

# Future Foresters – history and into the future

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## Abstract

Future Foresters is a Special Interest Group under the New Zealand Institute of Forestry. This paper outlines the history of how FF developed, its five key objectives, its current structure and funding (especially FRESTRA Club funding), and the future of FF.

## Development of the FF Special Interest Group

You may have seen one of our t-shirts, watched one of the careers videos on social media, attended a quiz night, or know a young forester who has benefited from training and networking. Hopefully, by now, the New Zealand forest industry as a whole has heard of the Future Foresters (FF).

It all began at the 2017 NZIF conference and the question: ‘Why doesn’t forestry have its own form of Young Farmers?’ We sat around that table, knew many of our peers throughout the country, and were left wondering why we didn’t have a chance to network as we entered into the industry.

As foresters in the making, we were becoming acutely aware of forestry’s issues, but increasingly unaware of any successful efforts trying to work towards resolving them. Forestry’s issues are nothing new: poor public perception, lack of positive stories, lack of engagement from the younger generation, lack of enrolment in forestry courses, an ageing workforce etc. We naively thought we might be able to do something about it. We knew the issues, and thought that if we could create a forestry community for young or new entrant foresters in New Zealand it would at least be part of the solution to some of these problems.

With minimal experience and a pinch of drive our aim was to help build a stronger, more connected and more diverse forest industry by linking foresters throughout the country. From the beginning we said: ‘If we fail, then we will learn. If we succeed, then we have helped to make a stronger and more united industry.’

Just over three years ago, there wasn’t a connected community of young foresters in New Zealand. There wasn’t a collective presence of young foresters on social media, there were no young forester events, there was no representation on industry bodies. There was no ability to connect across forest, regional and company boundaries to allow the next generation of foresters to feel welcomed, supported and a part of the industry. This meant there was no network of passionate young foresters who got together and shared a love for trees, their products and the people in the industry.



Figure 1: Future Foresters at Feilding Field Days

It has been an incredible journey to see the idea transition from seed to sapling, but more so in witnessing the FF community coming together from nothing. To now have the opportunity for young foresters to connect with recent graduates and those new to the regions, that is what FF is all about.

## Five key objectives

Being a Special Interest Group under the NZIF holds FF to account under the Institute’s Code of Ethics. It also means that we have a seat on, and report quarterly to, the NZIF Council. NZIF support has allowed us to focus on what we do best without being swamped by the administration load of running our own individual organisation.

FF has five main objectives:

1. Create a diverse community of foresters in New Zealand through social and professional networking opportunities.
2. Provide professional development opportunities for early career foresters.
3. Provide a relatable face for forest industry career promotions to the next generation of foresters.
4. Provide a voice for young foresters involved in all aspects of forestry in New Zealand.
5. Connect new foresters with those more experienced.

Although there are five objectives, the foundational goal of FF is to create a sense of community. It is our firm belief that without achieving and focusing on fostering community for young foresters our ability to achieve the other objectives would be severely limited.

FF's success thus far can be measured across the five key objectives:

## Objective 1

Through networking events (in person and online), branding (FF logo and over 150 t-shirts), and our presence at conferences, workshops and industry events, a sense of forestry community has been created throughout New Zealand and we strive to grow this to a stronger presence in the forestry workforce. Through Facebook we have 250 members and through our mailing list we have over 350.

## Objective 2

Mental Health First Aid, public speaking and negotiation training have been run throughout the country, as well as regional workshops, such as the recent Interpine/Hovermap workshop in Rotorua.

## Objective 3

FF successfully ran three social media campaigns, with 10 young forester videos seen by many people outside of the industry who would not normally have been exposed to forestry (video views have now reached 645,125). The recent campaign beginning in August 2021 has driven over 8,000 clicks through to the [www.forestrycareers.nz](http://www.forestrycareers.nz) website and reached over 100,000 unique people.

## Objective 4

FF representatives sit on a wide range of industry groups and committees: the NZ Forest Owners Association (FOA) Training and Careers Committee, the FOA Biosecurity Committee, the NZIF Council and the Forestry and the Wood Processing Workforce Action Council.

## Objective 5

Through industry involvement FF has connected more with the older generation in the industry. Admittedly, there is still work to be done but all ages in the industry are welcome to FF events.

## Structure

FF has an Executive Committee of four people who run the nationwide initiatives and campaigns, source and apply for funding, report to the NZIF Council and funding providers, engage with industry partners, and coordinate the Regional Leaders and annual planning session.

There are currently seven Regional Leaders throughout New Zealand who deliver local training, networking and careers events, assist with FF events during the year, and who aim to connect together all young foresters in their region. The Regional Leaders were launched in 2020 after it became apparent how difficult it was for just the Executive Committee to connect at a local level with all the young foresters in each region without being based there.

The leadership meets every year (around October) to plan the following year's events, the annual theme and social media campaigns. Planning for 2022 was held in October 2021 in Christchurch, which coincided with an excellent opportunity sponsored by Te Uru Rākau to take fourth year forestry students out to dinner and interact with the latest cohort of soon-to-be forestry graduates.

## Funding

Core funding for FF comes from an annual application to the FOA Training and Careers Committee, which delivers funding via the Forest Growers Levy Trust (FGLT). This was the first-ever funding FF was able to access and has been consistent since it started. It provides the resources needed for professional development events (e.g. public speaking training or Mental Health First Aid courses) and for attending careers events with instantly recognisable FF t-shirts.

For industry promotion FF coordinates social media campaigns, which have been exclusively supported by the Wood Industry Development and Education Trust (WIDE). The Trust have been extremely supportive and critical to our success by assisting with resourcing for video creation, social media campaigns and associated advertising costs that have become a core part of FF's public outreach.

In 2021, Te Uru Rākau provided one-off funding for special projects, which allowed FF to continue with some of its 2021 plans when other funding fell short.

# HOW?

## Establish

*a community of young foresters.*

*A place where foresters can engage with the industry and feel part of the collective group.*

## Increase

*the number of young people who choose forestry as an industry.*

## Build

*engagement and awareness of forestry as a diverse and rewarding profession within schools and tertiary providers.*

Figure 2: Future Foresters NZ high-level strategy – 'Establish, Increase, Build'

## The FRESTRA Club

A serendipitous message out of the blue in August 2018, coincidentally at the first-ever FF planning session, began what has been a three-year journey involving FF and FRESTRA. The relationship and realisation of synergies between the two entities has culminated in FF becoming guardians of a significant amount of funding that has roots that trace all the way back through the club to the original New Zealand Forest Service.

The FRESTRA Club, formed in 1982, was a social club located on campus at the Forest Research Institute with the purpose of providing social connection for the Rotorua forestry community. The name FRESTRA came from the telegraphic address of the Forestry Research Institute in Rotorua and training centre. When in operation it would provide revenue to the club to take care of a property in Papamoa for use by club members. This property was affectionately known as the FRESTRA bach and was gifted to the club by the outgoing Forest Service as it was being discontinued in the late 1980s.

After 38 years of operating and providing a social environment for foresters to connect and share stories, the difficult decision was made to sell the FRESTRA bach and look for a way to wind the club up. Fast forward to November 2021 and FF is now the humble custodian of what is a historically significant set of funds. With the gifting of this fund, FRESTRA has solidified FF as a key stakeholder in the New Zealand forest industry in perpetuity.

FF is immensely grateful to the past and recent members of the FRESTRA Club and the Forest Service for passing on the torch all those years ago. The fund will be aptly named the 'FRESTRA Fund' and will sit with NZIF, but only to be used for FF activities. The aim of the fund is to create a non-declining and self-sustaining revenue stream that will enable FF to continually support and connect young foresters within New Zealand, with an annual budget to further the five key objectives.

The FRESTRA funding opportunity forced FF to formalise its structure under the NZIF and to clarify key issues of succession and responsibilities. The four of us who founded FF are slowly becoming foresters. Although we still all have an immense passion and much to add to the industry, it is time we began the process of passing on the torch and allowing other young foresters the opportunities we have been exposed to through being involved in FF.

Beginning in 2022, there will be an annual application process for those in the industry who wish to be a part of organising and running FF to apply for either Executive Committee or Regional Leader positions. This will be run in conjunction with the annual process for the NZIF Foundation Awards. Executive Committee members will be selected by the current committee and the NZIF Council and the Regional Leaders will be decided by the Executive Committee. NZIF and FF have the opportunity to encourage the next cohort



Figure 3: Future Foresters brand logo

of enthusiastic foresters to continue the growth and impact of FF for the betterment of the entire industry.

## The future of FF

The future of FF is in the hands of our young foresters and the industry at large. The progress made so far has come from our personal motivation and enthusiasm combined with unfaltering support from peers and employers. Without the support of time, finance and encouragement we wouldn't have got to this point, so I urge all forest industry employers and managers to encourage young foresters to be involved in whatever small way with FF. The benefits to their careers, their knowledge base and their network connections are invaluable, and the benefits to the industry are already being felt.

An ideal future for FF would be a connected forest industry across all those who interact with forests for both work and play. FF could be the conduit to connect contractors, conservationists, technology providers, sawmillers, researchers, entrepreneurs and foresters with all those involved in trees, wood, land and the environment.

The ideal future will also see FF continuing to be recognised as a key voice at the table of industry groups and given opportunities to prove their value and provide insight into the thinking of the next generation. FF will continue to connect, share, tell stories, develop, grow, and have fun as part of a diverse and rewarding community of people who care about trees and the power of wood as the ultimate renewable.

FF will continue to work with the soon-to-be established Global Network for Forestry Young Professionals (ForYP) to help link young Kiwi foresters to those around the globe. This will strengthen not only the New Zealand forest industry, but all foresters around the world through connections previously not possible.

## 100 years from now

For those interested in what New Zealand forestry might look like in 2121, there has been a thought-provoking article written recently by young foresters Sheridan Ashford (Commercial Sales Manager at Summit Forests New Zealand) and Adrian Loo (ETS/Project Manager at Forest Management Ltd). The article 'Haere taka mua, taka muri. Kaua e whai' was first published in March 2021 in *O Tātou Ngāhere* (Our Forest) by Pure Advantage and Tāne's Tree Trust. An excerpt can be found in the side box.

## Conclusion

The enthusiasm and passion for forestry, and the recognition of the power of networking and the support (from industry, peers, funding providers and FRESTRA), has allowed FF to flourish to become a part of the New Zealand forest industry. It is important for all involved in forestry for FF to be here in the long run, as a core part of connecting foresters throughout the country, and a pivotal part of a young forester's journey on a diverse and rewarding career path that appreciates their input and supports them as a valuable part of the sector.

## Acknowledgements

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**'Haere taka mua, taka muri. Kaua e whai. Go in front, not behind. Don't follow!' – Māori proverb. Sheridan Ashford and Adrian Loo**

'Now in 2121, New Zealand is a tree-loving heaven. We are not only ranked #1 for Rugby, Sailing and Olympic surfing, but we are also ranked #1 globally for personal wellbeing for over 60 years running. This ranking is 100% purely related to the trees we have and the forests we support to grow in our country. New Zealand, once again, is now regarded as the most beautiful place on earth; we have long been pest-free and people pay a fee to log in virtually to experience the grandeur of our birdsong chorus.

'The world has united in the use of cryptocurrencies; no foreign exchange risk and no uncertainty in the value of a dollar. This change brought about a globally recognised and valued green cryptocurrency, invented in New Zealand called the 'Kākāriki'. This green dollar rewards all Land Guardians that ensure more and more environmental protection is occurring.

'The land is more valuable than anything and the people with trees are considered "green billionaires". People realised they didn't want to live in cities and didn't need to spend their life's earnings on a small cube in downtown Seymore-Ville (formerly Remuera). The Kiwi-dream is now to ditch the traffic jam and migrate from the cities to become a Land Guardian. People realise that the land that surrounds us can provide food, fodder and an opportunity to offset the residual carbon emissions from their grandparents.

'Everything is now made from wood. These woody products are sourced from our "New Zealand Forests"; a never-ending system of continuous cover forestry that provides woody biomass for us and our future generations. Housing continues to transform from the grey steel and concrete jungle of the past with the rich, golden syrup tones of Totara, Matai and Rimu abodes peppering the landscape. New Zealand has been smoke-free for over 80 years, plastic is illegal, fossil fuels are gone, electric self-driving vehicles rule our roads and zero-emission boilers fuel our biocircular economy. Our tourism thrives as electric planes deliver tourists; arrival taxes reflect New Zealand's values and each tourist must plant a tree, protect a waterway or undertake an action that results in a cleaner greener New Zealand.

'In 2121 sustainability is a salary and the Land Guardians are rewarded for the positive externalities they provide. For years forests were considered nothing more than an offsetting source for emitters and polluters, however, now through widespread societal recognition, the industry of sustainability no longer "offsets" but exists to "undo" the damage of our past generations. The industry of sustainability is a leader in new job creation enabling diverse economic opportunities.

'Land use no longer prioritises profits in the historical sense. Returns are now realised through environmental improvements, cleaner air, even cleaner water, and a landscape that all Kiwis admire. Many of those original tree-huggers or eco-warriors are now among the rich-listers. People invest for dividends of improved wellbeing as opposed to the singular financial driver of the olden days and returns on all investments are reported in both financial and wellbeing terms. This wealth is being redistributed straight back into New Zealand's environmental ecosystem; investment in the environment is internationally recognized as the best option for ethical wealth creation for others.

'Whakatupu is taught in all schools. Before maths or chemistry, we must learn to look after the land, so she looks after us. All children are taught about the importance of soil conservation and water quality, creating a passion for the environment in these young, green leaders.

'Through the last century, millions of these green leaders held New Zealand responsible to ensure we will always be a green nation. The force of our green revolution, driven by the millions of Kai Tiaki looking after their beautiful country.'