

Profiles in Forestry:

Rachel Billingham, Community Forestry Coordinator

In her position as Community Forestry Coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, Rachel Billingham's position involves tasks such as resource coordination, grants administration, statewide program implementation, and presenting at various events. *The Forestry Source* recently asked Billingham about her work, how she became interested in forestry, and what advice she has for new professionals.

When did you become interested in forestry?

I trace my interest in forestry back to the extensive traveling my family did when I was very young. We traveled all over the continental US and through most of Canada on summer camping trips that were almost 90 days long. We would leave after my sisters and I finished the school year and would not return until just before school began again. We did most of our camping on public lands and had many an adventure, from staying in an abandoned barn in northern Maine to attending Vacation Bible School in Cloudcroft, New Mexico, to hiking washed out trails in Olympic National Park. As we hiked through North America's woodlands, my father would quiz us on trees and scat. This time in the woods made a huge impression on me and is the primary reason I chose forestry as a career path.

How did you get where you are today (what has been your career path)?

I received my bachelor's degree in forestry at Louisiana State University and then pursued my master's degree in agriculture at Pennsylvania State University. This degree combined forestry and communications. After graduation, I was self-employed for several years, in forestry education and database programming. In 2001, I was hired by my current employer, the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Bureau of Forestry in their Rural and Community Forestry Section.

What's a typical day for you?

In my position, I help administer private forestland and urban and community forestry programs for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This involves tasks such as resource coordination, grants administration, statewide program implementation, and presenting at various events and trade shows, among others. This position heavily involves communication among state employees, federal employees, conservancy representatives, stakeholder groups, and advisory committees. There really is no "typical day." I often attend meetings or assist projects throughout the state, but I also do a fair amount of work at the office.

What knowledge and skills are essential for your job?

Basic technical knowledge is a given. The additional "must-haves" are good communication skills (both written and oral)—I can't overemphasize the importance of being able to communicate effectively; organizational skills—with so many things going on at once you have to be able to keep track of all pertinent tasks and deadlines; and creativity—important when working to find new and better ways to complete tasks or reach goals.



Rachel Billingham, community forestry coordinator for the Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources, Bureau of Forestry, said that the more she participates in SAF, the more benefits she reaps from her membership.

What is the biggest challenge associated with your position?

The biggest challenges of my position, which deals with both rural and urban forestry, are the challenges of urban sprawl and poor land use decisions. These issues affect people everywhere, whether they realize it or not. In a sense, the "American Dream" has contributed to these challenges, and the solution will likely involve much communication, which is needed to shift the current paradigm to something more sustainable.

What keeps you motivated?

Much of my motivation comes from knowing that what I do every day has an impact on the quality of life of our citizens and the environment as a whole. My involvement in projects that will conserve land for future generations is a source of excitement and pride. As the head of my department once said, "How many people can go home from work every day and say that they have done something noble?" We, as foresters, should be proud of what we do.

What advice would you give to new or young foresters?

Know where you stand in regard to forestry ethics. Be ready to take a stand if you need to. Make as many professional forestry contacts as you can. SAF is a great venue for this. You never know when you might need someone's expertise, advice, or contacts. Develop your communications skills. This will set you apart from the rest of the pack when you apply for positions.

Has SAF membership benefited your career? If so, how?

SAF has been a huge benefit to my career. The networking opportunities that SAF has provided to me at both the local and national levels have really been unparalleled. I have not found any other organization in our field that can provide anything close. I have found that the more effort I put into SAF participation, the more benefits I reap from my membership. My involvement in state society SAF leadership, participation in a national commit-

tee, and involvement in working group leadership have given me opportunities to attend the National Convention and Leadership Academy, which are experiences that I would recommend to anyone in the profession.

“Profiles in Forestry” highlights the various positions within the broad field of forestry and the SAF members who occupy them. If you’d like to be featured in a future installment, send an e-mail to source@safnet.org.