

# Accomplishment Report 2007 - New York

October 20, 2007

## State Contact

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## Introduction

With a new manager, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation's (NY DEC) Urban and Community Forestry (U&CF) Program is exploring ways to connect its activities to other endeavors, offering "green" solutions to environmental problems. While maintaining focus on the core functions of planting trees, educating volunteers and professionals on proper tree care and maintenance, and building support for urban forestry among municipal officials and residents, opportunities for partnerships are being sought to take advantage of the efforts of the Forest Service in quantifying the benefits of trees, as well as the State initiatives to combat climate change and sprawl. Providing communities with technical and financial assistance to grow larger, healthier, more diverse urban forests (32 planting projects were funded this year) will continue to receive the majority of our resources until we achieve our ultimate goal of maximum forest cover in all municipalities statewide. Additionally, the partnership with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) entered into by the previous program manager, involving planting trees and studying the resulting impact to the heat island effect is ongoing with a Request for Proposal for more planting in the Bronx. Recognizing the many and diverse benefits of trees, we are also looking for creative, new U&CF projects that strategically showcase this, by mitigating particular issues with "green infrastructure."

## Urban Watershed Project

With a surface area of 5,444 acres, the West Brook watershed is one of the largest watersheds in the Lake George basin and one of the largest contributors of stormwater runoff and water quality degradation. West Brook contributes approximately 50 percent of the total annual tributary runoff entering the south end of Lake George and infuses significant amounts of suspended sediments, nitrogen, phosphorous, and chloride into the south basin. Most of these pollutants are in runoff flowing from transportation corridors and developed land. The total sediment load to Lake George (estimated to be 270 tons annually) has been forming a delta at the mouth of the stream, which negatively impacts navigation, drinking water quality, fish spawning and aesthetics. Due to winter salting of the highways the level of chloride is four times higher than it was 20 years ago. Phosphorous, also a contaminant of concern, promotes the growth of algae and, in sufficient quantities, leaves the water green and murky. Algae impairs recreational uses, diminishes aesthetic enjoyment of the lake, impairs drinking water, alters the biological community as it consumes available oxygen, and may produce toxins that are harmful to animals and people. Currently, the 12-acre site at the mouth of West Brook is an abandoned amusement park, unused for over 20 years, with decrepit buildings and crumbling pavement.

The Village of Lake George and Warren County have committed to the need for an environmental project to remediate the stormwater load into Lake George from the West Brook watershed. The Fund for Lake

George, The Lake George Association (LGA) and The Lake George Land Conservancy along with the rest of the members of the Lake George Watershed Conference (a consortium of 25 local governments, nonprofit organizations, and state agencies) have identified the restoration and reforestation of this site as a priority project in its “Planning for the Future,” watershed water quality improvement management plan. This is a precedent-establishing coalition of environmental not-for-profits and municipal entities working together for the common goal of water quality protection with natural resource conservation..

The plan calls for removal of all paved surfaces and most (if not all) buildings, reforestation (with funding from the USDA Forest Service), wetland restoration, restoration of the meanders to West Brook, and the creation of nature trails with interpretive signage (e.g. how a wetland cleans water and the importance of native species). Stormwater devices such as retention and detention ponds and grassy swales will remove gross and finer sediments that contain many pollutants such as metals. Phosphorus-laden sediment will be filtered and deposited as it flows slowly through wetland vegetation. Reforestation with native species will be an important source of nutrient uptake, and in combination with wetlands will also positively impact groundwater, allowing for infiltration during dry months as well as slowing down the rate of water entering the lake. Native plants will help to keep out non-native, invasive species and supply habitat for wildlife. The park-like atmosphere will attract people and wildlife, help to keep Lake George (which is also used for drinking water) clean, and educate visitors as to how this project helps keep it that way. In the midst of a dense commercial center in Lake George Village, there will be an undeveloped oasis of green space with native plants, shade trees, trails, and open space enjoyed by visitors and residents alike. It is recognized that the amount of forested lands in a watershed, especially those bordering streams and shorelines, are an important determinant of water quality and the health of aquatic ecosystems. This project embodies the philosophy of the USDA, that trees and forests are critical to the health and proper function of watersheds.

### **Brownfield Restoration and Riparian Stabilization**

A pass-through grant from the USDA Forest Service will provide funding to the City of Poughkeepsie to plant trees as a significant component of a major project on a 15-acre former industrial site with about one-half mile of waterfront. In addition to creating opportunities for public recreation, this will have the additional environmental benefits of brownfield restoration and shoreline stabilization on the Hudson River, in an Environmental Justice community.

### **Buffalo Snowstorm**

Natural disasters can throw even the best plan right out of the window. The following excerpt from a USA Today article on October 20, 2006, says it best:

BUFFALO (AP) — Heavy, lake-saturated snow was falling like never before in Buffalo, at least not so early in the fall, piling up on a citywide canopy of maple, ash and oak trees still lush with leaves.

Strobes of lightning and bursts of thunder punctuated the overnight storm. And there was another sound, an eerie popping like gunshots from all directions. It was the sound of tree limbs cracking under the weight of the snow and leaves.

Karen and Clem Arrison rushed from tree to tree in their yard and the parkway where they live trying to shake off the pummeling snow, but the morning light showed the futility of their efforts.

The surprise storm, with its nearly two feet of snow, devastated the city's trees, damaging virtually every one.

"I felt like I was out there watching my old friends die," Karen Arrison said.

In Buffalo's treasured system of interconnected parks, parkways and circles envisioned in 1868 by landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, an estimated 90% of the trees will need care.

"This system is as unique and means as much to Buffalo as Central Park means to New York City," said Johnathan Holifield, chief executive of the Buffalo Olmsted Parks Conservancy, the not-for-profit group that oversees the system and its 11,000 trees.

The countless other trees shading streets and homes outside the system also suffered.

NYS DEC U&CF responded to this event with a State funded "2006 Snow Storm Grant" program, providing technical and financial assistance to the City of Buffalo as well as to 19 other affected municipalities. Although more than \$300,000 was distributed for tree damage assessment and corrective measures, it will take a great deal more just to deal with the pruning and replacement nightmare that was created, and decades to regain some of what was lost.



### **County Tree Ordinance**

The Long Island ReLeaf Group has finished drafting a tree ordinance for Nassau County, which will be submitted to the County Legislature's Planning, Development, and Environment Committee in October for review. The county executive declared in early spring a new initiative to create a "Healthy Nassau." Included in the program is a community forestry program, to try to revitalize parks and streets. The committee felt that in order to reach this goal and deal with some of the tree related issues that have occurred within the villages on county-managed roads, the first step was to create a tree ordinance. The ordinance would set up a committee to deal with community forestry problems and set basic guidelines on planting, maintenance and removal. The long-term goal of the committee is to get the county recognized as a Tree City USA. This will be the first county-wide street tree ordinance in New York State.



*A picture taken during the final inspection of the planting project undertaken by Nassau County on Nassau Road in Roosevelt and Freeport, NY. The project was undertaken as part a larger project to help revitalize and improve the declining community. Tree planting was funded under the Community Grants program.*

### **PowerPoints**

Six PowerPoint presentations have been created for use by DEC regional foresters. Topics include a general overview of U&CF; benefits of community trees; tree boards; tree ordinances; use of

professionals; and management plans. By developing these presentations in the central office, foresters will not need to continually “reinvent the wheel.” These presentations are meant to inspire and motivate communities to begin and strengthen U&CF programs.

### **Statistics**

Number of NY communities that have, or have potential to develop, programs: 753

Number of people living in communities provided assistance: 11,964,112

Number of people living in communities developing programs: 2,740,791

Number of people living in managed communities: 9,223,321

Volunteer assistance generated: 143,434 hours

Tree City USA communities: 100

Tree City USA growth awards: 9

Tree Line USA utilities: 5