

Summary of the Policy Process Comments

New England Society of American Foresters Subcommittee on Policy Process June 2010

Key Member Comments

- **Provide a tiered approach** – Pursuing a full position statement under this policy process will consume substantial volunteer effort and be too slow for impact. Implement this policy process to ensure that all traditional position statements are well-vetted by member comment and vote, but allow the policy chair and ad hoc committees to respond to open comment periods and other fast moving opportunities with only a member comment period.
- **Clarify the voting process** – NESAF must clarify the criteria for approval, whether there is a quorum required, and how to handle regional voting on issues that may affect a local unit (i.e. Maine members could outvote Rhode Island on a Rhode Island issue).
- **Seek a champion to actively engage the new process** – The initial policy chair should be recruited specifically to champion the new format.
- **Consider more substantial reimbursement** – Retaining a policy chair and communications chair with the skills to fit the stated needs will be challenging; we may need to consider a more substantial stipend.
- **Replace the State regulatory language** – Members strongly supported the suggestion that NESAF should focus on local issues unless a true regional issue is pressing. The language used to express this interest however indicated a focus on State regulatory issues, and was deemed too narrow and misleading. Replace this language to indicate NESAF's role of supporting our local units on pressing current issues.
- **There was especially strong agreement**
 - To move to an ad hoc committee process with one-time champions and issue specific experts;
 - To include non-SAF expertise to properly vet the science behind our statements; and
 - To move from traditional position statements to faster, more active responses on pressing matters by submitting comments, joining coalitions, and supporting local units in current policy issues.

Purpose

Since June 2009, NESAF has engaged our members through surveys, subcommittee participation, and a comment period to respond to their calls for an organization that has a more active voice in the policy that affects New England forestry.

This summary of the recent May 2010 comment period highlights member suggestions to the recommendations of the Subcommittee on Policy Process prior to a member vote on the initiative.

For the complete list of recommendations on which the members commented, see 'The Final Report of the Subcommittee on Policy Process' as posted on www.nesaf.org

Appendix

General Comments
<p>Overall, this document looks great. Thanks to all who participated in drafting it. Thumbs up!</p>
<p>This is an impressive, well thought out body of work and recommendations - thank you! I would not debate what you recommend in detail, but have one overarching comment; which is that it seems overly ambitious to expect the level of involvement and volume of work required to make this happen given that we are a volunteer organization. I note the stipends recommended, but don't think that incentive will matter much to the level of professionals that you'd like to see involved.</p>
<p>Otherwise, nice work and I'm sure your group knows the membership and likely participation levels better than I.</p> <p>I suppose you have considered a paid Executive Director with administrative staff as a possible solution, and wonder whether that isn't in the end more cost effective.</p>
<p>Other comments - Looks like a comprehensive exam of position statement process has been done. Comments by members share many concerns. A position statement will likely never satisfy all. The committee will need to decide if any statement is appropriate for SAF and society - i.e. the public.</p> <p>There should probably be few position statements in a decade, those that are made should be of substance and have merit.</p> <p>In the past we have had to clear statements with the National Office. Is this still the case. I think that with any statement that deals with State or National Legislation the National Office should be asked for review, comment, and if need be, approval, modification or if appropriate a recommend not to move forward.</p>
Ensure that Policy Chair vacancies are filled through a thorough candidate search for a clearly defined role
<p>Line 79: the initial holder of this position should be recruited specifically to champion the new format. S/he will need to solicit interest in forming ad hoc approaches to issues and get the process moving.</p>
<p>Line 100: This role will be challenging. On the one hand, the Policy Chair will simply wait for issue to be brought to the table. In practice, a more active role might be needed. Balancing this - especially initially - will be hard to do well.</p>
<p>1. Be clear on the level of effort that is required for this position - and whether this is a full-time paid position or part-time or "volunteer".</p>
<p>2. Are funds going to be available to support travel costs?</p>
<p>OK</p>
<p>Support</p>
<p>This may be hard to do. Will there be more than one candidate?</p>
<p>Although a laudable goal, I believe finding a suitable candidate within NESAF will be a challenge.</p>
<p>A call for volunteers must be followed by targeted "asks" by the leadership of specific SAF members who have the necessary expertise. Marines don't volunteer and often neither do foresters!</p>
<p>Good section</p>

Create a Communications and Outreach Chair position to facilitate full use of position statements and to meet member-valued purposes

Line 116: This role resembles a staff specialist function. Specific skills in public relations are highly desired. Stipend-based compensation could be critical and might still be insufficient to ensure adequate competency in this challenging specialty.

Is this necessary? Shouldn't the Policy Chair be doing this?

OK

Support

I like this idea a lot.

Finding a volunteer, within NESAF, to fill this position and provide the implied expertise will be a challenge.

This is an excellent idea. I suggest making the extension and service foresters in New England a pool for this role (and adding people from industry and NGOs who have similar duties (e.g., NEFF forester). This narrows the search and "ask" process.

Line 129 - Change the phrase "We can then outreach," possibly to "communicate."

Focus the initiatives of our policy efforts on State regulatory initiatives

Line 163-168: It is important that this NOT be seen primarily as a way to oppose all regulatory "interference" with private-sector business. Constructive engagement usually requires long-term engagement. This 'crisis intervention' format could become counter-productive or negative; if allowed to.

1. I think this is too narrow. SAF should be engaging a wide range of issues related to forestry, a multi-disciplinary sector, outside State regulations.

2. SAF New England encompasses 6 states. Each state is unique in many ways. What is SAF pursuing - similar policies for State regulatory initiatives?

Agree, but often regulatory issues are fast moving and don't lend themselves well to a deliberative "position paper-based" approach to advocacy. By the time the process results in an approved position paper, the issue can have already been decided.

Support

State REGULATORY initiatives is a very narrow focus. There are other state issues that we could address that are not regulatory initiatives. I'm not opposed to regional or national policy efforts, either.

This is still a disconnect, NESAF is reconfiguring its policy and communication in order to help individual states with their regulatory initiatives. I do not disagree with the relevance, but it appears to be a top-down (regional) solution to more local problems. The key is getting a one time state champion to take on a large role with assistance from NESAF.

Yes -- with rare exceptions NESAF should not get involved in Federal policy issues that are better handled by the National SAF office. There are some regional issues, like the NE Governor's forest initiative and the growing Wildlands and Woodlands movement, however, that must be on the NESAF policy radar screen and may require comment.

Smart idea. Relevancy IS crucial. State level is where NESAF Chapters & Divisions as a group can be most effective & useful. Nationally it takes key individuals from various regions.

Clearly identify selection criteria for our position statements
Line 176: good criteria.
Agreed
Support
Yes!
Probably one of the best suggested additions, nicely clarifies a process.
The criteria are clear, but the list may be too long. The first three are really important; the second three are practical points, which should be overcome by SAF leadership if the first three are met.
The criteria are all good. Glad to see line 182.

Restructure the standing Policy Committee into an issue-specific, ad hoc committee structure
Policy discussions should include professionals outside the forestry profession
No comment
Recommend sub-committees for specific issues. Retain the Policy Committee as an over-arching structure.
Agree 100%. Standing policy committees do not work. Form task forces around specific issues and identify interested individuals to participate. Then vest these task forces with ability to make decisions and move fast.
Support
This seems flexible, so long as there is a way to form quickly as issues arise.
The current standing policy committee is just a chair with input from the NESAF Executive Committee. Any broadening of input from NESAF members with short-term service on more specific issues would be an improvement.
We do need a small standing committee that can appoint ad hoc committees. The group does not need to be large but needs about three SAF members who understand the talent available in their region of New England.
Wise. Ad hoc committees or quick strike teams are more responsive and more responsible. Volunteers are more likely to sign on to a project with an end.

Ground all initiatives in forest science with direct input from issue experts
Policy discussions should include professionals outside the forestry profession
no comment
Need to think multi-disciplinary on technical issues with input coming from experts in other disciplines as appropriate.
Support
What is the process for handling disagreements in the science?
Chasing down and getting the condensed science for the issue of the month will be challenging. It is out there
NESAF Position statements must be consistent with National SAF position statements.
Forgive me for being dubious on this point. Over my 50 plus years in forestry, I have listened to many arguments that were scientific gibberish about clearcutting, diameter limit cutting, fire, and so forth. Often science is called in to "prove" a point and the arguments are really ideological polemics in favor of pre-held positions. Perhaps we need a session or two on the "Philosophy of Science and the Roles of Science in Understanding and Managing New England Forests."
Agree it is important to include non SAF - member expertise.

Provide for a structured member comment period
Line 250: this can only succeed by relying on electronic communications. Move to an all-electronic format as soon as possible.
Agreed
OK, but often you don't have the time to engage membership in a deliberative process. This is especially true with fast moving legislative or regulatory issues at state level.
Support
Good. Will the member comments be biased? How will they be used in the decision making process?
This is a member driven request and is an improvement. My viewpoint is that I will only engage and take advantage of when the issue involves my state
YES! This is always a good idea when the Society is speaking on behalf of all its members.
Good

Seek a vote of the membership for each position statement
Line 253: What is the criteria for approval? Simple majority? Voting participation will vary. Small majorities for low-interest items might vary significantly from member consensus.
I suggest a two-tiered system - with votes on essential position statements and the Policy Committee in light of the Chair making decisions on minor ones.
If this is the approach you advocate, then the position statements will have to be high level statements of philosophy or guiding principles. Ability to influence fast moving state issues does not lend itself to a cumbersome slow-moving position statement process. To be effective in advocacy, at some point you have to vest your elected leadership with ability to make quick decisions in best interest of membership. The remedy to screwing up is to vote your leadership out if you don't like the positions they advocated.
Support
I actually don't like this idea... What if there is something that SAF must take a stand on that the majority of the membership does not agree on? (Thinking of extremely examples like voting on civil rights for black people - not something for a democratic vote). Do all forestry issues that we could vote on work under a voting situation? Would there be an instance where the exec committee overruled the membership vote? Could you add a stipulation that a certain percentage of the membership vote in order for the vote to stand? I.e. they have to reach quorum.
Another nice idea, but given the recent voting percentages for various levels of office positions within and throughout NESAF, this ideally will be a local issue. If it involves my state I might vote. Equally dangerous is that a non-involved state, Maine with 300 members, could in effect override the wishes of the involved state (Rhode Island with 20 members).
This may be a good general principle with some exceptions. Time is one limitation, and some more thought is needed in when "getting heard" in a policy debate trumps democratic process.
Fine

Ensure the timeliness of position statements throughout the development process
No comment
Agreed
Easier said than done. You all have done an excellent job of laying out an idealized process for making and advocating policy. The real world does not work this way. NESAF and its state chapters need a more streamlined and less bureaucratic way to influence policy in real time.
Support
Agreed.
The suggested turn-around of 3 - 6 months is desirable in order to have an impact, but may still be too long a time-span to address pending state legislation. NH legislature meets for 45 days, ME's meets for 120 days.
Some combination of Survey Monkey-like methods and votes may lead to rapid consideration and votes in the future. SAF leaders at all levels should have strong ability to create action plans and make plan vs. actual updates.
Timeliness is very important. Can't move like a dinosaur seeking absolute perfection.

Officially adopt the Operations Manual
No comment
I can't comment - I've never seen the Operations Manual.
OK
Support
Okay.
Yes, yes, yes
Having not seen this Manual, my thoughts are offered in ignorance. Any manual that is long and long-winded will not be used. Beware following the Forest Service or corporate America in documents that are too long long, too complex, and basically devices to make bureaucracies not work.

Actively clean our member email lists in order to enable maximum response and participation
Good luck
Agreed.
OK
Support
Seems logical.
Always needs to be done, regardless of whether any of the above is accepted.
Yes -- but just tell responsible folks to do it and beware of guidance that is either ill-advised or will become out-dated in this rapidly changing arena.
Makes sense.