

# Urban and Community Forestry Program 2016 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 2016, the program was able to utilize 3 full-time employees and part-time commitments from 15 district foresters amounting to 5 full-time equivalents (FTEs) for a total investment of 8 FTEs.

## Key Accomplishments

### 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 (\$250,000 annually) that funds an Urban Forestry Specialist with the Iowa DNR Forestry Bureau. It also 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 2016, 16 tree distribution projects were organized during the spring and fall, and a total of 3,199 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 \$207,935, and more than 507 hours of volunteer service were donated to complete the projects.

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 (\$125,000 annually) and funds an Urban Forestry Specialist with the Iowa DNR. During FY 2016, 12 projects were held in cooperation with local,

county, and city partners to distribute a total of 3,350 landscape trees to MidAmerican Energy customers. The approximate value of the trees is \$217,750, and more than 201 hours of volunteer service were donated to complete the projects.



*Residents take part in a Plant Some Shade residential tree distribution in Waukee, IA .*

### **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, the program evolved into a formal grant program that offers trees for planting on school grounds or public areas. *Trees for Kids/Teens* produces natural resource-based educational materials for teachers and educators. Both public and private organizations provide funds for the *Trees for Kids/Teens* program. During FY 2016, a total of 27 grants were awarded. The total grant amount for the projects was \$84,546 and leveraged an additional \$10,173 in voluntary matching funds and 3,690 volunteer hours.



*Trees for Kids educational tree planting at Paul Lutheran School in Fort Dodge, 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, which is essential for developing updated community management plans, is also used to address urban forest health challenges. Tree inventories provide important information that is useful in demonstrating the functional value of urban forests to decisionmakers as well as their contribution to the overall health of Iowa's environment. A total of 38 community inventories were completed.

## **Community Highlight**

Huxley Tree Board members gather in the parking lot at Centennial Park early on a Saturday morning. They are volunteering their time in the summer months to conduct a community tree inventory of the 646 city-owned trees. Their many hours conducting the inventory will result in a tree management plan to improve the health of the city's trees. It is estimated that the trees will provide \$57,704 worth of benefits annually, but benefits continue beyond the inventory results. The engagement of the Tree Board in management of these trees will benefit the small community for years to come.

The community tree inventory is just one of the city of Huxley's successes through the Sustainable Urban Forestry Training and Assistance (SUFTA) program. The program is funded in partnership with the U.S. Forest Service and the Iowa DNR. The program assists communities by training and educating city staff, Tree Board members, elected officials, and community members to enable each community to develop and maintain a sustainable forestry program. In total, 20 communities will receive intensive training by a



*Huxley, IA, Tree Board members participate in the young-tree pruning SUFTA workshop.*

team of DNR Forestry staff in tree identification, tree inventory, tree planting and maintenance, and many other topics. Each community will receive a community tree management plan with canopy goals, scheduled maintenance, and a planting schedule. The focus is to prepare for and manage emerald ash borer, train municipal staff in urban forestry best management practices, and increase urban tree canopy.

During the 2015 grant application cycle, Huxley was one of 10 communities awarded a grant. The others were Algona, DeWitt, Hiawatha, Maquoketa, Newton, Sioux City, Spencer, Waverly, and Webster City. The 2014 grant cycle assisted 10 communities the previous year.

Tree Board members have noted that Sustainable Urban Forestry training has been an asset as they partner with the city to improve their urban forest. Tree Board Member Mike Betz said, “As for me, the hands-on tree identification and tree inventory survey was essential for recognizing and identifying various tree species. Other learning highlights were the information on proper tree mulching as well as guidelines for the pruning of younger trees for their long-term shape and health.” Wayne Messer, Tree Board member, touted his skills identifying symptoms of emerald ash borer on a tree in a nearby city: “Checking out the tree, I knew it was a white ash, and it did have some bark splitting on the branches and a little flecking. Before the classes I'm sure I would have thought that unknown tree is just having a hard time.”

### **Statistical Highlights**

Managing Communities:	24
Developing Communities:	308
Population of Participating Communities:	2,081,483
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	4,398

