

# Urban and Community Forestry Program 2011 Accomplishment Report – West Virginia

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## Introduction

The West Virginia Urban and Community Forestry Program began in 1991 with the mission of encouraging municipal governments to begin providing long-term care for trees on public property across West Virginia. Three positions comprise the full-time urban forestry staff that delivers the program statewide to cities and towns. The Urban Forestry Coordinator, Bob Hannah, is responsible for overall program administration. We have a new Urban Forester, Jesse Wise, whose primary responsibility is to educate community tree care providers so that they have a variety of skills and knowledge necessary to successfully manage their urban forests. The Partnership Coordinator, Andy Sheetz, coordinates volunteer programs and develops financial partnerships with corporate sponsors to fund community tree care activities.

## Key Accomplishments

This year, we began addressing several major issues impacting urban forestry and quality of life that were identified in our Forest Resource Assessment. The urban forestry issues identified in the assessment include building program capacity at the community level, climate change mitigation and energy conservation, population dynamics and resource allocation, air quality, public drinking water quality and quantity, and recreation. A recent Competitive Allocation Request for Proposals (CARP) grant will allow us to expand urban tree canopy cover assessment and to develop strategies for enhanced program delivery within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

## Project Narratives

**Title:** Urban Tree Canopy (UTC) Assessment and Enhancement of the Potomac Tributaries – CARP Grant

**Location:** Counties within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed

**Objectives:** Protect and Improve Water and Air Quality, Reduce the Impacts of Land Use Change, Mitigate Climate Impacts, and Building Program Capacity

The Eastern Panhandle of West Virginia is developing faster than any other region of the State with potential negative impacts on air quality, water quality, competing land uses, quality of life, and public health. Assessing and managing tree canopy cover is the most practical and effective means for urban forestry to positively influence these issues.

### Program Components

Grants and Resource Assistance  
Chesapeake Bay Community Grants  
Cool Community Grants  
Project CommuniTree  
Mountaineer Treeways Grants  
Awareness and Outreach  
Chesapeake Bay Forester  
Tree City USA  
Personal Contacts  
Technical Assistance  
Community Support  
Workshops and Training  
Educational Material  
Partnerships  
Municipal Tree Restoration Program  
Corporate Sponsorship  
Volunteer Participation  
Tree Advocacy Organizations  
Mountaineer Treeways Seedlings

This grant will foster partnerships among government agencies, private organizations, units of local government, and volunteers that will utilize UTC assessments to identify high-priority forest land and develop land management strategies at county and municipal levels. Management strategies will involve setting canopy cover goals, determining high-priority planting areas, and fostering tree planting initiatives within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed to increase public benefits from both urban trees and surrounding forest land.

Our first accomplishment has been to develop a position description and advertise for a project coordinator. Interviews are now scheduled and this position should be filled soon. The next phase will involve utilizing statistical sampling and aerial imagery to determine the extent of the existing tree canopy along with basic land cover types. A key project partner, the Cacapon Institute, will contract with the Spatial Analysis Laboratory located in the University of Vermont to perform this land cover assessment. We will assess the area of impervious surface, open green space, bare soil, water, buildings, roads/railroads, and other paved surfaces. Based on this sampling, we will identify the towns that would benefit the most from expanded tree canopy and target them for assistance. Municipalities will be encouraged to declare a UTC goal, develop plans for increasing tree canopy, and care for existing trees. Towns will be encouraged to set land aside as woodlots to enhance wildlife habitat and adopt beneficial riparian forest buffers on public lands. Local volunteers will be engaged in forest stewardship and public outreach and education. A mechanism for scoring and ranking community progress toward enhanced tree canopy will be developed. Funding for planting trees in identified priority areas will also be a part of this effort.

This effort has allowed us to begin significantly advancing important objectives identified from our urban forestry assessment, including helping build program capacity at the municipal level, conserving energy and mitigating climate extremes, reducing the impacts of urban growth and loss of forest land, maintaining and improving water and air quality, conserving green spaces, and enhancing canopy cover in urban areas.

**Title:** New Urban Forester – Jesse Wise

**Location:** Region 1 - Romney

**Objectives:** Technical Assistance, Building Program Capacity, and Outreach

In July, we welcomed a new Urban Forester, Jesse Wise, to our program. To date, Jesse has primarily been working with cities, nurseries, Mon Power, and Potomac Edison to coordinate the Municipal Tree Restoration Program (MTRP). This is a utility-sponsored tree replacement program designed to reduce tree and electric utility conflicts. Her work has included assisting the 16 cities eligible for the 2011 program with selecting appropriate replacement species and determining planting sites as well as working with local nurseries to obtain MTRP-approved tree species.

Jesse has also taken the lead with West Virginia becoming part of the American Grove [online community]. The West Virginia Grove site launched last month and will serve as an online meeting place and reference clearinghouse for both urban forestry professionals and interested citizens across the State. As the West Virginia Grove coordinator, Jesse will keep the site updated with a calendar of events, reference material, and various project opportunities to keep citizens, volunteer organizations, and municipalities engaged in urban forestry.

Soon, Jesse will begin hosting a variety of workshops and training sessions across the State. Initial topics will include proper pruning and hazard tree identification. She will also be working with our Chesapeake Bay Forester, Herb Peddicord, and staff of the West Virginia Conservancy to organize Project CommuniTree tree planting events and training sessions. Additionally, she will be involved with implementing our Urban Tree Canopy Assessment and Enhancement CARP grant within the Chesapeake Bay Watershed.

**Title:** WVU Arboriculture and Urban Forestry Program

**Location:** WVU - Morgantown

**Objectives:** Education, Building Program Capacity, and Research Opportunities

West Virginia University formally launched the arboriculture and urban forestry program in August 2011 when Dr. Greg Dahle joined the faculty. He has been charged with growing the interest in arboriculture from the current minor into a formal discipline.

WVU views arboriculture and urban forestry as a strong avenue for growth in the world of natural resources management. Over the past 10 years, approximately 10 percent of the graduating forest resource management students have been placed in the arboriculture industry. This is impressive given there are currently no formal courses on the subject at the university.

Dr. Dahle hopes to change this by developing two undergraduate courses focusing on arboriculture and urban forest management and one graduate level course. The development of the courses will take into account requirements for the Society of American Foresters' specialized accreditation in Urban Forestry. WVU students will be well prepared for employment in urban forestry and the arboriculture industry upon graduation.

Our program will also benefit from additional research opportunities with WVU. Dr. Dahle will continue the research he began at Rutgers University using biomechanics to gain insights on tree development. He is interested in learning more about how the transition of branches and stems from juvenile to mature growth alters both tree form and material properties such as wood strength. He is also seeking to partner with the arboriculture industry and fellow researchers to build his research program.

**Title:** West Virginia Arbor Day Poster Contest

**Location:** Statewide

**Objectives:** Conservation Education, Tree Planting, and Community Outreach

For 19 years the Arbor Day Foundation has sponsored a nationwide Arbor Day Poster Contest. However, with the conclusion of the 2010 contest they decided to end their sponsorship of a National Arbor Day poster contest. This program was an important outreach tool and educational opportunity for West Virginia. Consequently, we partnered with the Urban and Community Forestry Council and the West Virginia Forestry Association to maintain this capacity.

Partnership Coordinator Andy Sheetz organized the first West Virginia Arbor Day Poster Contest with the theme "What Tree Is It?" Andy developed several educational activities, including a tree leaf identification guide, seek and find puzzle, and a crossword puzzle with the goal of teaching students how to identify common tree species. These activities were available for fourth and fifth grade art and science teachers to download from our Web site. Teachers were encouraged to utilize a variety of educational tools in their classrooms. Students were provided with materials and instruction to produce posters based on this theme.

Posters were judged and three winners were selected. The State Winner received a \$100 U.S. Savings Bond from the West Virginia Forestry Association, a framed certificate, a copy of their artwork, and an Arbor Day t-shirt. These items were presented during a tree planting ceremony at their school. The second and third place winners won a framed certificate and a copy of their artwork, and also had a tree planted in their honor on school property.

Contest announcements and educational materials have already been distributed to teachers for the 2012 contest.



2011 West Virginia Arbor Day Poster Contest Winner, Tori Carr, and 5th Grade Teacher, Joan Carr, from Kingwood Elementary.



Students from Bluefield Intermediate School plant trees during a 2011 Bluefield Arbor Day activity.



The Chesapeake Bay Forester provides tree planting instructions to Musselman High School students.



Partnership Coordinator Andy Sheetz (center) presents Bluefield Tree Board Chair Tim Probert with the city's 10th Tree City USA Award.



Students from Musselman High School plant trees provided by a Cool Community Grant.



West Virginia's State Animal was sighted in our State Tree during a street tree inventory in Summersville this fall.

## Statistical Highlights

Managing Communities:	7
Developing Communities:	66
Participating Communities:	73
Technical Assists:	249
Population Impacted:	415,100
Volunteer Hours Generated:	4,620
Tree City USA Communities:	15
Tree City Growth Awards:	3
Trees Planted:	3,767
Training Hours Provided:	957

