

2009 Accomplishment Report – Connecticut

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Introduction

Connecticut is a highly urbanized, heavily forested State. According to U.S. Forest Service figures, nearly 60 percent of the State is forested. At the same time, the population density of the State averages better than a person per acre, with approximately 80 percent 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, is also having an 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 of what this profession can apply to solving these difficult problems.

Key Accomplishments

Several field projects from this past year are worthy of note. One of the projects to highlight involved the Senior Citizen Center in Oxford, CT. Oxford is one of those small Connecticut communities (population under 10,000) that is facing development pressure. At the same time, the community is working to keep its own identity as it also seeks to integrate itself with adjacent communities in the State.

In past years, the Town of Oxford has applied for and received grants to plant trees around the schools in town. More recently, the Town constructed a Senior Center and sought to hire a contractor to plant trees and shrubs around the building. However, the high school biology teacher took this opportunity to organize a Youth Conservation Corp as a club in the high school, and volunteered the services of the club for this tree planting.

In addition, because this high school teacher had previously worked in Bridgeport, the State's largest city (population almost 140,000—about a half hour away by car), he invited students from Bridgeport's youth volunteer program to come help with this planting at the Senior Center; in exchange, the young people from Oxford also volunteered to travel to Bridgeport to assist in projects in that community.

The outcome was a great opportunity for learning and for social sharing, all centered around the planting of trees and shrubs. The young people learned a lot about each other, about their different communities, about trees, and about their possibilities for the future, including potential employment in working with trees and plants. This grant project was a great success beyond simply planting trees.

In Bridgeport, a separate grant was awarded to the city for planting trees in a park adjacent to a school. This planting project also went very well; at the culmination of the planting, the city's Parks Department invited the adjacent middle school and the mayor to participate in a ceremony that would involve planting the last tree of this project. Some 35 middle school students sat with rapt attention for over 90 minutes as, at first, the mayor and members of the Parks Department spoke about planting trees, why trees are important, and how they need to be cared for properly. The students then watched members of the Parks Department use their heavy equipment to lift the tree and place it into the hole, and then, after properly preparing the root ball, filling in around the roots of the tree.

Other projects involved the preparation of a management plan for a town-owned forest parcel in the Town of Glastonbury, the planting of 23 trees for one neighborhood by the Knox Parks Foundation as part of the Trees for Hartford's Neighborhoods program, and the preparation of an urban landscape management poster by the Conservation Commission within the city of Torrington. In the city of Ansonia, the Ansonia Nature Center used urban forestry grant money to clear and maintain the native woody vegetation around the adjacent pond, and then prepare educational exhibits related to these plants and this work.

These are but a few highlights from around the State of Connecticut. Urban forestry continues to be an important contributor to the environmental and social quality of life in the State, and continues to remain on a solid foundation on a statewide basis.

Statistical Highlights

Number of Communities:	169
Communities Participating:	161 (128 Developing, 32 Managing)
Population of Participating Communities:	3,370,562
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	12,000
Tree City USA or Equivalent:	15
Tree City USA Growth Awards:	3