. International Paper Company) have also initiated active diversity programs and training. None of these programs can diversify the natural resource professions independently - but there has been little effort to coordinate activities and join forces for more efficient use of resources to insure greater success.

It is recognized that other related groups (such as environmental, wildlife, water resource, and recreational societies and agencies) have a vested interest in diversifying our professions and have numerous programs and initiatives of their own (example – The Wildlife Society’s Minority Affairs Committee has published their recommendations, “Challenges and Opportunities for Increasing Diversity in the Wildlife Profession and The Wildlife Society, March 1999). These professions are also often woven together within academic programs and agencies. Therefore, it is probably most feasible to coordinate all diversity programs among natural resource professions.

SAF currently has a “Cultural Diversity Action Plan” (revised November 17, 2003) which outlines numerous objectives and specific activities for the Society. These activities often require the cooperation of other forestry groups, specifically the NAUFRP institutions and employers. Therefore the first objective of this proposal is to provide a mechanism for the coordination of diversity efforts specifically among SAF, NAUFRP and forestry employers (starting with the USDA/Forest Service and International Paper Company) and other natural resource professional societies.

The second objective will be to organize national diversity efforts into manageable units. There are three separate steps which must take place if we are to diversify the natural resource professions. First, minorities must be attracted to and recruited into professional programs. Second, the professional programs must accept and train the individuals, without negatively influencing their future professional choices. Finally, the employers and co-workers need to welcome and support the minority

individuals. Different minority groups may be facing different levels of barriers at each step. For example, the recruitment and training of women has been relatively successful (when compared to African-Americans), but retention within the workforce has not been very good. With three separate steps occurring at distinctly different times and locations, it is logical that we should organize our efforts accordingly.

Program 1: Recruitment and Education (pre-professional)

Many minority groups have historically had negative images and experiences with natural resources and the professions that manage them (including agricultural sciences). Efforts must continue to attract minorities and begin the development of their appreciation and increase their potential interest. Many universities, industries and federal agencies sponsor school programs, summer camps and special activities to attract minorities. However, few know what anyone else is doing and what lessons have been learned. We all would gain if we could learn from others and review success stories. Agencies, industries and universities may discover programs that they could support and subsequently benefit from. Therefore, one obvious need appears to be to create a listing of programs, possibly the creation of a website where examples, success stories and lessons learned can be collected and posted.

It may also be useful to have a “mini summit” of key individuals who have experience in natural resource programs and their development for K-12. Their goal would be to recommend a national strategy for the forest resource profession.

Additional activities could involve:

- 1). Development of a national marketing plan to sell forestry careers to minority populations.
- 2). Development of summer forestry camps for high school students with special emphasis on attracting minorities.
- 3). Communicate a future natural resources vision to which urban and under represented groups can relate.
- 4). Develop partnerships between colleges and inner-city schools and communities.
- 5). Develop partnerships between colleges and tribal schools and communities.
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- 7). _____

Program 2: Professional Education

If we stimulate interests and are successful in recruiting minorities into our professional programs and then are not aware of the pressures and challenges that these students face, we will not retain them. Other students, staff and faculty members can both positively and negatively impact the comfort level of the minority student. In many cases, the minority student's support system has been eliminated and he/she has been placed in a new and unique environment.

Activities within this program could include:

- 1). Addition of diversity information/training in all introductory level courses at the professional schools. We discuss at length the importance of all of the various resources associated with the forest, except perhaps the most critical one – our human resources. Potential class readings and suggested topics could be provided.
- 2). Assignment of mentors to all diversity students to assist with their adjustment and as an information source for early identification of potential problems. The mentor needs to be an individual that can not be viewed as a potential threat, which may mean that it should not be an administrator or academic advisor.
- 3). Establishing a diversity friendly/welcoming environment. A step to accomplish this is by placing posters and pictures of people of color and gender in hallways and offices.
- 4). True warmth and acceptance emanates from the individuals occupying the learning environment. Therefore, diversity training needs to include all faculty, staff and existing students. Measures can be developed to assess the understanding and commitment of the faculty members, staff and students to the importance of diversity.
- 5). As we have already demonstrated with other issues (ethics as an example), the relative importance of diversity can be increased in the accreditation process.
- 6). Continue establishing new and strengthen existing relationships and partnerships with minority serving institutions of higher education, especially the HBCUs, Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) and the American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES).
- 7). Partner with employers/agencies/industry for funding and recruitment.
- 8). Hire more minority faculty (or provide faculty fellowships) and develop better hiring initiatives and incentives with teeth.
- 9). Develop programs that recruit (and employ) “critical cultural mass”.

10). Catalog sources of funds (both for scholarships and graduate fellowships targeting minority students and for program support). However, fund nationally and manage locally.

11). Use graduates/alumni for recruitment (if available).

12). Develop position descriptions for faculty with broader backgrounds and specializations to cast a broader net.

13). Explore joint appointments/joint funding of faculty positions for minorities and women between universities and Forest Service Experiment Stations that are located on the same campus or same town.

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Program 3: Professional Retention (workplace issues)

The best efforts and intentions of an active recruiting program, followed by a nurturing and supportive professional training program can be totally negated by a workplace environment that does not accept minorities. In 1997-1998, 45% of all BS degrees awarded in Natural Resources were awarded to females (42% of BS in Forestry). Currently, only 13% of SAF membership is female, with only a 2% gain in relative membership for females in the last 20 years. Either females are not joining SAF or we are not retaining them in the profession.

Activities within this program could include:

1). Promotion of employee diversity training efforts, such as those being conducted by International Paper Company.

2). Integration of diversity issues in SAF national, state and local chapter meetings.

3). Increase relative importance of diversity training at the SAF Leadership Academy.

4). Promote family friendly working environments for professional positions.

5). In working environments where there are currently no women and minorities, recruit/hire women and minorities in groups of at least two, and preferably more, to reduce the “token” environment and the pressure on the person.

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Suggested plan of action:

1. Incorporate ideas and changes from NAPFSC Executive Committee (March 2004). – **Completed.**
2. Submit working paper to partners for comments, suggestions, review, etc. - **In process.**
3. Develop national program, possibly after summit/meeting of stakeholders with input from key specialists on diversity (including reps from other professions).
4. Delineate lead individual/group/agency for implementation of each activity.
5. Solicit external funding for support of national center (hosted at SAF?).
6. Establish advisory/review committee.