

## Grand Rapids Emerald Ash Borer Recovery Project Also Improves Water Quality

### The Challenge:

The city of Grand Rapids, MI, realized a valuable resource was being lost to the emerald ash borer (EAB) when the insect began infesting community ash trees. Based on tree inventories, the city estimated ash trees in the street canopy intercepted 6.3 million gallons of urban storm water a year, valued at over \$170,000. The canopy loss also presented an obstacle to meeting the city master plan goal of increasing tree canopy to 40 percent.

### The Solution:

Grand Rapids responded to this challenge with a strategic plan, collaborative actions, and a commitment to send clean water down the Grand River to Lake Michigan. With funding from Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grants through the Forest Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Grand Rapids planted and maintained nearly 6,000 trees in a three-phase recovery effort. Building from their [urban tree canopy assessment](#) and an EAB management plan, the city identified high-priority reforestation areas near waterways and in underserved communities. The city's tree canopy goal becomes attainable through projects like this one and the combined efforts of the city's Forestry Division, Friends of Grand Rapids Parks, and numerous volunteers.

### Resulting Benefits:

Upon completion of the third phase, Grand Rapids had treated or replaced over 75 percent of the affected ash trees identified in public spaces. The newly planted trees will prevent millions of gallons of untreated urban storm water runoff from entering the Grand River. They will also provide wildlife habitat, improved air quality, energy savings, and public health and economic benefits for years to come. By selecting diverse tree species for planting, an urban canopy was created that is resilient to pests and diseases. Additionally, this planting effort supported a broader initiative to make



*Volunteers pose for a group photo during a planting event. (Courtesy photo by Grand Rapids Department of Parks and Recreation)*

a meaningful difference in improving the water quality of the Grand River, an impaired waterbody, by planting trees; greening streetscapes; and installing other green infrastructure, such as rain gardens.

The Forestry Division worked with Building Bridges Professional Services, a neighborhood-based employment and training program, as a tree planting and maintenance contractor under these grants. Building Bridges trains at-risk youth to deliver high-quality, affordable services such as lawn care, landscape design, and handyman services.

### Sharing Success:

The city worked with partners and stakeholders to develop a tri-fold brochure with information on tree care and benefits. The brochure was distributed to residents in planting areas, encouraging them to help care for public trees and improve the tree canopy on their own properties. Additionally, the city helped Building Bridges build capacity and expertise in tree planting and care, which allowed the organization to successfully bid for tree planting contracts under two subsequent GLRI grants.

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*Grand Rapids replaced or treated over 75 percent of ash trees in public spaces through Great Lakes Restoration Initiative grants.*



**Forest Service  
Eastern Region  
State and Private Forestry**

Robert Lueckel, Acting Regional Forester  
626 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
414-297-3765  
[robert.lueckel@usda.gov](mailto:robert.lueckel@usda.gov)

Sherri Schwenke, Acting Deputy Regional Forester for State & Private Forestry  
626 E. Wisconsin Ave.  
Milwaukee, WI 53202  
414-297-3646  
[sherri.schwenke@usda.gov](mailto:sherri.schwenke@usda.gov)

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