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HARD TIMES — NOTHING NEW

by Terese Walsh

Forestry professionals are feeling the crunch of the economy just like everyone else, perhaps, in the eyes of foresters, even more. Permanent employment is a hurdle which not all foresters clear immediately after graduation. Even temporary employment, with pay at any rate, is an accomplishment to be envied. But, it is more important to remember in these "hard times," that foresters do have a purpose in society. It is important for us to hold on to our beliefs that professional foresters are needed to manage and utilize those complex organisms we know as trees. It is important to realize that the education we obtain yields more benefits than merely collateral for a job upon graduation. Perhaps the most comforting thought to remember is that we are not the only forestry students to go through "hard times."

In fact, in the 1939 issue of the AMES FORESTER, an article was published entitled "The Employment Problem in Forestry." It was written for foresters during times similar to the ones we are living in right now. So similar are they, that some excerpts from the article of 1939, by Roy B. Thomson, follow:

"The limited opportunities, temporarily, for employment of graduating foresters in the United States is a challenge both to students and to educators in the field of forestry. The profession itself will probably benefit as well as suffer from the situation. If the condition were analyzed, it would probably be found that the plight of prospective foresters is little different from that of recent graduates in other professions, but such a conclusion offers little consolation to those foresters who are unable to find work. They are principally interested in discovering ways to find a niche in their chosen profession. A few suggestions are offered herewith, in the hope that zealous foresters might not become discouraged and that the profession might rescue a capable body of personnel whose loss would probably be keenly felt in the future.

Temporary unemployment among foresters may be explained simply by the familiar law of supply and demand. It can be overcome by two lines of action: (1) restriction of the number of new foresters being trained, and (2) creation of a greater demand for their services. Students often ask why the forestry schools have not taken steps to solve the problem, and occasionally assume an attitude that if the schools undertake to educate foresters they should also guarantee their employment. Forestry is peculiarly appealing to many young men (and women) contemplating college entrance. The anticipation of a life in the out-of-doors is alluring to many high

school graduates...and not a few forestry freshmen therefore believe forestry to consist of the nursing of individual trees and animals of the forest. Many students discover later that actual forestry is a more man-sized job and that most successful foresters find it impossible to spend a major share of their time in the field and are often confined in an office for extended periods.

In the face of such apparently dismal prospects, what measures should be taken to alleviate the situation? It is certain that the schools alone cannot solve the problem and that students must also help themselves. The action by forestry school administrators should probably follow lines similar to those already taken in individual instances, but the efforts should be more unified and more vigorous. The following suggestions are offered.

1. Modernize forestry curricula.
2. Standardize the general forestry curriculum.
3. Allow more specialization.
4. Strengthen graduate work.
5. Decrease the size of graduate scholarships and fellowships.
6. Continue efforts to raise standards and produce more capable men (and women).
7. Continue efforts to find new outlets for foresters.

More important, perhaps, than any action possible on the part of the forestry schools are the results that may be attained by students themselves. The final solution of the problem lies in the creation of a demand for the services of each individual graduate. No one is more capable of accomplishing this purpose than the individual himself. At the risk of being accused of "preaching," the following suggestions are offered to prospective foresters for what they might be worth in helping them to discover ways of improving their chances of obtaining employment:

1. A student should ascertain as early as possible what kind of work is expected of a forester; then he should determine by self-analysis whether he is fitted by temperament, inclination, and capability to do such work.
2. He should be apprised that his professors are not obligated to find him a position and that competition is increasing in all phases of forestry.
3. After a student has made the decision to remain in forestry, he

should do all in his power to maintain a high standard of scholastic attainment.

4. He should not become a slave to study, however. Discipline to improve his physical and personal qualities is just as important as mental discipline.
5. The prospective forester should study the field to determine as soon as possible if there is not some specialized phase for which he would be particularly qualified.
6. Upon graduation, foresters generally try to find employment rather than continue with graduate work. Such effort is to be recommended, apart from the prospect of earning money, for the opportunity it affords for gaining experience.
7. If a position cannot be found, or temporary employment terminates, serious consideration should be given to one or more years of graduate study. This is especially important if only a four-year course has been completed.
8. Foresters who are contemplating a career in research or teaching should take graduate work leading to advanced degrees.

The conclusion may be drawn, therefore, that the problems of employing foresters may be a serious one during the next two years, after which the situation will probably be relieved. Despite improvements which had been and will be made by the forestry schools, the fact will probably need to be faced (as in other professions) that some graduates will experience difficulty in obtaining jobs. Whether or not they will be successful depends finally upon their own efforts. The existence of a large number of employable foresters is almost certain to result in higher standards in the profession and, to remain in the running, a student should make every effort to raise his own standards during the training period. Good men (and women) are always in demand in any field."

Forty-four years later, and the same advice still holds true. In hard times when job opportunities seem limited, we must exhaust resources which offer us potential job experience. Places to check for jobs include county, state, and federal forestry agencies; private industry; scholarship programs; and international exchange programs.

Karen Mahoney, Les Bender, and Jeff Prestemon gained valuable experience in forestry while working in foreign countries. Karen spent February to November of 1982 going to school at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. She went to school on a Rotary Foundation Undergraduate Scholarship. Les spent the summer of 1982 in Neckargemund, West Germany after being placed through the Summer Trainee Exchange Program (STEP). Jeff spent the summer of 1982 in Sweden. He explains how he got his job:

"It was mid-January of that year that I walked into Dorothy Foley's office at the International Work and Study building on the Iowa State campus, inquiring about overseas summer jobs. Ms. Foley told me of the American-Scandinavian Foundation, an organization which exchanges American and Scandinavian college students for summer work in their areas of study. Five months later, after completing the application, being accepted, getting my passport and purchasing my ticket, I was on my way to Kloten, a small village nestled in the spruce/pine forest of south central Sweden. I was to work for Domanverket, the Swedish Forest Service."

Perhaps gaining practical job experience won't go quite as smoothly for the rest of us, but there are more job outlets than merely overseas, and with a lot of perseverance we will eventually find our niche in the forestry profession. For the moment, at least, we can find comfort (misery loves company) in knowing that these hard times are nothing new.

