

Remembering our Roots, Growing it Forward

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The Forest Stewards Guild began 25 years ago to meet the needs of field foresters who were practicing long-term, thoughtful silviculture. These people often worked in isolation and without a means for meeting, sharing, and learning with other like-minded people. The original group of foresters was identified first by a nation-wide search for well-managed forests. The foresters and managers of these lands were then identified and called together for an initial meeting in Santa Fe in 1995, and the results were amazing. The passion for the forests, silviculture, and stewardship shared then was (and is to this day) powerful.

More meetings were convened in different parts of the country. Then the Forest Stewards Guild as an organization was officially created in 1997 at the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina, where Gifford Pinchot first practiced scientific restoration forestry in this country. Fittingly, we as forest practitioners saw our profession being “born again in the Cradle of Forestry.” Since the very first meeting, the knowledge, passion, energy, and power of the whole group are larger than the sum of the individuals. Similarly, the forest is way more than the sum of individual trees. This is the foundation of the Forest Stewards Guild today; practicing foresters are our roots. They are the means by which we spread “excellent forestry, coast to coast.”

My personal involvement with the Guild began at the second gathering, shortly after the Santa Fe meeting. I was immediately hooked, finding a group of like-minded foresters who were **not** waging war with “environmentalists” or focusing on, above all things, getting the cut out. Thankfully, our forestry profession has evolved beyond this limited view of the forests, due in no small part to the influence of the Guild and its members. The Guild now rightly includes a range of natural resource professionals, students, and others who support the mission and principles. These have remained relatively unchanged over 25 years. “Our first duty is to forests and their future.” This principle is the foundation that binds us together.

Years ago, as a young female forester with a conservation/ecological leaning, I felt a bit intimidated and outnumbered among my peers. The Guild was a community that helped me find my voice and take leadership roles in various conservation and professional organizations. It was an honor, privilege, (and a lot of work!) to serve on the Guild’s first Board of Directors for 12 years. I’ve met and learned from wonderful people, some of whom have become close friends. To make an analogy, I feel somewhat like a “mature” tree now, still healthy but getting older, looking around at the forest I’ve helped grow. I am so pleased to see regeneration (younger people) and the diversity of interests and skills they bring to the forest. I’m glad that they have the Guild for support, networking, learning, and power as they begin their careers and put the forest first in these changing times and climate. I’m confident that the Guild will continue to evolve, supporting the practicing forest professionals with boots on the ground. They are the roots of the forestry profession and the Guild.