

## Why are Consulting Foresters Essential Workers?

By Sheri Singer, Singer Communications

During COVID-19, there are businesses deemed critical to the nation's infrastructure and essential workers referring to employees that are important to the functioning of American society. Most understand why healthcare workers, postal and delivery services, grocery and drug stores are essential. But some people might ask why are consulting foresters are considered essential workers in an industry marked as critical to the U.S. infrastructure?

Part of the answer lies in the importance of wood and paper products. If this pandemic teaches us nothing else, we realized the important role of toilet paper in our lives. But there are other critical products that comprise the timber product supply chain and involve consulting foresters.

Consulting foresters are independent professionals who manage forests and market forest products for private woodland owners. They are called upon by landowners to advance their forestland ownership goals and in general, to manage forests. As such, they are part of the forest products sector—a complex, interconnected and interdependent market sector.

This market sector includes forestry, which is where consulting foresters fit in, forest products manufacturing such as sawmills, customers such as builders, and truckers who moving the product. No one element of this supply chain can exist without the others. As such, consulting foresters are an integral part of the industry.

At the start of the pandemic, the federal Department of Homeland Security's Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) guidance identified "Workers who support the manufacture and distribution of forest products, including but not limited to timber, paper, and other wood products" as part of the Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce.

As essential critical infrastructure workers, many consulting foresters have the letters ACF behind their name indicating that they are members of the Association of Consulting Foresters. To use this designation, ACF members must meet stringent educational, experience and professional reference requirements and **adhere to the organization's comprehensive and strict Code of Ethics**. ACF members found that don't uphold ACF's Code of Ethics may be asked to discontinue use of the industry gold standard ACF designation.

As ACF's President Elect, Wayne Pfluger, ACF, President of Lone Star Forestry, LLC, Huntsville, Texas, explained more about why consulting foresters are part of our nation's essential workers. "Whether it's a ranch, farm or forest, agriculture is essential to our most basic human needs—food, clothing and shelter," he said.

Pfluger explained there are a number of essential tree byproducts. "Wood products used to build homes, schools, hospitals; wood pellets that help heat homes, and paper or cardboard used in food packaging are only a few of the important timber-related products" he said.

To ensure their status as essential workers who are a critical part of the nation's infrastructure, consulting foresters might carry a letter that designates them as an Essential Critical Infrastructure Worker as specified in the CISA guidelines. The letter, created by ACF, explains that consulting foresters manage forests and market forest products for private woodland owners, critical suppliers to the forestry supply chain.

The consulting forester's signature on this letter verifies that they are in good health and exhibit none of the known symptoms of COVID-19; are willing and able to stay home should any symptoms develop or there is suspicion of exposure or infection; and agree to practice social distancing in any shared public space. The letter asks the reader to permit the consulting forester to continue with their essential work despite local or state regulations connected to COVID-19.

Pfluger offers a more abstract explanation as to why consulting foresters and the forestry industry are so essential to our lives. "You can close a hair salon and business stops. But you can't turn off a growing, thriving forest. Even during COVID-19, the sun comes up and goes down, the flowers grow, the birds sing, the squirrels gather nuts. We can't just leave our forests unattended."