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Profiles in Forestry:

Dan Goerlich, District Program Leader, Virginia Cooperative Extension

Dan Goerlich, district program leader with the Virginia Cooperative Extension (VCE), spends much of his time assisting his fellow extension agents in their efforts to develop high-quality educational programs. Goerlich served as district extension forester when began working for the VCE in 1999. He was promoted to his current position in 2005. He joined SAF in 1991 and is a past recipient of SAF's Young Forestry Leadership Award, which recognizes outstanding leadership by a forestry professional younger than 40 years of age.



According to Dan Goerlich, district program leader with the Virginia Cooperative Extension, an interest in working with people and excellent communication skills are essential for a career in natural resources.

When did you become interested in forestry?

At an early age, by the time I was nine or 10 years old. I can recall my mother was writing to the USDA Forest Service seeking information about outdoor careers on my behalf. Many kids dream about being a firefighter or a baseball player. I wanted to be a park ranger.

How did you get where you are today?

I graduated from Virginia Tech with a bachelor's degree in forest and wildlife management in 1994. My first job following college was as a seasonal forest technician with the USDA Forest Service in Rifle, Colorado. Afterwards, I worked as a project manager and data analyst with a consulting forestry firm in southern Georgia before returning to graduate school in 1997. I graduated from the State University of New York—College of Environmental Science and Forestry with a master's degree in silviculture in December 1998. While working toward my degree, I held down jobs as a teaching assistant, research assistant, office assistant, painter, and freelance writer.

What's a typical day for you?

In extension, every day is different. Generally, I find myself managing a large number of projects, usually related to educational programming, that are in different stages of completion while simultaneously responding to client requests for information. The day I wrote this narrative I also worked to obtain feedback from other agents on the new agent training process, prepared for an organizational meeting with agricultural extension agents, responded to agent requests for information regarding the annual planning process, and assisted an SAF member with the nomination process for a national award.

What knowledge or skills are essential for your job?

One must love working with people, be skilled at managing time, have a flexible and creative approach to solving problems, be able to work with minimal supervision, and work well both individually and as part of a team. Excellent oral and written communication skills are critical.

What is the biggest challenge of your position?

For an introvert who sought a career in forestry to "be in the woods," I have found that managing personalities, rather than trees, has been an adjustment.

What keeps you motivated?

I have always had strong intrinsic motivation and I like to challenge myself to continually improve. I also feel a strong sense of responsibility to the people I work with, so I am motivated to do the best possible job I can for them. It is easy to work hard for people one likes and respects. In recent years, providing for a growing family has become a motivating factor as well.

What advice would you give to new foresters?

Being a forester might not make you rich financially, but it will make you rich in other ways. Respect everyone. Be flexible—don't resist change. Work hard, but work smart too. Don't put pressure on yourself to know everything. Learn to balance work and family, especially as you advance in position. Be open to a range of experiences. Stay in touch with your friends. When life knocks you down, get up, and remember those who have helped you become successful.

Has membership in SAF benefited your career? If yes, how?

I have benefited from SAF membership both personally and professionally. SAF has enabled me to establish a number of professional contacts, many of which evolved into personal friendships over the years. I gained leadership experience by serving in various SAF officer and committee positions. And I recall cases where speakers I met at SAF conferences provided me with research that I used to answer questions from clients. Now that I am in a predominantly nonforestry related position, SAF enables me to stay in contact with my friends and colleagues in the forestry community.

Profiles in Forestry is an irregular feature created to highlight the various positions within the broad field of forestry and the SAF members who occupy them.