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Connecticut's 2006 Accomplishment Report

Introduction

Connecticut is a highly urbanized, heavily forested state, with nearly 60% of the state listed as forested. At the same time approximately 80% of Connecticut's citizens living in urban or suburban environments. Thus, virtually all citizens of Connecticut live in close proximity to trees. The health and well being of the urban forest is of concern to everyone in the State.

This close connection between people and trees in Connecticut provides a great number of opportunities, and challenges. The state's older, industrial cities are densely populated and limited in financial resources. They also carry the legacy of an urban forestry infrastructure that is old, heavily used and suffering from a history of deferred maintenance. The older suburban areas face the consequences of decades of growth, much of it car-centric and inconsistently planned. Home rule, with its strong emphasis on problem-solving with a narrow, local focus, also leaves its impact. The newer suburbs and rural areas face the pressures of rising land values, sprawl and uncertainty about the best ways to deal with what seems to be a constantly accelerating problem.

Fortunately, good people and good programs are arising to face these challenges. The interest in urban forestry continues to grow, along with the expectations as to what this profession can apply to solving these difficult problems.

Disaster Response - During the past year, Connecticut U&CF Partners have spent a considerable amount of time discussing urban forest management plans – what they mean and how to go about establishing them. One opportunity identified is that of tree emergency management planning. Communities have been asking how they can best prepare themselves against a natural disaster and what they can do now to mitigate the possible effects of such a disaster. This discussion has been spurred in part by the publication of the Governor's Natural Disaster Plan, published in January 2006. This plan pays particular attention to the possibility of a large-scale category-3 hurricane, of the sort that devastated Connecticut in 1938. As a result of these discussions, the Tree Wardens and Public Works Departments in five towns around New Haven (New Haven, Orange, West Haven, Milford and Hamden) are working on a cooperative tree emergency management plan. While still in the formative stages, this plan promises to be both a large step forward towards helping these communities prepare for such a natural disaster and also serve as a model for other communities in the state.

Outstanding Programs Recognized - Other communities in the state have also been very active. The quality of work done by the volunteers and the City of Norwalk was recognized through an Award of Excellence presented to City by the Home Depot Foundation and the US Conference of Mayors. Norwalk was recognized for having the outstanding urban forestry program among small cities from throughout the United States. An example of the type of creative projects initiated by the citizens of Norwalk is the Neighborhood Tree Liaison program. Similar to many Connecticut communities, Norwalk is composed of many well-defined neighborhoods. The identification of local tree liaisons helps the city identify the tree needs in these neighborhoods and also gives an excellent point of contact through which the city can help expand its tree planting program.

A centerpiece of the Norwalk tree program is the recently dedicated Rosa Parks Arboretum adjacent to Columbus School in South Norwalk. This tree planting project, funded through a DEP Urban Forestry Inner City Grant, helps revitalize a section of the city and also provides the school system with an outdoor laboratory for their educational program. As a part of the grant, the City Director of Education created a science curriculum using the Arboretum that all grammar schools in the City can use.

Excellent programs can also be cited in many other Connecticut towns and cities, including Bridgeport, Enfield, Hartford, Milford, Monroe and more. The more that the message of urban forestry spreads to the local level and gets picked up by citizens and public officials, the more we see new and exciting projects being developed. The enthusiasm and creativity found in these projects are what keeps the state-wide program fresh, forward-looking and on-target, as it continues to benefit the citizens of the state.

Statistical Highlights

Number of Communities	169
Communities Participating	112 (99 Developing, 13 Managing)
Population of Participating Communities	2,846,204
Volunteer Assistance Generated	14,230
Tree City USA or Equivalent	12
Tree City USA Growth Awards	2