

# Urban and Community Forestry Program

## 2010 Accomplishment Report – Connecticut

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### Introduction

Connecticut is a highly urbanized, heavily forested State. The State has over 3.5 million people living on approximately 3.1 million acres of land, of which around 1.8 million acres (58 percent) is forested. The landscape of the State continues to become more urban, with some 80 percent of the population living in urban or suburban environments. The connection between the people of Connecticut and trees is strong, as they live, work, and play in this extensively forested State. For many of its citizens, the forest they know is the urban forest around them, and they are willing to commit time and effort into keeping this forest healthy and growing.

### Key Accomplishments

The origins of Connecticut's current urban forestry program are more than 20 years old. It is built upon the very solid foundations provided by longstanding State initiatives such as the Tree Warden Law (1901) and the Arborist Licensing Law (1919). Over the past two decades, the State's program managers have reached out in a number of ways, and have achieved a number of successes. Sometimes, though, the successes are better measured not as individual accomplishments but as the culmination of years of hard work and dedicated effort. This report will highlight two such accomplishments.

What the city of New Haven has accomplished during this past year is impressive. It comes from the commitment of previous years, as the city of New Haven, along with the Urban Resources Initiative (URI), its nonprofit partner, has jumped into urban forestry with both feet. Perhaps the most significant first step was the recognition on the part of both the city and URI that, as they work together, good things will happen, with the beneficiaries of their joint collaborations being the residents of the city. URI, which is affiliated with the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, brought youthful energy, academic insight, and a connection to the network of leading edge ideas to the table, while the city brought opportunity, flexibility, and a willingness to adapt in order to achieve.

The partnership has worked. With URI's willingness to reach out into the community, the urban forestry program in New Haven began to develop new partners and new supporters. The city helped URI identify priority concerns and became itself more aware and more energized, as it came to see what is possible. A major step forward was the city becoming a Tree City USA in 2008, as URI and the City Department of Parks, Recreation, and Trees cooperated on projects involving tree planting, inventory efforts, and policy recommendations.

With URI's involvement, New Haven also became a participant in a pilot project using state-of-the-art photo imagery interpretation techniques to develop an urban tree canopy cover analysis. This work was conducted by the University of Vermont, using funds from a U.S. Forest Service grant. This project gave folks concerned with trees, including those involved with URI and with the city's own tree program, an opportunity to impress upon the mayor and other political leaders the importance of trees and the need for more trees and tree canopy in the city.

The upshot of this effort is a commitment by the mayor for the city to plant 5,000 trees over the next 5 years, with a parallel commitment from the private and institutional community within the city. As a result, the city is a beehive of tree planting activities these days. One can scarcely travel down a street without seeing newly planted trees. Casual conversations among residents often wind up in a discussion about tree planting efforts they have been involved in, and how those trees are doing. To date, this year, some 700 trees have been planted on city property alone. While this has all just begun, it is already beginning to pay off benefits, with trees and tree canopy now recognized as a major part of what makes New Haven the city it is.

Meanwhile, in 2010, the city of Milford (population about 55,000) dedicated its main Green and the Lower and Upper Duck Ponds in the center of the city as a public arboretum. Back in 1999, a small group of people got together in Milford, determined to become involved with the trees in their city. Using the resources available to them, including the Meskwaka Volunteer Tree Training Program run by UConn Cooperative Extension, this group built themselves into a core unit of dedicated and knowledgeable volunteers, willing to tackle any of a number of challenges.

Among the challenges and accomplishments faced by this group has been the completion of a complete street tree inventory, with results geo-referenced and incorporated into the city's GIS system (the first such tree layer in the State); the passing of a tree ordinance that established the official Milford Tree Commission and gave it a legal role in the conduct of city business; the establishment of a tree nursery; and the planting of hundreds of trees throughout the city.



Volunteers and city employees plant trees in Milford, CT.

In the background, while all of these projects were ongoing, Milford Trees, Inc., as the incorporated volunteer group became [known], put the creation of a public arboretum in the center of the city at the top of their priority list. Using a grant from the State of Connecticut DEP (with the funds coming from the U.S. Forest Service), Milford Trees hired a landscape architect to develop the plans, while volunteers and city employees planted the trees. They also developed a map and booklet to show these plantings and encourage the public to come and be a part of the arboretum.

Finally, on September 25, 2010, the city held the dedication ceremony for the Milford Legacy Arboretum. Among the speakers was Glenn Dreyer, Arboretum Director at Connecticut College, who pronounced the new Legacy Arboretum as one of only four official arboreta in the State, the only one that is truly a public arboretum, and the only one with a specific focus on urban forestry.

These are but two examples of many that can be drawn from within Connecticut to demonstrate the growth and strength of the urban forestry program. All the while, the number of Tree City USA dedications has grown from 8 in 2000 to 17 in 2009 (and with more on the way), while the number of Certified Tree Wardens in the State has increased from none in 1998 to 212 today. The current urban forestry program was built on a good foundation. The activities of today will, in all likelihood, become an equally solid platform for the next wave of urban forestry to occur, as the program continues to build, succeed, and look forward to more accomplishments.

### **Statistical Highlights**

Managing and Developing Communities:	161
Population of Participating Communities:	3,367,297
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	12,250