



U.S. FOREST SERVICE EASTERN REGION



URBAN CONNECTIONS PROGRAM



Connecting Citizens to the Land

Message from Regional Forester Kathleen Atkinson

The USDA Forest Service's Urban Connections program has had great success over the years, and 2014 was no exception. The year was filled with many accomplishments centered on increasing awareness about the importance of natural resources and the nation's forests and prairies, and engaging urban residents in Forest Service activities through the work of our Urban Connections city coordinators in Detroit, Boston, Milwaukee and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

Creating opportunities for stewardship, collaboration, information sharing, experiential learning, and employment are just a few highlights of a successful year. Thank you to the dedicated partners, numerous volunteers, and concerned citizens who are essential to this work.

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.

—*Kathleen Atkinson, Regional Forester*

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 Eastern Region of the Forest Service working with Forest Service Research, State & Private Forestry, urban leaders, other agencies and you 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 an underserved audience.

4) **Forest Service organizational effectiveness**

Increasing the understanding of urban needs and encouraging agency diversity.

Highlights of the Year

Competed for & received funding from two national program sources:

More Kids in the Woods (Minneapolis/St. Paul - see item #2)

21st Century Conservation Service Corps (Boston - see item #2)



Meet the Boston Team



Boston Coordinator

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Partners include:

Boston Youth Environmental Network

MA Department of Conservation and Recreation

Statewide Black Clergy

Student Conservation Association

Seeds of Hope Stewardships for Sustainability

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1

Boston Children's Museum

Boston Highlights



Urban Resident Information & Involvement

If you're looking for a large and enthusiastic audience, you are sure to find one at major sporting events, especially if that major sporting event is a Boston Red Sox game. In August, Smokey Bear was the guest of honor at Fenway Park in celebration of his 70th birthday. Smokey, Forest Service personnel, and partners shared information about wildfire prevention, invasive species management, and ways that citizens can help protect the nation's natural resources with the park's 37,016 attendees.



Partnership with Communities

More than 70 youth (ages 7-18) from urban areas in New England enhanced their awareness of the cultural and historical environmental practices of American Indians through field trips to public lands, and interactions with Native elders and natural resource specialists. Elders have indicated that knowledge sharing is best done in person and on the land. Traditional knowledge includes the practice of "careful noticing" in the forest, and the concept of planting different plants side by side to enhance their collective growth. This program was made possible thanks to a partnership between the Forest Service and the North American Indian Center of Boston, as well as a More Kids in the Woods award.

Boston Highlights



Stewardship of the Nation's Forests

The [Student Conservation Association](#) and the Forest Service launched a pilot Apprentice Crew Leader program, providing a University of New Hampshire biology student an opportunity to be a future green leader. The apprentice completed an intensive 3-week training that included leading a National Student Conservation Association Conservation Crew. The Apprentice Program is designed to engage youth from communities that are underrepresented in the environmental field.



Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness

Sometimes when surrounded by buildings and concrete, it can be hard to get inspired to work in the great outdoors. To help remedy this, the Forest Service partnered with the [Boston Youth Environmental Network](#) to take 84 high school students from the Boston area to New Hampshire's [White Mountain National Forest](#). Participants visited with Forest employees, tracked animals, toured habitat improvement projects and learned about forest science research at the [Hubbard Brook Environmental Forest](#).

Meet the Detroit Team



Detroit Coordinator

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Thomas Schmidt, Northern Research Station, Assistant Director

Kathryn O'Connor, Regional Office, Eastern Region Director of Public and Government Relations

Partners include:

Michigan State University Extension

The Henry Ford Museum

Detroit Zoological Society

The Greening of Detroit

Our Global Kids

Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Student Conservation Association

Detroit Highlights



Stewardship of the Nation's Forests

The wet, old-growth (mesic) forest located on Belle Isle has fewer invasive species and an improved wildwood trail thanks to the efforts of newly trained teachers and 542 students from Detroit Public Schools. The teachers logged 80 hours of training in forestry. They gained skills in teaching in the outdoors, and lesson planning to communicate the benefits of forests and natural resources. The learning culminated in on-the-ground projects in one of Detroit's marquee green spaces – Belle Isle.



Partnership with Communities

The 21st Century Conservation Service Corps Initiative engages young people and veterans to protect, restore and enhance America's Great Outdoors; in Detroit, two programs did just that. Youth spent six weeks as "apprentice" forestry technicians in Detroit's Rouge Park and the Hiawatha National Forest, thanks to funding from the Initiative and Johnson Controls. Two of the weeks were spent camping and working alongside Forest staff on the Hiawatha. They rerouted a mountain biking trail, improving a watershed effected by seasonal flooding. The Greening of Detroit's Green Connections program also received funding. Participants worked 12 weeks creating emergent forests and improving forest canopy in Detroit, as well on the Huron-Manistee National Forests, where they gained firsthand knowledge of careers in archeology, botany and forestry.

Detroit Highlights



Urban Resident Information & Involvement

In terms of reaching a constant and diverse audience, it's hard to top a renowned museum like [The Henry Ford](#), which attracts thousands of people to be inspired by yesterday's traditions and today's innovations. The Forest Service is proud to partner with the Museum on a number of different programs. These include Holiday Nights, where visitors learn about Christmas tree permits in national forests and sustainable management of the land; Penny Pines, where tree seedlings are distributed to 20,000 area children; and the Forest Service Historic Ranger in [Greenfield Village](#). Every year these programs reach approximately 750,000 people and inspire them to become stewards in their local neighborhoods.



Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness

Detroit UP is a program that allows Detroit students interested in natural resource careers to experience federal lands in Michigan's Upper Peninsula along with their families. Coordinator Lisa Perez and the sponsoring organization, Our Global Kids, worked with resource professionals from the [Hiawatha National Forest](#), [Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore](#) and [Seney National Wildlife Refuge](#) to provide hands on experiences. Youth from four Detroit public high schools explored the forest with a silviculturist, the lake with a hydrologist, fire equipment with a fire prevention specialist, and wildlife migration patterns with wildlife biologists. Once back in Detroit, families shared outdoor education opportunities with their neighbors and continued monthly outdoor activities.

Meet the Milwaukee Team



Milwaukee Coordinator

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The rest of the Milwaukee Urban Connections Team is in development; stay tuned!

Partners include:

Neighborhood House of Milwaukee
Keep Greater Milwaukee Beautiful
Urban Ecology Center
Betty Brinn Children's Museum
Lakeshore State Park
Lake Valley Camp
Safe & Sound

Milwaukee Highlights



Stewardship of the Nation's Forests

A number of teens gained firsthand knowledge of management of a national forest and career opportunities in the field of natural resources thanks to a partnership between the Forest Service and The Urban Ecology Center. As part of the first year of a two-year "Outdoors Leaders Program," Milwaukee teens visited Wisconsin's Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest where they observed improvements to recreation areas, logging operations, and maintenance of historic Civilian Conservation Corps cabins. In addition, the agreement supports local field trips to the new Urban Ecology Center Arboretum and Children's Forest by students from Milwaukee public schools.



Partnership with Communities

Being at the right place at the right time with the right message takes a village. Thankfully, the Forest Service works with some great local collaborators. Every summer, Forest Service conservation education interns work with partners to connect Milwaukee youth to nature all around them through interactive programs. This year, the team connected with over 1,200 Milwaukee youth through visits to places like Lakeshore State Park, Lighthouse Youth Center, Southshore YMCA, the United Community Center and Milwaukee's Urban Tree House site. The children took home valuable lessons about fire prevention and the benefits of forests.

Milwaukee Highlights



Urban Resident Information & Involvement

Reaching an urban audience requires seeking out and fostering good relationships with the local media. The Forest Service has found a great partner in [WUWM public radio](#). The Forest Service was featured in a number of pieces for the Lake Effect program, including one on the [conservation education intern team](#) and their experiences sharing conservation messages with Milwaukee youth. The Lake Effect program also featured the Forest Service's partnership with the Betty Brinn Children's Museum, and the exceptional [Smokey Bear & Woodsy Owl traveling exhibit](#).



Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness

"I want to be a forester when I grow up!" This is what the Forest Service and [Betty Brinn Children's Museum](#) hope to hear from visitors to the Smokey Bear & Woodsy Owl Home Sweet Home exhibit through an exciting new career component. The popular traveling exhibit has reached over 700,000 visitors since 2009. Hoping to inspire the next generation of natural resource professionals, the new career component will feature a forester, wildlife biologist, entomologist, and geologist. Kids and adults alike will see and hear what is involved in each of these program areas from the resource specialists themselves.

Meet the Minneapolis/St. Paul Team



Minneapolis/St. Paul Coordinator

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Partners include:

Laurentian and Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Centers
Minnesota Department Natural Resources
Salvation Army
St. Paul Parks & Recreation
Tree Trust
Wilderness Inquiry

Minneapolis/St. Paul Highlights



Stewardship of the Nation's Forests

Minneapolis/St. Paul high school students made on-the-ground improvements to a forest in their home state thanks to a long-standing partnership between the Forest Service and [Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center](#). Students returning for their second year of the environmental science immersion program came back as mentors and traveled to the [Superior National Forest](#) to assist recreation staff with campsite, trail, and portage maintenance projects. The mentors removed brush and dead trees (public hazards), cleaned fire grates (wildfire prevention), and cleaned the campsite (improving public enjoyment).



Partnership with Communities

Thanks to a partnership among the Forest Service, [Wilderness Inquiry](#), the St. Paul YWCA and Minneapolis Tree Trust, Minneapolis youth visited the two national forests in their state, a first for most of them! These 30 youth traveled to the [Superior](#) and [Chippewa](#) National Forests where they sampled recreation opportunities, worked with Forest Service personnel on service projects, like planting trees to help prevent soil erosion, and toured a local college to find out about natural resource areas of study.

Minneapolis/St. Paul Highlights



Urban Resident Information & Involvement

Throughout 2014, Coordinator Teri Heyer shared information with urban residents on the importance of trees and their benefits to urban areas, such as providing clean water. A perfect backdrop for this particular message was the [Lake Phalen Waterfest](#). Lake Phalen is an urban lake in St. Paul's Regional Park System. The lake is a popular recreation destination that drains into the Mississippi River. Since 2001, steps have been taken to convert riprap (rocks) along the shoreline to natural vegetation, making the lake and its watershed healthier.



Forest Service's Organizational Effectiveness

Did you know a student's potential for a career in the sciences can be determined as early as middle school? If students are not prepared, it can be very difficult to change course once in high school. The [Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center's](#) Environmental Science Immersion outreach program is a unique and effective way to address this issue. Of particular note is the eighth-grade environmental science class offering students who have left the science track an opportunity to get back on and qualify for advanced science classes in high school.

Get Involved!

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The forests & prairie in the Eastern Region welcome you; plan a visit today:

[Allegheny National Forest \(Pennsylvania\)](#)

[Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest \(Wisconsin\)](#)

[Chippewa National Forest \(Minnesota\)](#)

[Green Mountain & Finger Lakes National Forests \(Vermont/New York\)](#)

[Hiawatha National Forest \(Upper Michigan\)](#)

[Hoosier National Forest \(Indiana\)](#)

[Huron-Manistee National Forests \(Michigan\)](#)

[Mark Twain National Forest \(Missouri\)](#)

[Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie \(Illinois\)](#)

[Monongahela National Forest \(West Virginia\)](#)

[Ottawa National Forest \(Upper Michigan\)](#)

[Shawnee National Forest \(Illinois\)](#)

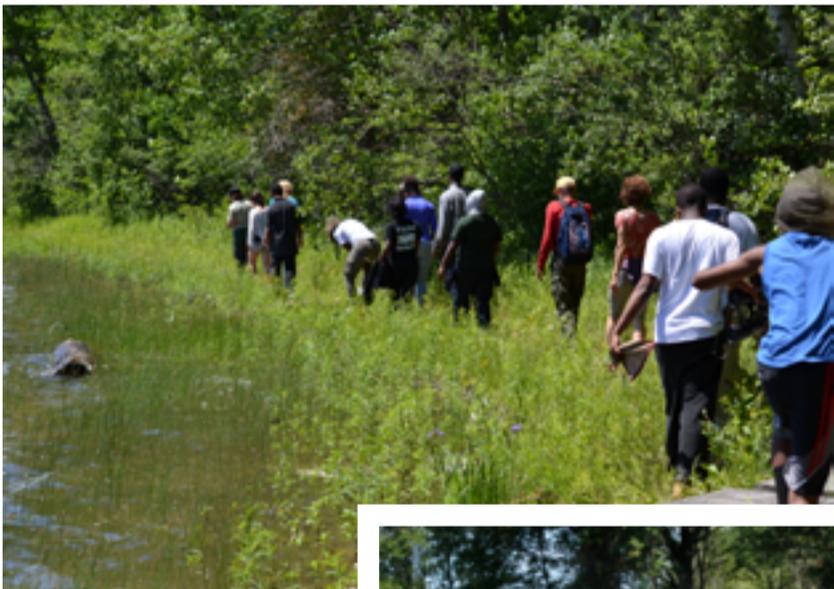
[Superior National Forest \(Minnesota\)](#)

[Wayne National Forest \(Ohio\)](#)

[White Mountain National Forest \(New Hampshire\)](#)

Wondering how close you are to a national forest?

[Check out this map and travel table.](#)



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