

Urban and Community Forestry Program 2017 Accomplishment Report – Iowa

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Introduction

The Iowa Urban and Community Forestry (IUCF) program provides technical, educational, and financial assistance to communities, individuals, and organizations. Program activities result in improved awareness of urban forestry and the benefits of managing for a sustainable and healthy natural resource.

IUCF combines Federal, State, investor-owned utility, and other funds to provide support and technical assistance to more than 300 Iowa communities annually. Grants are offered to communities throughout the State to increase tree canopy and improve urban forest resources. Partnerships with cities, counties, and nonprofit organizations enhance and broaden the impact of the IUCF program. During FY 2017, the program was able to utilize three full-time employees and part-time commitments from 12 district foresters that was the equivalent of five full-time employees, for a total investment of eight full-time employees.

Community Project Highlights

Operation ReLeaf and Plant Some Shade

In the fall of 2001, a partnership was formed between Alliant Energy and the Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Forestry Bureau to promote energy efficiency, urban forest tree diversity, and increased tree planting on private lands. *Operation ReLeaf* is a residential tree distribution program supported by Alliant Energy (\$300,000 annually) that funds an Urban Forestry Specialist with the Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau and provides partial funding to buy locally purchased landscape trees and sell them at greatly reduced prices to Alliant Energy customers for planting in their yards. Iowa DNR Forestry purchases these landscape trees through a Request for Proposal process, establishes local partnerships with county and city organizations, and coordinates tree distribution days with volunteers. During FY 2017, 16 tree distribution projects were organized during the spring and fall; a total of 3,924 landscape trees were sold to Alliant Energy customers at a cost of \$25/tree. Customers also received planting and care advice. The value of these trees is approximately \$255,060.

Following in the success of this model, a partnership was formed between MidAmerican Energy and the Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau in the spring of 2004 with the similar goals of promoting energy efficiency, urban forest tree diversity, and increased tree planting in private yards. The *Plant Some Shade* residential tree distribution program is supported by MidAmerican Energy (\$180,000 annually) and funds an Urban

Forestry Specialist with the Iowa DNR. During FY 2017, 12 projects were held in cooperation with local, county, and city partners to distribute a total of 3,104 landscape trees to MidAmerican Energy customers. The approximate value of the trees is \$201,760; more than 276 hours of volunteer service were donated to complete the projects.

Trees for Kids and Trees for Teens

The *Trees for Kids/Teens* program was established in 1990 to help Iowa schools celebrate Earth Day and Arbor Day. In the fall of 2009, it evolved into a formal grant program that offers trees for planting on school grounds or public areas. The *Trees for Kids/Teens* program produces natural resource-based educational materials for teachers and educators. Funds for the *Trees for Kids/Teens* program are provided by both public and private organizations. During FY 2017, 20 grants were awarded for a total grant amount of \$66,786, which leveraged an additional \$12,951 in voluntary matching funds and 1,580 volunteer hours.



Trees for Kids event in Floyd County, Iowa.



Trees for Kids event for Hoover Elementary School students in Mason City, IA.

Community Inventories

A goal of the Iowa Urban and Community Forestry program is to provide technical assistance through comprehensive tree inventories and management plans. Inventory data, essential for developing updated community management plans, is also used in addressing urban forest health challenges. Tree inventories provide important information, which is useful in demonstrating to decisionmakers the functional value of urban forests as well as their contribution to the overall health of Iowa's environment. A total of 28 community inventories were completed.

Success Story

There are many different ways to assess our urban forest. A growing method is using overall urban tree canopy. Urban tree canopy is defined as the layer of leaves, branches, and stems in a community that cover the ground when viewed from above. While this method may not indicate the health of the urban forest, it is a simple way for a community to get an overall picture of both residential and public trees. This urban tree canopy benefits community residents by cleaning air and water, reducing energy costs, and increasing property value. Urban tree canopy cover assessments can increase these benefits by providing a foundation of data on which to base tree canopy cover improvement goals.

The Iowa DNR determined canopy cover for all incorporated communities in the State using a high-resolution land cover dataset. This allows communities to see where they fall in comparison to the statewide average of 18.5% canopy cover at no cost. The Iowa Urban Forestry Council and the Iowa DNR have set a target to increase canopy cover by 3% in both public and private incorporated urban areas over the next 30 years. This would amount to about 3 million additional trees beyond removal

replacements. This may be a challenge with current and future pest and disease threats, but it is important to provide tree benefits to communities. This data has been incorporated in our Urban Forest Management Plan along with goal setting to improve overall canopy cover at the city level.

The city of Des Moines has taken a proactive approach to achieving its urban canopy goals. Knowing that they would need to increase tree planting in not only their city-owned plan but on private property as well, they launched a tiny trees program. The program’s goal is to make it easier to increase urban tree canopy by planting trees on private property. Residents can order up to five free seedlings and attend a local tree pickup each spring.

“This is what it’s all about: promoting people thinking about trees and planting them,” said city of Des Moines Urban Forestry Projects Manager Shane McQuillan about the program. This past spring the city distributed 5,600 trees, putting them on track to meet a 5% canopy increase to their current 29% canopy cover. By using seedlings, they are able to make a great impact over time on Des Moines canopy cover at a low cost as well as improve air and water quality, public health, and so much more.



Tree seedlings are boxed up for distribution at a "tiny trees" event in Des Moines.

Statistical Highlights

Managing Communities:	27
Developing Communities:	217
Population of Participating Communities:	1,973,763
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	1,856

