

Urban and Community Forestry Program

2011 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). However, even though the program has come far over the past few decades, there is still much to be accomplished.

The State program continues to revolve around building capacity at the local level. The small grant program that is made possible by the U.S. Forest Service is key to this effort, as is the enthusiastic involvement of people from many towns and many backgrounds from throughout the State. It could very reasonably be said that any measurable successes at the State level are simply the reflections of what is happening at the local level.

Lately, there has been a noticeable increase in interest in inventories and other methods of tree assessment within the State. Over the past year, both Torrington and East Lyme completed street tree inventories for each of their town centers, while West Haven and Milford have begun work on a survey of randomly selected parts of town, with each having the goal of a completed 100 percent inventory for their municipality somewhere further down the road. All of these efforts involved considerable volunteer effort along with extensive involvement by town personnel and the use of town resources.

These inventories and assessments were very timely because Connecticut is very concerned about the proximity of two major invasive insects near the borders of the State. In 1998, the Asian longhorned beetle was found 30 miles west of the southwest border of the State and then, in 2008, was found 30 miles north of the northeast border. In 2010, the emerald ash borer was found to be 30 miles west of the northwest border, leading to a sense that it is very likely that one of these pests will be found in the State. It also led to the determination to find it early so that it can be dealt with quickly and effectively.

This has led to many outreach and training sessions that involve a wide range of participants, including arborists, tree wardens, foresters, urban foresters, professionals of all sorts, and a whole host of volunteers. There is now a much more heightened sense in the State that the trees need protection and that it is up to everyone to pay attention to trees to help find and deal with threats to the trees and forests.

Of course, insects are not the only problem that nature will offer to test trees. Storms have proven to be a great problem too, especially for the urban forest recently—not only for the damage that occurs to the trees, but also due to the disruption these storms have caused to the essential services of society, including electrical distribution. In particular, the repercussions of Tropical Storm Irene are still being felt as policy makers at all levels discuss the importance of the urban forest and the need to balance green and grey infrastructure.

Meanwhile, there continues to be a strong emphasis on licensing and certification programs in the State. Despite the well-respected difficulty of the Arborist Licensing Exam, there are currently some 928 individuals who hold the license in Connecticut, with the great majority active as tree care professionals. There are also 151 licensed landscape architects. While the tree wardens are not required to have any specific degree of qualifications, the voluntary certification program run by the Tree Wardens Association of Connecticut (TWAC) has led to there being nearly 300 individuals who have learned the essentials of being a tree warden. In addition, roughly 129 tree wardens out of the 169 tree wardens appointed either have their qualifications certified by the TWAC or hold professional credentials that establish their qualifications.

To highlight one planting project during the year: On May 7, several volunteers from the city of Bridgeport joined in the planting of some 60 trees in downtown Bridgeport. Helping out with the planting were Bridgeport Mayor Bill Finch; representatives of the city's Parks Department; Groundwork Bridgeport Director Jack Dillon; and approximately two dozen volunteers from a variety of Connecticut law firms, businesses, and associations. The planting was organized in connection with the American Bar Association (ABA) "One Million Trees Project – Right Tree for the Right Place at the Right Time."

The ABA's goal is to plant 1 million trees across the United States by 2014. Local Connecticut lawyers chose Bridgeport as Connecticut's largest city and one that is in great need of trees, particularly following last June's tornado. That storm cut a violent path through the city, including many of the same locations chosen for this tree planting.

The whole event turned into one large cooperative effort, with the city providing the water, lawyers carrying trees and mulch to planting holes, and everyone involved in seeing to it that the trees got off to a good start.

As summed up by Mayor Finch, "Trees are an essential element to reaching our goal of making Bridgeport the cleanest, greenest city in the region. I am happy that the local American Bar Association affiliate chose Bridgeport for their 'One Million Trees' volunteer effort. And, I look forward to working with all the volunteers to fulfill my goal of planting 2,012 trees by 2012."

Statistical Highlights

Managing and Developing Communities:	162
Population of Participating Communities:	3,537,390
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	13,475

