



United States Department of Agriculture

# U.S. FOREST SERVICE

## URBAN CONNECTIONS PROGRAM



Forest  
Service

Eastern  
Region

Annual  
Report

December 2015  
FS-R9-055

# Connecting Citizens to the Land

## *Message from Regional Forester Kathleen Atkinson*

The Eastern Region of the U.S. Forest Service is proud to host the Urban Connections program. City coordinators in Boston, Detroit, Milwaukee and Minneapolis work with partners to connect urban populations to nature. They achieve this work by partnering with local, state, regional and nonprofit organizations, as well as Forest Service employees from [national forests](#), [Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry](#), [Northern Research Station](#), [Forest Products Laboratory](#) and [International Programs](#).

In 2015, Urban Connections work engaged thousands of urban residents in outdoor activities, and led to 113 teens and young adults visiting and working in national forests. Key partners in this effort included [Student Conservation Association](#), [Youth Conservation Corps](#), [Michigan State University Extension](#), [Our Global Kids](#), [Wilderness Inquiry](#), [YWCA of St. Paul](#), [Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa](#), [Urban Roots](#) and [Neighborhood House](#). An experience where youth participate in conservation work in their community and then perform similar work on public land is often life-changing. I hope some of these amazing young adults will one day find careers with the Forest Service.

I celebrate the accomplishments described in the following pages with you, and challenge us all to encourage our friends and neighbors to join us in the important effort of learning about, caring for, and enjoying the nation's forests, prairies and green spaces.



*Regional Forester Kathleen Atkinson with a Historic Forest Service Ranger at The Henry Ford's Greenfield Village in Dearborn, Michigan.*

# About Urban Connections

**Mission:** To grow and foster mutual relationships that connect urban residents and the Forest Service through the use and conservation of forests and green spaces.

**Vision:** Urban residents in four of the country's largest metropolitan areas are engaged in caring for and enjoying the nation's forests (local parks, woodlands, and national forests and grasslands).

## About Us

Urban Connections is an outreach program of the Forest Service in the Northeast and Midwest that works with urban leaders and other agencies to help connect people to their national forests. The program is focused on four main goals:

1) **Stewardship of the nation's forests**

Promoting sustainable forest management and enhancing the capacity of forests to provide public benefits. It's about connecting urban residents to the natural world all around them.

2) **Partnership with communities**

Creating long-term partnerships with organizations that will enhance understanding of the work of the Forest Service. Two heads are better than one; we can accomplish so much more by working together.

3) **Urban resident information & involvement**

Sharing and widely distributing Forest Service information and messages to urban leaders, the media and others. City coordinators focus on sharing Forest Service knowledge with underserved audiences.

4) **Forest Service organizational effectiveness**

Increasing the understanding of urban needs and encouraging agency diversity.

For this report, each city coordinator provided one example of work they did in support of each goal in 2015.



## *Meet New Urban Connections & Conservation Education Program Manager Lisa Myers*

In June 2015, I had the distinct pleasure of joining the Urban Connections team. Since then, I moved to Milwaukee and traveled to each of the Urban Connections cities. In every city, I met talented partners and participated in terrific programs. Jean, Jessie, Lisa and Teri are catalysts for change in their respective cities, and I look forward to working with them to help further this great work.

I was born and raised in Boston and have memories of visiting the city's green spaces, such as Boston Common and Public Gardens; however, my family wasn't very outdoorsy. Other families took me camping in middle school and to Maine in high school; these experiences changed my life! I studied forestry at the University of Maine and then worked in environmental education in New England, Bermuda and Central America before joining the [National Park Service](#). I was a ranger for 26 years, and now I'm managing a regional program for the U.S. Forest Service.

I believe in the goals of the Urban Connections program because I benefited from someone introducing me to the wonders of nature when I was young. I can testify to how much my life has been enriched by those connections every day and am grateful to have a job that enables me to do that for others.



*Lisa Myers (left) with Detroit Urban Connections Coordinator Lisa Perez (right) and partner Mike Reed (center), Zoological Society, at the opening of Michigan Department of Natural Resources's Outdoor Adventure Center in July 2015.*

# City Highlights

# 2015 City Highlights



## **Boston Coordinator**

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## ***Meet the Boston Team:***

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*Dee Hines*, Green Mountain & Finger Lakes, Acting Forest Supervisor

*Ethan Ready*, Green Mountain & Finger Lakes, Public Affairs Specialist

*John Parry*, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry Urban & Community Forestry Program Manager

*Rob Clark*, Northeastern Area, State & Private Forestry, Acting Field Representative

*John Brissette*, Northern Research Station, Assistant Director

*Peter Church*, Massachusetts Dept. of Recreation and Conservation, Director of Forest Stewardship

## ***Partners Include:***

[Boston Children's Museum](#)

["e"inc.](#)

[Eagle Eye Institute](#)

[Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation](#)

[Medford High School](#)

[National Park Service](#)

[North American Indian Center of Boston](#)

[Statewide Black Clergy](#)

[U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1](#)

[YMCA of Greater Boston](#)

## Boston, Massachusetts



### *Stewardship of the Nation's Forests*

The U.S. Forest Service, [Urban Farming Institute](#) and [Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church](#) hosted an event to tell the history of African-American soldiers and their role in protecting public lands over 100 years ago. Rose Fennell, Deputy Superintendent of [Boston African American National Historic Site](#) and [Boston National Historic Park](#), shared the bravery of the 10th Cavalry (better known as the Buffalo Soldiers) and how they protected national treasures from decimation by European settlers laying claims to lands in former Native American Territory. She also shared how women posing as men fought side by side with other cavalymen and served as stewards of forested lands.



### *Partnership with Communities*

A belief that the great outdoors is a perfect learning space and that we must be good stewards of the land led to formation of the Community Conservation Education Partnership. This partnership granted Medford High School teachers support for outdoor classes, access to Tufts University resources, use of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's mobile water testing lab, and an opportunity to participate in [A Forest for Every Classroom](#) training. Additionally, interested students are trained in [Project Wild](#), go hiking, snowshoeing, and participate in stewardship activities. These students will help verify vernal pools in the [Middlesex Fells Reservation](#), a 2,500-acre forested area managed by the state that abuts the school.



### *Urban Resident Information & Involvement*

Gaining knowledge about how to be green in everyday life while enjoying good food, music, culture and fashion is what [Boston GreenFest](#) is all about! Recognized as New England's largest multicultural environmental music festival, GreenFest is an ideal place to provide information to urban residents about the importance of trees and forests and the benefits they provide in making our lives healthier and cities more livable. U.S. Forest Service representatives enjoyed hearing about attendees' visits to the [White Mountain](#) (New Hampshire), [Green Mountain](#) (Vermont) and [Finger Lakes](#) (New York) National Forests. They also shared information with novice visitors, as well as those seeking more advanced recreational experiences.



### *Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness*

A common phrase used by Coordinator Jessie Scott when speaking to adults and teens about a career in federal land management is "green jobs are real jobs!" A challenge when having these kinds of conversations with urban residents is that their knowledge of green spaces is usually limited to a highly managed urban park surrounded on every side by roads and developments. To address this, partnership efforts are underway to expand urban resident experiences through overnight trips to state and national forests; facilitated conversations between the public and natural resource professionals; and service learning experiences in both urban and rural settings.

# 2015 City Highlights



## **Detroit Coordinator**

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*Carleen Yocum*, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry, Field Representative  
*Jill Johnson*, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry, Field Representative  
*Therese Poland*, Northern Research Station, Research Entomologist  
*Thomas Schmidt*, Northern Research Station, Assistant Director

## ***Partners Include:***

[Michigan State University Extension](#)  
[The Henry Ford](#)  
[Detroit Zoological Society](#)  
[The Greening of Detroit](#)  
[Our Global Kids](#)  
[Michigan Department of Natural Resources](#)  
[Student Conservation Association](#)

## Detroit, Michigan



### *Stewardship of the Nation's Forests*

Over the past several decades, Detroit has lost tens of millions of trees to urban expansion, Dutch elm disease, emerald ash borer and resource constraints. As part of a comprehensive urban forest restoration effort, Urban Connections is working with [The Greening of Detroit](#)'s Citizen Forester program, a cadre of volunteers trained to help share the benefits of trees, coordinate efforts of other volunteers and use [Open Tree Map](#) to document long-term benefits of plantings. This year, 77 Citizen Foresters were trained and led other volunteers in planting 2,881 trees.



### *Partnership with Communities*

The Forest Service and partners celebrated the grand opening of Michigan Department of Natural Resources's [Outdoor Adventure Center](#) in Detroit. The Center is designed to connect urban audiences to nature by simulating outdoor experiences. Forest Service employees from all three branches ([National Forest System](#), [State & Private Forestry](#), and [Research](#)) worked with [Detroit Riverfront Conservancy](#) and Department of Natural Resources staff to develop displays and messaging that teaches Center visitors about stewardship of public lands. Additionally, national artist Louise Phillips donated the painting, "National Forests in Michigan" to be displayed at the Center.



### *Urban Resident Information & Involvement*

From a special viewing of the 2014 Capitol Christmas tree to planting trees to providing seedlings to over 20,000 school children, Southeast Michigan's number one tourist attraction – [The Henry Ford](#) – continues to share the message of sustainable forest management and conservation with millions of visitors. The Henry Ford's Greenfield Village was the location of a 2015 [National Get Outdoors Day](#) event featuring Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl, a Historic Ranger presentation and Regional Forester Kathleen Atkinson swearing in new Junior Forest Rangers.



### *Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness*

The [Detroit Conservation Leadership Corps](#) and Urban Connections partnered to help city youth learn about U.S. Forest Service career opportunities while completing projects to improve recreation and protect watersheds. Detroit Conservation Leadership Corps crew members worked alongside Forest Service rangers and Youth Conservation Corps members to complete 1,447 feet of "Bruno's Run" mountain biking trail in the [Hiawatha National Forest](#). In their free time, they explored the wonders of the Hiawatha including swimming in Lake Superior.

# 2015 City Highlights



## **Milwaukee Coordinator**

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## ***Meet the Milwaukee Team:***

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*Linda Jackson*, Ottawa National Forest, Forest Supervisor

*Lisa Klaus*, Ottawa National Forest, Public Affairs Officer

*Sheree Johnson*, Regional Civil Rights Director

*Dawn Meier*, Regional Volunteer and Service Program Coordinator

*Phillip Rodbell*, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, Urban and Community Forestry Program Leader

*Jill Johnson*, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry, Midwest Urban Forestry Coordinator

*Mike Ritter*, Forest Products Laboratory, Assistant Director

*Martin Pfeiffer*, Forest Products Laboratory, Wildlife Biologist

*Cythina Sandeno*, Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Species Program Leader

## ***Partners include:***

[Neighborhood House of Milwaukee](#)

[Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful](#)

[Urban Ecology Center](#)

[Betty Brinn Children's Museum](#)

[Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

[Lake Valley Camp](#)

[Milwaukee Public Schools](#)

## Milwaukee, Wisconsin



### *Stewardship of the Nation's forests*

Experience is an essential component of learning. Teens from Milwaukee's [Neighborhood House](#) continuously learn about the importance of the natural world and take ownership of it through service projects. Urban Connections organized a visit to Wisconsin's [Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest](#) where teens experienced forest management firsthand through a tour that included a logging operation, recreation site maintenance and a prescribed burn. They also tried out canoeing and archery. Also, teens from the [Student Conservation Association](#) spent four weeks training and performing trail maintenance and invasive species removal in Milwaukee followed by two weeks on the Chequamegon-Nicolet working with Forest staff on trail and facility maintenance.



### *Partnership with Communities*

Milwaukee Urban Connection's Conservation Education interns work with an array of partners every summer to deliver natural resource education to urban youth. In its 20th year, the intern team worked with 13 partners, including [Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful](#), [Lake Valley Camp](#) and [Betty Brinn Children's Museum](#), to connect 1,600 city youth to the outdoors. They accomplished this through interactive lessons about forests, habitat, animals, water, pollinators and ways to be good stewards of the land.



### *Urban Resident Information & Involvement*

Radio continues to be a wonderful tool to reach a broad audience. Coordinator Jean Claassen used an [interview](#) with Wisconsin Public Radio as an opportunity to share information about the Forest Service and Urban Connections program with the public. She provided information about projects taking place in Milwaukee, as well as ways the Forest Service's presence in the city is of value to urban residents. The hope is that the message will translate into more people knowing who the Forest Service is, more people getting involved with Urban Connections and new partnerships with local organizations.



### *Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness*

A goal of the Urban Connections program is to educate urban youth about natural resource careers. In 2015, a green careers panel hosted by the [Student Conservation Association](#) reached more than 70 Milwaukee teens. Several Forest Service employees, along with other natural resource professionals from city, state and private organizations provided firsthand accounts of their career paths. Secondly, a natural resources career component was added to the Betty Brinn Children's Museum's [Smokey Bear and Woodsy Owl](#) traveling exhibit, which reaches thousands of pre-school/elementary school age children.

# 2015 City Highlights



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*Mary Nordeen*, Chippewa National Forest, Forest Supervisor

*Carleen Yocum*, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry, Field Representative

*Gina Jorgensen*, Northeastern Area State & Private Forestry, Director of Communications

*Tom Schmidt*, Northern Research Station, Assistant Director

*Deb Dietzman*, Northern Research Station, Director of Communications

## ***Partners include:***

[Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center](#)

[Minnesota Department of Natural Resources](#)

[Salvation Army](#)

[St. Paul Parks & Recreation](#)

[Tree Trust](#)

[Wilderness Inquiry](#)

## Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota



### *Stewardship of the Nation's Forests*

Gaining firsthand knowledge of what's involved in forest management is a step to becoming a future steward of the land. This was the case for 18 high schoolers in the [Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa](#) who capped off their summer working on the [Superior National Forest](#) for three weeks. The youth experienced a broad range of resource work including removing invasive species from 0.5 acres, improving three campsites, improving 18 miles of hiking trails, constructing 156 ft. of bridge and boardwalk, removing brush and temporary fences and planting trees. On the weekends, the learning continued through classes such as wild edibles, astronomy, rock climbing and sea kayaking at the [Wolf Ridge Environmental Center](#).



### *Partnership with Communities*

Forest Service partner [Wilderness Inquiry](#) uses a Pyramid of Engagement model to help urban youth forge a deep connection with nature. The first brick of the pyramid involves inspiring confidence, curiosity and wonder, which is accomplished by taking urban youth on a local waterway in a safe and stable 12 ft. voyageur canoe. In 2015, the "Canoemobile" reached more than 120,000 youth in 45 cities including all four Urban Connections cities. The next rung of the pyramid builds upon the foundation through extended experiences in nature. In 2015, 20 high school youth from the Twin Cities visited the [Chippewa](#) and [Superior](#) National Forests where they gained knowledge about natural resource careers and educational opportunities.



### *Urban Resident Information & Involvement*

The 2014 Capitol Christmas Tree, selected from Minnesota's [Chippewa National Forest](#), presented a unique opportunity to share Forest Service messages with people across the country. Closer to home, it provided an important connection between the [Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe](#), who share boundaries with the Forest. During the cutting ceremony, Tribal elders were on hand to bless the tree. Urban audiences had the opportunity to get up close and personal with the Forest Service thanks to three tree related events in the Twin Cities. Connections continued en route to Washington, D.C. as the tree visited 30 communities and reached an estimated 45,000 people.



### *Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness*

The [Students Eagerly Acquiring Knowledge](#) (SEAK) program works with diverse middle and high school students from St. Paul/Minneapolis and Duluth to help them explore the outdoors and natural resource careers. The U.S. Forest Service partners with the [Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center](#) to carry out this program. Students learn about careers by meeting and interviewing [Superior National Forest](#) staff. Because of this exposure, participating St. Paul middle school students are choosing more advanced level science classes in high school than their peers. In summer 2015, two students who had gone through the program volunteered at the [Northern Research Station](#) - Forest Inventory and Analysis unit in St. Paul.

# Get Involved!



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Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (Wisconsin): [fs.usda.gov/cnnf](https://fs.usda.gov/cnnf)

Chippewa National Forest (Minnesota): [fs.usda.gov/chippewa](https://fs.usda.gov/chippewa)

Green Mountain & Finger Lakes National Forests (Vermont/New York): [fs.usda.gov/main/gmfl](https://fs.usda.gov/main/gmfl)

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