

Urban and Community Forestry Program 2017 Accomplishment Report – Connecticut

State Contact

Chris Donnelly
Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator
Department of Energy and
Environmental Protection
Division of Forestry
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: 860-424-3178
Fax: 860-424-4070
E-mail: chris.donnelly@ct.gov
Web sites: www.ct.gov/deep/forestry
www.ct.gov/deep/urbanforestry

State Forester

Christopher Martin
Connecticut Division of Forestry
79 Elm Street, 6th Floor
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: 860-424-3630
Fax: 860-424-4070
E-mail: christopher.martin@po.state.ct.us

Introduction

Connecticut is a heavily forested State that is also highly urbanized. More than 3.5 million people live on approximately 3.1 million acres of land, of which roughly 1.8 million acres (58%) are forested. About 73 percent of the land area is under tree cover. The State continues to become more and more urban, with 80% of the population living in urban or suburban environments. Connecticut is also a strong home-rule State that has 169 separate municipalities, each of which has full responsibility for local government. This emphasis on local self-governance can make urban forestry a very absorbing local activity within the State.

Highlighted Activity

Coming Together with Computers

Urban forestry, in its current form, depends heavily upon computers. It is difficult to imagine collating a complete street tree inventory, with its thousands of trees, much less doing any sort of detailed analysis, without the capabilities that computers provide. Similarly, the types of assessments that come from remote sensing are heavily dependent upon the use of computers to collect and interpret the data. As demonstrated by the i-Tree software suite and urban tree canopy cover assessment programs, the research and technology communities are continuously leading the forward movement of urban forestry by creating a whole range of new possibilities for municipal urban forest managers.

At the same time, the background of a typical urban forest manager or municipal tree committee member is working directly with trees. Their knowledge is based on hands-on experiences with individual trees and the urban forest as a whole – they see it as it looks in the field. Their motivation for the work they do most often comes through their personal connection with trees, not that abstract, technological information derived from computer processing of data, which is not helpful for them. For many of these people, a data-driven approach is not their native habitat, so to speak. This leads to a disjunction, or technological gap, for many folks engaged in urban forestry.

In the city of Hartford, this disjunction came to the fore in a discussion regarding urban heat islands. The City Forester and the Tree Advisory Committee were well aware of the existence of urban heat islands. However, when the question turned to figuring out the most effective way to deal with them, this led to other questions, such as: How does one define urban heat islands? How does one go about locating urban heat islands in the city? What is the best way to come up with tactics for dealing with urban heat islands once they are identified?

For those who are technologically oriented, a good GIS analysis is an excellent tool to use to answer these questions. The city has a very good GIS office (Hartford GIS Services (HGIS), a division of Metro Hartford Innovation Services). The University of Vermont Spatial Analysis Lab also conducts an urban forestry canopy cover assessment, and American Forests completes an analysis of the city's urban forest based on urban canopy and GIS data.

Meanwhile, those directly charged with managing the municipal urban forest in that city had also been very active. In recent years, the city had passed a leading edge urban forestry management ordinance, hired a highly qualified City Forester, and established an active Tree Advisory Commission through the new ordinance.

Yet, until it came to responding to these questions about the existence of urban heat islands in the city, neither group seemed to realize the capabilities that they already had at hand. Because of that, a meeting was called during this past year. Representatives from the University of Connecticut Center for Land Use Education and Research (CLEAR) and HGIS met with the City Forester and members of the Hartford Tree Advisory Commission. Members of the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Urban Forestry and Environmental Justice Programs were instrumental in calling this meeting.

During the meeting, one could almost see the light bulbs being turned on. The more technologically oriented people at the meeting had trouble early on understanding why the more field-oriented individuals had not already made use of the information available to them, until they realized that the information had not yet been presented in terms that the people who are more oriented towards field observations could readily understand. Likewise, more field-oriented members came to see how they could gain greater insight from the data if they learned to ask their questions more in terms of the data and how it was collected. Suddenly, information that had previously seemed as either obtuse or distantly related became very useful as each group got a better grasp of what the others were saying.

The State Urban Forestry Coordinator, along with the individual from the Environmental Justice Program, were key to helping bridge this technological gap. They did so without necessarily having strong technological insight. Being able to listen and direct traffic, in metaphorical terms, can be a big help. It is often the role of the State Coordinator to convene meetings and foster dialogue to help individuals and groups get over hurdles and see things in a new way. In the end, the payoff comes in the form of improvements for Hartford's urban forestry program.

The lessons from all of this? It should not be presumed that everyone else knows all that you know, or that people who should be talking to each other already are. In addition, some investments do not yield results right away, but need the time to mature and to find their level before results are seen. And finally, it is useful to ask questions, because sometimes those questions work like a scalpel, cutting through old understandings and leading new ideas out to be looked at in a new light.

Statistical Highlights

Managing Communities:	38
Developing Communities:	127
Population of Participating Communities:	3,536,256
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	14,750

