Professional foresters can provide landowners with management assistance that will increase the value and productivity of their forested acreage. More than 60 percent of North Carolina is forested, but much of this valuable resource is poorly managed or not managed at all. Many forest landowners are not aware of the benefits that can be derived from a properly managed forest—extra money from the sale of timber products, improved wildlife habitat, aesthetics, recreation, and pride in ownership. Consulting foresters are one of several sources of assistance for landowners who are interested in managing their woodlands.

What Is a Consulting Forester?
A consulting forester represents, for a fee, the best interests of his clients in all matters concerning the forest. A consulting forester can improve the quality of the forest environment and increase the production of marketable products. When the trees become merchantable, he can secure buyers and supervise the timber sale. The fees charged by a consultant may be based on an hourly or daily rate, forest acreage, or a contract price based on a percentage of gross revenues from the sale of forest products. The cost of services can be repaid by faster tree growth and the higher prices received for timber that is marketed correctly.

What Are the Qualifications?
As in all professions, the knowledge and experience of consulting foresters vary widely. "Consulting forester" means a person who: (a) is registered by the State Board of Registration for Foresters; (b) is a technically educated professional forester who is a graduate of a forestry curriculum of a college or university and who holds a bachelor's or higher degree in forestry; or has shown equivalent knowledge by passing the written examination administered by the State Board of Registration for Foresters; (c) is governed by the Code of Ethics of the Society of American Foresters; (d) is competent to practice forest management, appraisal, development, marketing, protection, and utilization for the benefit of the general public on a fee, contractual or contingency basis; (e) has not engaged in any practice that constitutes a conflict of interest or in any way diminishes his ability to represent the best interest of his clients; and (f) has filed annually an affidavit with the State Board of Registration of Foresters attesting to his compliance with G.S. 89B-2. Many qualified consultants are certified members of the North Carolina Society of Consulting Foresters—an organization that promotes the service, practice, and standards of consulting forestry and seeks to strengthen its ethical and professional standards. Consulting foresters may also be
members of the Association of Consulting Foresters or the Society of American Foresters.

The North Carolina Division of Forest Resources and the Cooperative Extension Service can provide a list of graduate consulting foresters. A landowner can also secure names from the telephone directory or from a woodland owning friend.

How Do You Select a Consultant?
The landowner should request information from a few consulting foresters before selecting one. Be sure to obtain the forester’s specific qualifications, references from previous clients, and fee estimates. To prevent a potential conflict of interest, avoid those who are buyers for a single forest products company.

Once a professionally qualified consultant has been selected, a contract or written agreement should be signed. It should include a list of services to be performed, who will perform them, and the agreed cost of services. The consultant should welcome any questions and clarifications that the landowner may seek. Good communication between the landowner and consultant is essential.

What Services Does a Consultant Provide?
Services offered by consulting foresters vary considerably. The following is a list of services the landowner should expect from a fully qualified professional. The landowner should be sure that the contract or written agreement clearly itemizes the services he expects.

Timber Sales. When a stand of timber is to be harvested by the clearcut method, the consultant marks the boundaries of the area. When using the selection method, the consultant marks the boundaries and the trees to be harvested, painting the stump as well as the trunk to make sure unmarked trees are not cut. Sometimes the trees to be left are marked instead of the trees to be cut. The consultant may record the species, diameter, quality, and height of each tree to be cut. With this information, he can calculate the volume of the sale and prepare a contract for the owner’s approval. The consultant may also determine where to locate the skid trails and log landing.

For a sealed-bid sale, the consulting forester will send potential buyers an “invitation to bid on standing timber,” which includes volumes, species, size classes, and tree quality. It may also include dates for woodlot inspection, the payment schedule, dates for beginning and completing logging operations, the performance deposit required, if any, and any other conditions of the sale that will protect the landowner’s property and best interests.

The forester will show the woodlot to potential buyers, supervise the opening of bids, and advise the landowner on available alternatives. After the landowner chooses the buyer, the forester will have the buyer sign the contract, collect the performance bond and all or part of the sale price, and arrange the details of the logging operation. He may check the logging operation to ensure that the terms of the contract are honored.

The forester conducts a negotiated sale similar to a sealed-bid sale except he may personally contact buyers in an attempt to receive the best price for the stumpage.

Management Plans. The information in the management plan usually describes the current condition of the forest, the species present, and the size, volume, and quality of the timber. The plan should list for each forest stand a recommended sequence of operations necessary to achieve the goals outlined for the management period. Management plans vary in sophistication from short reports based on a brief walk through the woods to detailed financial analysis with computer simulations of forest growth and suggested treatments. The cost will reflect the time and effort required to collect the data and prepare the report.

To create a management plan, the consulting forester must first locate the boundaries of the managed area and conduct an inventory, or timber cruise, of the trees and forest products. Age, stocking, and growth rates are estimated. These data are processed, and a forest-type map is drawn. The forester then develops a management plan that will accommodate the landowner’s objectives.

Appraisal. A buyer or seller of timber or forest land may want to know the quantity or value of the land and timber on the tract. The consultant can provide this information by performing a timber cruise and a site analysis. This involves measuring a representative sample of the trees, preparing forest-type maps from aerial photographs and ground surveys, and calculating the volume and value of the timber and land.

Boundary Marking. Boundary marking requires the forester to check the deed registry, consult with adjacent landowners, and identify boundaries on the ground. Boundaries are flagged, blazed, or painted, and a map showing their bearing and length is drawn and given to the landowner. The consultant may recommend a registered surveyor in case of contested boundaries, litigation, relocation of corners and lines, or establishment of new lines. A consultant cannot provide bona fide surveying services unless he is licensed by the state as a registered land surveyor.

Regeneration. The establishment of a new forest crop is encouraged by providing growing space through harvesting,
killing, or removing all or part of the preceding crop. Prescribed burning and mechanical site preparation are sometimes necessary to create the appropriate environmental conditions for natural or artificial regeneration.

A prescribed, broadcast, or spot burn removes unwanted vegetation or logging residues (slash) before the establishment of the new forest. The consultant begins this operation by identifying the boundaries of the burn area and, sometimes, plowing a firelane. When atmospheric conditions are right, the forester may conduct the burn or contract a third party. Upon completion, the forester will inspect the area to determine whether the desired results were achieved.

Mechanical site preparation typically requires a bulldozer, used first to knock down unwanted vegetation and then to chop or pile the vegetation and logging residues. The consulting forester should begin this operation by notifying third party contractors and accepting bids on the job. He can assist in the selection of a contractor and will inspect the area upon completion. After the site has been prepared, the consultant or contract crews may plant seed or seedlings.

**Fire Protection.** Two common methods of forest fire protection include firelane construction and maintenance and controlled burning to reduce fuel. Firelanes are barriers built to stop the spread of fire. The consultant lays out the route of the firelane and, when applicable, conducts competitive bidding to contract a bulldozer. When completed, the consultant inspects the firelane, and the landowner pays the bulldozer owner.

Prescribed fires can be used to eliminate fuel buildup and thereby reduce the chances of a major forest fire. The forester begins this operation by marking the area to be burned and installing the necessary firelanes. When conditions are appropriate, he notifies the local fire control agency and conducts the burn. The firelane and the burn site are inspected to ensure that the fire is out.

**Timber Stand Improvement.** Timber stand improvement may include any combination of silvicultural (forest care) operations designed to improve the vigor, health, growth, and quality of the trees. Growth of crop trees can be accelerated by removing undesirable trees that compete with them. Undesirable trees may be removed for fuel wood, killed by chemicals, girdled, or cut down.

**Other Services.** Consultants may also offer advice on wildlife and recreation management, state and federal cost share programs, tax issues, estate planning, and road construction.

For further information concerning forest land management and choosing a consulting forester, contact your local Cooperative Extension Service center or North Carolina Forest Service office.