Urban and Community Forestry Program
2016 Accomplishment Report – Wisconsin

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Introduction

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) Forestry Division's purpose is to work in partnership to protect and sustainably manage Wisconsin's forest ecosystems to supply a wide range of ecological, economic, and social benefits for present and future generations. The WDNR provides urban forestry technical, financial, capacity building, and promotional assistance through a team led by the State team leader that includes a partnership/policy specialist, finance specialist, six regional coordinators, and seven half-time specialists. Urban forestry services are also provided by a rural and urban forest inventory specialist and forest products services staff. Statewide policy development and implementation are managed with a team approach in partnership with the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council.

Staff Changes

Dick (Richard) Rideout, Urban Forestry Partnership/Policy Specialist, retired from WDNR after 25 years of dedicated service. Throughout his career Dick has demonstrated his passion to ensure that Wisconsin's urban forests are protected and sustainably managed. He is a consummate professional who has had an impact on the urban forestry profession well beyond the borders of his home State of Wisconsin.

Key Accomplishments

Urban Forestry Council

The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council is advisory to the WDNR and consists of 29 representatives from the green industry, government agencies, municipalities, and nonprofit and trade organizations. In addition to its advisory role, council members serve on various issue groups. On November 5, the council invited a WDNR staff member to facilitate strategic planning and help set the direction for these subcommittees. The council determined that they would focus efforts for the next 4 years on the following topics: urban wood utilization, advocacy/tech transfer, stormwater issues, and urban forest species diversity. View more council information.

Urban Forestry Financial Assistance

The WDNR Urban Forestry Grants program awarded $554,526 in 37 grants during Federal fiscal year 2016. Thirty-six grants were awarded to 26 Wisconsin communities, two counties, one township, two tribal governments, and five nonprofit organizations as part of our annual program. These projects were for a wide variety of projects. Eleven of those grants were Start-up grants awarded to municipalities trying to establish or reestablish their municipal urban forestry program. The remaining grant was a Catastrophic Storm grant for approximately $6,800. This grant was awarded to a community needing assistance with recovery from damage sustained to their urban trees as a result of a winter storm for which the Governor had declared a state of emergency. View more information about these urban forestry grant programs.

Education & Outreach

Urban Forestry staff coordinated a workshop at the 2016 Wisconsin Arborist Association/WDNR Annual Conference titled "Using Tree Inventories to Promote Community Programs or Business." A panel of developers and end users spoke on a variety of topics including statewide street tree databases, the use of i-Tree applications to quantify ecosystem services of trees, and success stories from Wisconsin municipalities that have seen urban forestry budget increases as a result of sharing the quantifiable benefits of trees with their elected officials. Workshop attendees broke into small groups led by presenters and Urban Forestry staff for further discussion on how these tools could assist their communities, organizations, and businesses.

WDNR staff presented at the Upper St. Croix River Basin Forestry Conference in mid-February to a diverse audience of citizens, nonprofits, land managers, and government employees. The presentation highlighted the city of Cumberland's ecosystem benefits summary, derived from i-Tree, and demonstrated the power of these tools and the benefits of a healthy urban canopy in small Wisconsin communities.

In partnership with Mid-State Technical College, Urban Forestry staff provided training in urban forestry and arboriculture to nearly 30 new WDNR Foresters. The training provides Foresters with an awareness of the resources, services, and urban forestry connections available to them and the communities they work with throughout the State. In addition, Mid-State gains exposure for its urban forestry facilities, curriculum, and instructors, which these Foresters pass along during career days and other events.

Increasing Urban Forest Canopy through Partnerships

Through a WDNR Urban Forestry grant, Golden Sands Resource Conservation and Development Council, a nonprofit organization representing 11 counties in central Wisconsin, is assisting communities in increasing emerald ash borer (EAB) awareness through Green Ribbon campaigns and preparing EAB management plans. The Green Ribbon campaign identifies to the public what ash trees look like and the detrimental effect losing these trees would cause while encouraging residents to seek information to manage trees in their own yards. To date, the project has adorned nearly 1,000 trees with green ribbons.

Urban Forestry staff partnered with the Bay-Lake Regional Planning Commission (BLRPC) to secure a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grant

to help mitigate the loss of canopy and canopy benefits due to or threatened by EAB. The funds will be used as a pass-through tree planting grant program for local governments and tribes within the Great Lakes Basin located in EAB-quarantined counties. Staff assisted in the marketing of the grants and shared their knowledge and experience in grant ranking procedures with BLRPC.

The Arborist Registered Apprentice (ARA) program garnered State approval and has signed contracts with its first employers and apprentices. The ARA program has attracted attention nationally and is being reviewed for adoption by the Federal Department of Labor, which would effectively make an ARA program available in over half of the country. The program is expected to help fill a growing demand for qualified arborists by opening new doors for arboriculture career promotion and workforce recruitment.

Working at a Higher Scale

In partnership with industry, Wisconsin Urban Wood, and Kenosha County, WDNR Forest Products and Urban Forestry Teams sponsored and presented at an urban wood mechanical harvesting demonstration and workshop. Nearly 60 urban forestry professionals attended the workshop, where thousands of ash trees were removed, processed, and sold into traditional timber markets. This method of harvesting allowed removal costs to remain low while putting the wood to a higher end use. The daylong event shared information about the harvesting strategy and operation, how to build partnerships with the timber industry, and the opportunity to see the methods employed to manage EAB and timber in urban forests.

Wisconsin's Urban Forest Assessment goes statewide this year. Urban Forest Inventory and Analysis field plots were established in 96 different communities, making Wisconsin the first State to expand this program to all Census urban areas and clusters. An urban tree canopy classification of all incorporated cities and villages is also underway. The Urban Forest Assessment was featured in the March 2016 issue of The Municipality magazine, which is distributed to over 10,000 local elected officials, staff, and partners throughout Wisconsin.

Projects to Watch

Joint Meeting of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council and the Minnesota Shade Tree Advisory Committee – These groups planned to meet in the fall of 2016 with the goal of sharing resources and finding areas of common concern with a special emphasis on storm water issues and urban wood utilization. This meeting will facilitate discussion of opportunities for collaboration on leveraging limited resources, increasing collective problem solving, and developing sustainable relationships to improve the state of our regional urban forest canopy.

Wisconsin Urban Landowner Survey – In collaboration with the U.S. Forest Service, WDNR is piloting an urban form of the National Woodland Owner Survey to better understand the people who own and manage our urban forests. The survey is paired with the Urban Forest Inventory and Analysis program in which data is collected on our urban trees and forest. This survey will be sent to 6,000 urban residential property owners in four metro areas: Milwaukee, Madison, Wausau, and Green Bay. View more details about the Wisconsin Urban Landowner Survey.

Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI) Graduate Workshop – After surveying past CTMI graduates, a need and desire for advanced training in urban forestry management was identified. Approval was received to develop and host a 2-day CTMI Graduate Workshop. The curriculum will be a combination of hands-on technical training as well as components that increase a community's capacity to most effectively manage its tree programs, including leadership training, networking, and case studies.

Web-Based Tree Data Aggregation Software System – The specifications for a public-facing geospatial software system to aggregate and analyze existing tree inventories are in development. This database will host tree inventories gathered from communities and organization throughout the State, allowing users to assess the structure, composition, condition, and benefits of our urban forests at a variety of spatial scales.

Statistical Highlights

Managing Communities:	100
Developing Communities:	167
Population of Participating Communities:	3,689,385
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	9,708