

Illinois Ash Reclamation Project

Communities Prepare for Loss of Ash Resource

The Challenge

The emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle from Asia, continues to kill ash trees in the Midwest at an alarming rate. Of the estimated 130 million ash trees in Illinois, approximately 20 percent are growing in urban settings. Communities urgently needed options for utilizing ash wood to prepare for the impending loss of this valuable urban resource. Communities, landowners, and the green building industry needed training in the best methods for ash wood utilization. Networking among municipalities, industries, organizations, and other stakeholders would help make the public aware of the situation and build resources for the substantial opportunities that existed to reclaim valuable ash wood.

The Solution

The U.S. Forest Service, Northeastern Area State and Private Forestry Wood Education and Resource Center provided funding to the Illinois Conservation Foundation to take the lead in developing the Illinois Wood Utilization Initiative. A team formed partnerships with working city foresters and arborists and explored opportunities to develop wood-based industries that would promote the harvesting and use of valuable ash lumber.

The team awarded and administered subgrants to organizations to meet specific project objectives. These objectives included training arborists and wood processors to optimize the quantity and quality of wood products made from ash lumber, measuring the volume and quality of lumber potentially available for reclamation, promoting the use of low-value woody biomass, and creating markets for recovered ash lumber in the green building and furniture industries.

A sustained wood utilization industry evolved that provided both economic and environmental benefits to Illinois communities. The initiative became a model for other communities. Trainers held sessions on chain saw safety and log harvesting, conducted workshops on hardwood lumber

The Illinois Wood Utilization Initiative creates new markets for recovered ash and other types of lumber from urban trees.



This furniture was created from reclaimed urban wood.

utilization and recovery, and held sawmill demonstrations for over 150 participants. In addition, the team initiated the design and publication of a database and service directory of small, custom sawmill operators and secondary/niche wood products manufacturers.

Resulting Benefits

- Established an urban wood utilization initiative
- Provided technical and financial support to optimize the utilization of urban ash wood
- Created market opportunities for recovered ash lumber

Sharing Success

- Assisted the Chicago Furniture Designers Association and sawmills with a traveling juried furniture exhibition—Rising From Ashes; Furniture from Lost Trees—at the Morton Arboretum and the Chicago Center for Green Technology
- Developed a Web site that is specific to the wood-using public and located at <http://www.illinoisurbanwood.org>
- Developed, printed, and distributed two brochures—Harvesting Urban Timber and Emerald Ash Board—at conferences and trade shows
- Presented a Powerpoint presentation entitled Beetles, Bats, and Beyond: Harvesting Urban Timber at the 2008 Sustainable Cities Symposium
- Published 162 news articles about trade shows and the use of urban wood



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