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## FPS/SWST AD HOC “FUTURE OF THE SOCIETIES” COMMITTEE SUMMARY

### BACKGROUND

In recent years, considerable debate and discussion regarding the future of Wood Science and Technology (WST) as a profession have swirled around Forest Products Society (FPS) and Society of Wood Science and Technology (SWST) board meetings, strategic workshops, in academic circles, and among WST professionals. At the annual board meetings of the two societies in Bellevue, Washington, June 2003, board members noted the weakening of academic programs in wood science and forest products, diminished recognition of Wood Science and Technology as a profession, and the need for a stronger, more unified WST voice to reach and influence decision-makers in academia, government, and industry.

From the 2003 FPS/SWST board meeting, a joint four-member ad hoc committee was created. The FPS/SWST ad hoc committee was composed of the Executive Directors and Vice Presidents of the SWST (Vicki Herian and Paul Smith) and FPS (Art Brauner and Ramsay Smith). The objectives of the task force included: 1) formalization and documentation of the relationship and respective roles of FPS and SWST in preparation of Art Brauner's retirement from the FPS, and 2) addressing the challenges facing the WST profession. Task force topics included the two societies' tax structures, professional journals, leadership and services, lobbying power, Agenda 2020<sup>1</sup>, and industry

support. All four ad hoc committee members also participated in the January 2004 FPS Strategic Visioning Workshop, convened “to address current and future challenges facing the Society [FPS].”<sup>2</sup>

The FPS/SWST ad hoc committee proposed a formal survey of past presidents of FPS and SWST to solicit their insight regarding issues facing the societies and the WST profession. A *Past Presidents' Questionnaire* was administered to all past presidents of FPS or SWST in April 2004.

The survey hoped to address some of the questions presented by the task force:

- Why do we have two professional societies (FPS and SWST)?
- Regarding the two professional journals, FPI and W&FS, why do authors submit papers to each of the two journals? How are the contents of these journals perceived?
- What are some of the critical issues facing the Wood Science and Technology profession?
- Lobbying is expensive—FPS/SWST resources and membership are limited—what is the best means by which FPS/SWST can influence policy given its budget constraints?<sup>3</sup> Can FPS/SWST influence funding levels for forest products research?

### RESULTS

The *Past Presidents' Questionnaire* was mailed to all available (adjusted sample frame of

<sup>1</sup> The Agenda 2020 Technology Alliance is an industry-led partnership with government and academia. Initiated in 1994 in partnership with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), it is a Special Project of the American Forest & Paper Association (AF&PA).

<sup>2</sup> Winistorfer P.M., I. Roche, W. R. Smith, N. Kutscha, and A. Brauner. 2004. Visioning for the future of the Forest Products Society. *Forest Prod. J.* 54(7/8):8–17.

<sup>3</sup> SWST is a 501c(6), thus allowing it to lobby and influence policy, whereas as a 501c(3), FPS cannot.

50) FPS and SWST past presidents in April 2004. The response rate was 68% (34 of 50). Average age of the 34 respondents was 67 years with a range from 46 to 93 years. Respondents were members of one or both societies on average for over 30 years. Other key findings are presented in this report.

### *Critical issues facing the Wood Science and Technology profession*

Issues facing the WST profession deemed most critical by past presidents, in order of importance, included:

- Recognition of WST as a legitimate profession
- Student enrollment in wood science programs
- Industry involvement and support
- Perception of the timber industry
- Wood product innovation and relevance, and the need for certification

Respondents suggested that both FPS and SWST should address these issues. In January 2004, FPS convened a Strategic Visioning Workshop to address challenges facing the Society. Workshop participants recognized similar issues. The Workshop identified declining membership in FPS as its most significant weakness, noting that numerous professional and trade organizations have experienced similar membership decreases in the past decade. Low student enrollment in WST programs and negative public perception of the forest products industry were also identified by Workshop participants as key issues (Winistorfer et al. 2004).

### *Wood Science and Technology undergraduate programs*

Past presidents responded that major challenges facing our WST undergraduate education programs today include, in order of most critical:

- Declining enrollment
- Visibility and recognition

- Aging faculty and outdated programs
- Lack of institutional support

Eighty percent of respondents mentioned *declining enrollment* as a major challenge facing undergraduate education programs. The FPS Strategic Visioning Workshop also acknowledged low student enrollment in WST programs as well as the overall decline of forest products graduate and undergraduate programs.

Nearly one-third (8/25) of the respondents noted *visibility* issues: lack of industry recognition of the need for WST grads, lack of student interest or awareness of WST as a profession, lack of visibility within university programs, and lack of recognition worsened by erroneous information being taught to K-12 grades. Respondents also mentioned *aging faculty* who might not be replaced and/or outdated WST programs as challenges. *Lack of institutional support* at administrative levels was cited by one-fifth of the respondents (5/25).

### *FPS and SWST services*

Past presidents rated the importance of numerous FPS and SWST services and organizational issues. Topics were ranked on a scale of 1–7, from 1 = not at all important, to 4 = somewhat important, to 7 = very important (Table 1).

### *FPS strengths*

Past presidents judged publications, *Forest Products Journal* (FPJ) and others, as the “best thing” about FPS. The Strategic Visioning Workshop also identified FPJ as one of the Society’s greatest strengths, noting its 50+ year tenure as a peer-reviewed journal (Winistorfer et al. 2004). The Workshop agreed with the past presidents’ assessment that conferences and special publications are also prime strong points. FPS strengths, in order of importance, were deemed by past presidents to be:

- *Forest Products Journal and other publications*

TABLE 1. SWST/FPS services, in order of importance.

	Topic	Mean
Very important	Continue to hold FPS conferences on timely research topics	6.45
	SWST and FPS should continue to share annual meeting dates & venues	6.11
	FPS should remain independent of Society of American Foresters (SAF)	5.86
	SWST should represent the profession to enhance nat'l wood research funding opportunities	5.81
	FPS should maintain sponsorship and support of student chapters	5.66
	SWST should maintain accreditation standards	5.62
	SWST should remain independent of SAF	5.48
	SWST and FPS should maintain separate journals	5.37
	SWST should maintain the ability to lobby and take public stands on relevant issues	5.33
Somewhat important	SWST and FPS should remain separate societies	4.68
	FPS should develop the ability to lobby and take public stands on relevant issues	4.45
	FPS should remain in Madison, WI	3.93
	SWST should remain in Madison, WI	3.57

- *Conferences and meetings*
- *Communication between science and industry*
- *Technology transfer and information exchange*
- *Networking and contacts*

SWST strengths

Past presidents also believe the SWST publication, *Wood and Fiber Science* (W&FS), is the “best thing” about SWST. The next best thing about SWST was its professional representation of the profession of WST. Past presidents felt SWST’s strengths included:

- *Wood and Fiber Science journal*
- *Professionalism*
- *Information exchange*
- *Academic support and accreditation*
- *Political impact*
- *Wood science focus*
- *Conferences and meetings*

Forest Products Journal versus Wood and Fiber Science.

Respondents rated *Wood and Fiber Science* as superior to *Forest Products Journal* in terms of *rigorous science* and *relevance to university scientists*. FPJ was rated superior in *relevance to the forest industry* and *to policymakers*. W&FS was judged slightly superior in terms of *relevance to government scientists*, *international nature*, and *efficiency of peer review process*, while FPJ was slightly superior in terms of *relevance to industry scientists* and *pleasing format*. Overall, FPJ and W&FS were judged to be equally valuable to respondents (Table 2).

Rationale for two professional societies (SWST and FPS) and two professional journals (W&FS and FPJ)?

Past SWST presidents felt more strongly than past FPS presidents that the two societies should remain separate and that the separate journals should be maintained. However, there was a

TABLE 2. “Regarding the Forest Products Journal and Wood and Fiber Science, please compare these two peer reviewed professional journals on the following items.” (mean importance rating).

Item	All (n = 34)	Position		
		FPS (n = 10)	SWST (n = 16)	Both <sup>4</sup> (n = 8)
Rigorous science	5.73	4.88	6.20	5.71
Relevant to university scientists	5.26	5.00	5.50	5.00
Relevant to government scientists	4.87	4.38	5.40	4.29
International in nature	4.45	4.00	4.81	4.14
Efficient peer-review process	4.40	4.25	4.31	4.83
Overall value to you	3.97	2.88	4.63	3.67
Pleasing format	3.52	2.88	4.19	2.71
Relevant to industry scientists	3.45	3.25	3.47	3.67
Relevant to policymakers	3.10	2.63	3.47	2.86
Relevant to the forest industry	2.73	2.50	3.07	2.29

Rating Scale: 1 = FPJ is superior, 4 = FPJ and W&FS are the same, 7 = W&FS is superior.  
<sup>4</sup> Respondents categorized as “Both” (n = 8) are past presidents of both the FPS and the SWST.

consensus that the two societies cooperate by sharing annual meeting dates and venues (Table 3).

To reiterate, past presidents, overall, judged the journals to be the “best thing” about each society. And, the strengths of the two journals—*Wood and Fiber Science* as superior in terms of *rigorous science* and *relevance to university scientists* and *FPJ* in *relevance to the forest industry* and *to policymakers*—suggest that the journals effectively serve their constituents; however, their target audiences are somewhat different (Table 2).

#### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Are the past presidents’ responses representative of the FPS/SWST membership? Should this survey be administered to the entire FPS/SWST membership? Did the survey accomplish its objectives of attempting to address some of the questions posed by the FPS/SWST joint task force?

The FPS/SWST ad hoc committee recommends including some of the key questions from this survey in FPS and SWST membership surveys in 2006 for comparisons and contrasts.

#### *What are some of the critical issues facing the Wood Science and Technology profession?*

Lack of recognition of WST as a legitimate profession was judged most critical by respond-

ing FPS/SWST past presidents, followed by low student enrollment and perceived lack of industry support. Respondents suggested that both FPS and SWST should address these issues.

Past presidents strongly support SWST representation of the profession to enhance national wood research funding opportunities. Respondents are also strongly in favor of SWST maintaining the ability to lobby and take public stands on relevant issues. Both FPS and SWST should remain independent of the Society of American Foresters (SAF). Past presidents indicated that it is very important for FPS to continue to hold conferences on timely research topics, and it is important that FPS maintain sponsorship/support of student chapters.

The Past Presidents’ Survey confirms current challenges facing the WST profession, and suggests direction that could improve both societies and the future of the WST profession: maintain separate societies and journals, but continue to share meeting dates/venues; continue to hold conferences on timely research topics (FPS); and take steps to influence policy and national funding (SWST).

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TABLE 3. “Please rate the importance of the following items.” (mean importance rating).

Item	All (n = 34)	Position <sup>b</sup>		
		Past FPS (n = 10)	Past SWST (n = 16)	Both (n = 8)
(a) SWST and FPS				
Maintain separate journals	5.37	3.88	6.00	5.71
Maintain separate societies	4.68	3.38	5.46	4.71
Share annual meeting dates & venues	6.11	6.63	6.15	5.43

Rating Scale: 1 = not important, 4 = somewhat important, 7 = very important.