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# WOMEN OWNING WOODLANDS

## Being Part of History

I was excited to attend the inaugural Women's Forest Congress (WFC) held in October in Minneapolis. Mason, Bruce and Girard Inc. (MB&G) sponsored the event, and I pitched a presentation to reveal my practice of asking permission, expressing apology and gratitude, and demonstrating reciprocity to the trees that I am planning to harvest.

What I imagine might be labeled a very feminine, feeling perspective of tree harvest is something that has been challenging to speak about in primarily male, economically minded company at professional events like those hosted by ACF and SAF. I was thrilled for my presentation to be included in a pre-conference session about Forest Therapy and Forest Bathing. It was very well received and resonated with many attendees. Afterwards, I had women coming up to me saying, "I do that too!" and "SAF needs you to do this presentation there!"

Overall, attending WFC was an amazing experience! Being in a room full of 400 other women foresters was deeply inspiring and nourishing. At times, it felt like a two-day therapy session as we shared our experiences and challenges overcoming prejudice, sexism and a constant feeling of having to prove your capability in this industry.

There were two recurring comments from the leaders who spoke from the stage: 1) how exciting it was to look out at a room full of women at a forestry conference, and 2) how proud many were to be the first woman in their position while at the same time recognizing it shouldn't have taken so long for that to be the case. This really resonated with me, being the first woman field forester at MB&G, attending the event with Erin VanDehey, first woman owner of MB&G.

As a new mom, I felt very affirmed listening to the stories of sometimes heartbreaking tradeoffs that

other moms had made to succeed in a career they love while satisfying the reproductive labor demands of being a mom— or woman in general: menstruation, pregnancy, birth recovery, pumping breastmilk (sometimes while on a fireline or cruising timber) menopause, as well as ongoing parenting and the ever-challenging job of coordinating childcare.

While I appreciated the opportunities to commiserate with other women foresters, there was far more emphasis on excitement for the future at WFC. I was energized by the positivity about the critical role of women in forestry, where we are going and how important women will be to change the industry for the better!

For example, during the Congress, we ratified resolutions on which the WFC Organizers had worked for years. Once implemented, these resolutions will create more pathways for women to enter this awesome profession, and policies to help them thrive, even in the face of the challenges I highlighted above.

Feeling so energized about increasing the number of and supporting women in forestry, a hallway conversation between the ACF crew (Members Lee Steigerwaldt and Katie Wildling along with Shannon McCabe and myself) and SAF leaders produced ideas for both organizations to keep the momentum going.

Just like the first American Forest Congress in 1882, this event was history making and I'm so glad I got to be part of it!



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The Women Owning Woodlands site, [womenowningwoodlands.net](http://womenowningwoodlands.net), is a joint effort of National Woodland Owners Association and the USDA Forest Service. The website is maintained by the Forest Stewards Guild, and by regional editors who volunteer their time to contribute to the site, along with staff from the US Forest Service.