



Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council

Biennial Report

Presented To:

**Wisconsin
Department of
Natural Resources**

2025

On behalf of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, I am pleased to present the 2025 Biennial Report to the Department of Natural Resources. This report highlights the Council's actions and accomplishments over the past two years.

Inside, you will find updates from our four issue groups, including key achievements and future plans for each. The report also provides a summary of urban forestry grants and award recipients, as well as an update from the Wisconsin Council on Forestry.

Additionally, we have included a comprehensive list of accomplishments and updates from both the Urban Forestry Council and the Urban Forestry program, along with advisory recommendations. Your continued support for these recommendations and initiatives is essential to maintaining and enhancing the valuable services that Wisconsin's urban forests provide to our communities.

Linda M. Cadotte, Chair
Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council



Membership

Officers

Linda Cadotte, Chair

Representing concerned citizens
Sr. Regional Communications Advisor, Cenovus
Energy

Matt Koepnick, Past Chair

Representing the Urban and Community Forestry
Society
City Forester, City of Racine

Matthew Staudenmaier, Vice Chair

Representing medium-sized communities
Forestry Supervisor, City of Eau Claire

Members

Kirsten Beyer

Representing Higher Education
Director, PhD Program in Public &
Community Health, Medical College of Wisconsin

Gregory Blick

Representing Ho-Chunk Nation Forestry
Forestry Division Manager

Wendy Braun, P.E.

Representing environmental groups
North American Stormwater & Erosion Association

Travis Derks

Representing Wisconsin Parks & Recreation
Association
Landscape Operations Manager, City of Oshkosh

Paul Fliss

Representing utility arborists
Regional Forester, We Energies

Lee Fredericks

Representing elected officials
Village Trustee, Village of Slinger
Western Great Lakes Territory Manager, Rainbow
Ecoscience

Jeffrey Kluslow

Representing large cities
Urban Forestry District Manager, City of
Milwaukee

Mitchell Lannan

Representing the Wisconsin Department of
Agriculture, Trade & Consumer Protection
Forest Entomologist

Michael Lawrenz

Representing the Wisconsin Arborist Association
Arborist, Hoppe Tree Service

Paul Morrison

Representing the Urban Wood Network
Owner, The Wood Cycle of Wisconsin

Evan Miller

Representing the League of Wisconsin
Municipalities
Government Affairs Specialist

Membership

Members

Brian Pelot

Representing medium-sized communities
City Forester, City of Green Bay

Allen Pyle

Representing University of Wisconsin–Madison
Extension
Horticulture Outreach Specialist

Ben Reince

Representing commercial arborists
Executive Vice President, Wachtel Tree Science

Christa Schaefer, PLA

Representing the Wisconsin Department of
Transportation
State Transportation Landscape Architect

Aaron Schauer

Representing technical colleges
Urban Forestry Instructor, Gateway Technical
College

Kristi Sherfinski, PLA

Representing landscape architects
Professional Landscape Architect, LANDCO₂

Jordan Skiff

Representing public works
Wastewater Superintendent, City of Sheboygan

Jonathan Stickels

Representing the green/nursery industry
Nursery Manager, Mariani Plants

Jeffery Treu

Representing statewide natural resource
advocates
Regional Forester, WE Energies (Retired)

Rex Zemke

Representing interested Wisconsin citizens
District Groundskeeper, Wausau School District

Non-Voting Members

Jill Johnson

United States Forest Service
Midwest Urban Forestry Coordinator, USFS

Jeff Roe

Wisconsin DNR, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Team Leader

Patricia Lindquist

Wisconsin DNR, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Coordinator

Laura Buntrock

Wisconsin DNR, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Partnership & Policy Specialist

Jenn Janness

Wisconsin DNR, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Council Liason

Council Purpose

The purpose of the Council is to advise the Wisconsin State Forester and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources on the best ways to preserve, protect, expand and improve Wisconsin's urban and community forest resources, as authorized by Wisconsin Statute s. 15.04 (1)(C).

Photo Credit: Wisconsin DNR

Goals

1. The Council shall advise and assist the Wisconsin State Forester to develop, implement, monitor and revise a state urban forestry plan.
2. The Council shall advise the Wisconsin State Forester and Department of Natural Resources on activities to further the understanding, appreciation, practice, and benefits of urban forestry in Wisconsin.
3. The Council shall strive to assist all parties involved in urban forestry matters to coordinate activities to avoid duplication, inefficiency and conflict, with the ultimate goal of the betterment of the urban forests in Wisconsin.

Council Overview

The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council currently consists of 24 voting members representing a broad spectrum of urban forestry interests. Our members come from diverse sectors, including elected officials, municipal foresters, landscape architects, private arborists, tree nurseries, educators, urban wood users and many others.

Members are appointed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary to three-year terms, with the option to renew for additional terms if in good standing.

Council members participate in four meetings annually and are expected to serve on at least one standing committee or issue groups, as listed below.

The Council leverages background information and knowledge through issue groups to address statewide concerns. Issue groups are established and periodically revised to ensure alignment with council objectives. Each member is asked to join at least one of these groups and participate as necessary during and outside of regular council meetings. One or more DNR Urban Forestry staff members are assigned to support each group and to connect the groups more solidly to the DNR.

Reports from each issue group follow the Advisory Recommendations.

Standing Committees:

- Executive Committee
- Nominations & Orientation Committee
- Awards Committee

Issue Groups:

- Workforce Development
- Public Health & Trees
- Stormwater
- Species Diversity



Urban Forestry Council members and DNR staff, Plover, Sept. 2025.

Advisory Recommendations

Program Funding And Staffing

Maintaining a cohesive urban forestry staff is critical to effectively meeting goals, operating grant programs, raising awareness and conducting vital research.

The Council recommends that the DNR recruit a new full-time, permanent Outreach and Partnership Coordinator position as soon as possible. This position would encompass duties of the current Outreach and Council Liaison LTE positions, which have experienced staff turnover in recent years. This would provide more continuity for the council and support an ongoing strong connection with the DNR Urban Forestry team.

The Council recommends that the vacant North Central Coordinator position be filled as soon as possible. Our communities are served more effectively with a coordinator dedicated to each area of the state. This would also alleviate the burden of additional work the DNR staff have taken on over the past year.

The Council recommends reviving the Champion Tree program in Wisconsin as there has been renewed interest in this popular initiative. We understand that managing this program exceeds the current staffing capacity of the DNR. Therefore, we recommend hiring an LTE to administer this program successfully.

Grant Funding

The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council encourages continued urban forestry grant program improvements, making these resources most effectively deployed throughout the state.

Modernization of policies and procedures that cover the urban forestry grants program is crucial to ensure effective and efficient execution of grant-funded projects that increase tree canopy cover and diversify tree species, improve urban forest health and resilience, and improve local capacity to manage and care for the urban and community forest.

The council recognizes the positive impacts the program has on urban forests throughout the state and acknowledges that the program is greatly oversubscribed on an annual basis. Increased investment in this program will ensure continuance of a healthy urban forest throughout Wisconsin.

Advisory Recommendations

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Grant Program

Wisconsin was awarded \$4,875,000 in IRA funds. As subawards through grants and contracts have been established throughout Wisconsin, we recommend continued engagement with the Council as funds continue to be disbursed and project outcomes realized. We recommend focusing on accountability and tracking both successes and challenges associated with the disbursement of these funds. Furthermore, we recommend continued reporting and communication of positive impacts to all key stakeholders.

Stormwater Credits For Trees

Urban trees reduce stormwater by capturing and storing rainfall in the canopy and releasing water into the atmosphere through evapotranspiration. Trees also slow and temporarily store runoff, which further promotes infiltration and decreases flooding and erosion downstream. Communities that spend significant funds to meet water quality limits as part of a Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System may realize savings if existing credits for leaf management programs were expanded to additional land-use types and tree canopy levels and new credits were developed for maintaining or increasing urban forest canopy in their community.

Therefore, the Council urges the DNR to cooperate across Forestry and External Services Divisions to invest in scientific studies to quantify tree planting and maintenance impacts on phosphorus loading in Wisconsin and to expand the existing credits for leaf management programs.

Tree Diversity

The Council recommends the DNR collaborate with the Species Diversity Issue Group to develop a Wisconsin Tree Selection Guide to promote diversity, including species and age class, within the tree canopy throughout the state of Wisconsin.

Technology

Technology has fundamentally shifted the ability to track and analyze the urban canopy in Wisconsin. To maintain this momentum, the Council recommends continued investment in both emerging and proven tools, such as i-Tree.

Issue Group Reports



Stormwater

The purpose of the Stormwater Issue Group is to raise awareness regarding the significant role an increased urban forest canopy can play to positively impact stormwater runoff quality and quantity. Trees provide considerable stormwater volume uptake and pollution control through rainfall interception and intensity reduction; stormwater infiltration and uptake; and nutrient load reduction.

Leaders: Wendy Braun & Travis Derks **DNR Support:** Laura Buntrock

Members: Linda Cadotte, Lee Fredericks, Brian Pelot, Christa Schaefer, Jordan Skiff, Kristi Sherfinski & Evan Miller

Trees & Stormwater Credits

The committee continues to engage with DNR Forestry and Stormwater staff regarding the use of trees to achieve stormwater credit in Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) areas. DNR Stormwater staff provided updates at the 2024 issue group meeting.

Biochar

- USDA Forest Service researcher, Ron Zalesny, presented on biochar at the September 2023 Council Meeting. To further explore this topic, the issue group requested DNR staff complete a literature review on biochar applications for urban tree plantings and stormwater management. Based on the results of the literature review, the issue group recommends gathering more information on local biochar research and applications.
- Council members Brian Pelot and Matt Koepnick presented at a Council meeting, sharing their experiences and knowledge of producing and using biochar in urban tree plantings.

Outreach To Other Groups

The Lake Michigan Bird Observatory (LMBO) received a Daybreak Fund Grant to study the production and use of biochar in urban tree plantings in five Wisconsin communities. At the request of an issue group member, LMBO is presenting this research at the NASECA Annual Conference in February 2026.

New Goals

- Engage with American Public Works Association - WI Chapter and public works professionals to better understand their needs and challenges, identify potential areas of collaboration and share information on the benefits of urban trees and biochar applications to stormwater quality and quantity.
- Work with the Executive Committee to focus a council meeting on the production and use of biochar in urban tree plantings and stormwater management. Potential speakers could include DNR Forest Products Services staff, MN DOT staff, UW researchers and council members who are engaged in biochar projects in their own communities.

Workforce Development

The purpose of the Workforce Development Issue Group is to connect the Wisconsin urban forestry community and other green industry organizations through workforce development activities to build strong relationships and assist in various initiatives to increase awareness and help bring more people into the green industry.

Lead: Ben Reince **DNR Support:** Brian Wahl & Elton Rogers

Members: Aaron Schauer, Michael Lawrenz, Brian Pelot, Matt Staudenmaier & Jeff Kluslow

Key Priorities Include:

Increasing Awareness And Strengthening The Urban Forestry Brand

Many students and job-seekers are unfamiliar with urban forestry careers. A clearer statewide message is needed to highlight career options, public benefits and the value of the profession.

Expanding Youth Engagement

Programs like LEAF provide essential early exposure. Empowering youth engagement through nature centers and other entities who consistently promote environmental awareness and the value of trees. The group supports expanding hands-on learning, teacher engagement and clearer connections to technical colleges and apprenticeships.

Improving Workforce Retention

Retention challenges — such as physical job demands and competition from other trades — limit workforce stability. Better onboarding, mentorship and career-ladder development are needed.

Collaborating With The Wisconsin Arborist Association

Stronger alignment with WAA on training, certification and outreach would reduce duplication and reinforce a unified professional network.

Overall, the group aims to ensure individuals intentionally pursue careers in urban forestry and arboriculture, helping build a strong, skilled and sustainable workforce for Wisconsin's future.

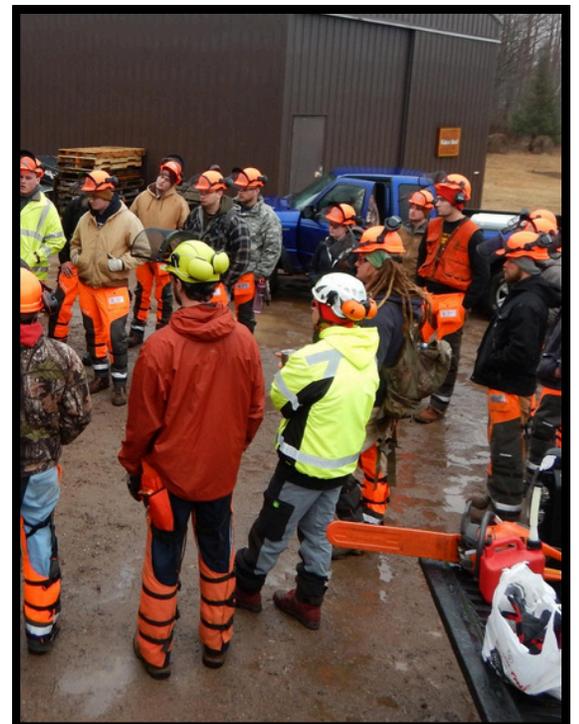


Photo courtesy of Aaron Schauer

Public Health & Trees

The purpose of the Public Health and Trees Issue Group is to broaden the understanding of the health benefits of trees to multi-sectoral audiences. Members seek to identify evidence supporting the benefits of trees and share that evidence with public health practitioners, healthcare organizations, foresters, urban planners, architects, municipalities and communities more broadly. We have worked closely with DNR staff to support communications around the health benefits of trees, including the Good Health Grows on Trees conference held in 2019.

Leads: Dr. Kirsten Beyer & Christa Schaefer **DNR Support:** Olivia Witthun & Jay Dampier

Members: Rex Zemke, Paul Morrison, Paul Fliss **Non-UFC Participants:** Dwyane Sperber

Goals and Accomplishments

Arbor Day Foundation Recognition Programs:

- Wisconsin increased the number of recognized Arbor Day Foundation Tree Campus Healthcare Facilities from 4 to 15 in 2023. In 2025, there are now 20 Tree Campus Healthcare Facilities. The issue group continues to promote this whenever possible.
- In 2024, the group also began promoting the Arbor Day Foundation Campus Higher Education and K-12 programs.

Events:

- *Trees First. Wood Next.* event at Sun Prairie SSM Health Clinic on Saturday, Oct. 4, 2025, organized by Dwayne Sperber.
- Wisconsin Veterans Hospital, Women's Development Network (WDN) of WEC Energy tree planting, organized by Paul Fliss.

Articles:

In August of 2025, the group submitted an article to the Wisconsin Medical Journal (WMJ) on the benefits of trees and health with a specific focus on hospitals and healthcare campuses. After publication, plans include featuring the work in an upcoming DNR Urban Forestry Newsletter.

Supporting Forestry Education:

Using IRA funds, the DNR staff and this issue group are collaborating with the UW Stevens Point LEAF K-12 forestry education program to update LEAF's Urban Forest Lesson Guide and create hands-on resources for learning about urban forestry. This exciting work is underway, with a project completion target of December 2027 or sooner.

Promotional Materials:

This issue group is developing a rollup banner promoting the benefits of urban trees and health. This banner will be usable by DNR staff or Urban Forestry Council members hosting educational booths at conferences and events. The issue group worked with DNR staff to develop an infographic to hand out to the public and will guide the development of additional promotional materials.

Species Diversity

The purpose of the Tree Species Diversity Issue Group is to communicate the importance of tree diversity in urban forests. Urban tree diversity is important for creating a healthy, beneficial and resilient urban forest. Having a diverse variety of tree species and age classes can increase the aesthetic value for residents and create safer and healthier neighborhoods for people, animals and the environment.

Lead: Brian Pelot **DNR Support:** Patricia Lindquist

Members: Jeffery Treu, Jonathan Stickels, Travis Derks, Jeff Kluslow, Paul Morrison, Greg Blik, Allen Pyle & Mitch Lannan

The Tree Species Diversity Group successfully advocated for the creation of the new award category, Tree Species Diversity. The first award recipient was recognized in 2025 at the Wisconsin Arborist Association Annual Conference.

Two articles were written to promote the importance of species diversity in the urban forests. One article was in The Municipality, June 2024 and the other was in the DNR Urban Forestry Newsletter, April 2025.

The group continues to focus on ways to spread the message of species diversity through promoting the use of social media pages for municipalities, nonprofit organizations and private tree care companies. The work group also recognizes that tree age diversity is an important concept. Age class diversity provides for a sustainable urban forest. Efforts to promote tree planting, like the Trillion Trees Project, will work to provide the young trees that will grow into the next urban forest tree canopy.

For 2026-2027, the Tree Species Diversity Issue Group will focus on improving communication about the critical importance of tree species and age diversity in Urban Forestry to professionals, municipalities and the public.



Photo Credit: Wisconsin DNR

Urban Forestry Awards

The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council presents annual awards to outstanding individuals, organizations, communities and tribes that further urban forestry in Wisconsin. The awards are announced each year at the annual DNR/Wisconsin Arborist Association Conference in February and are presented to winners in their community. [Award nominations for 2027 must be submitted online by Oct. 31, 2026.](#)

Lead: Lee Fredericks **DNR Support:** Jenn Janness

Members: Wendy Braun, Michael Lawrenz, Jordan Skiff, Matt Koepnik & Linda Cadotte

There are six categories of awards:

- **Species Diversity** recognizes individuals and organizations who have made an outstanding contribution to the promotion of species diversity through projects, outreach and other activities.
- **Next Gen.** recognizes an organization or individual working to inspire and educate the next generation of citizens engaged with their urban forests through projects, activities, and a variety of additional contributions. These inspiring adults will support the future growth and development of the field by encouraging these youth to become the next generation of urban forestry professionals and its supporters. Eligible programs engage youth through age 18.
- **Project Partnership** recognizes outstanding projects that utilize partnerships as a means of providing services or benefits to the urban forest.
- **Lifetime Achievement** recognizes outstanding contributions to urban forestry in Wisconsin demonstrated throughout a lifetime career.
- **Innovations In Urban Forestry** recognizes a community, individual, association or organization exhibiting outstanding innovations in the development or enhancement of an urban forestry project or program. This award recognizes the creativity, commitment, and success of urban forestry efforts.
- **Leadership** recognizes an individual or elected official at the county or local level of government who has made an outstanding recent contribution to urban forestry in Wisconsin. This could be a mayor, alderman, county executive or resident, who has gone above and beyond in their support. Wisconsin State Legislators who have made outstanding contributions to urban forestry will also be considered after they have completed their terms of office.



2025 Award Winners

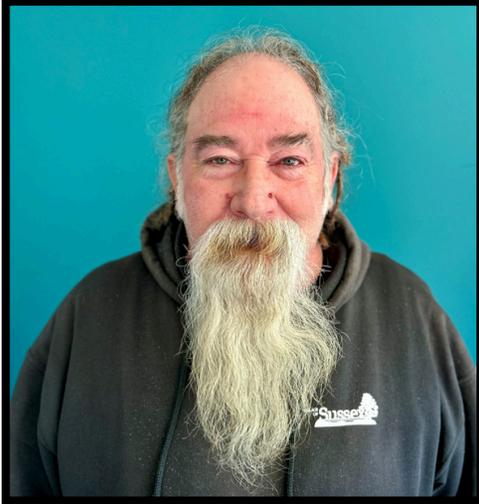


Photo courtesy of the Village of Sussex

Species Diversity: Thom Berres

Thom Berres's proactive efforts in promoting tree diversity in Sussex have made significant strides in enhancing the community's environmental sustainability. One example of his creative approach is the Sussex Village Park Tree Hike he created for Arbor Day, which highlights 25 different tree species. Thom also continues to expand his knowledge and collaborate with others such as the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the DNR. By actively involving the public and implementing innovative strategies, Thom Berres has successfully raised awareness about the importance of tree diversity and its positive impacts on the ecosystem.

Leadership: Jay Weiss

Jay Weiss received the leadership award for his work in the Village of Cambridge. The seeds were planted, which would grow into the Cambridge Tree Project when he began holding an annual tree sale in 2006 and used the proceeds to donate trees to the village. The Cambridge Tree Project continues to expand and has resulted in one of the most diverse public tree canopies in Wisconsin. Jay continues to inspire others through his leadership on the Dane County Tree Board and by sharing his knowledge through presentations and providing guidance to others throughout the urban forestry community.



Photo courtesy of Jay Weiss

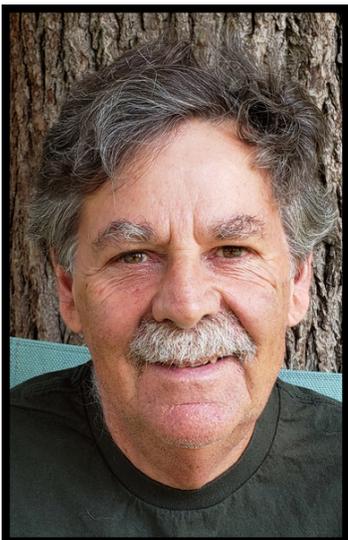


Photo Courtesy of Michael Yanny

Lifetime Achievement: Michael Yanny

Mike Yanny stated, "Whatever we can do as horticulture professionals, naturalists, or educators, things such as teaching, playing and providing natural play areas will, in my opinion, give us more 'plant people' in the future." Mike truly practices what he preaches. His visionary approach includes propagating species that will thrive in the changing Wisconsin environment, mentoring the next generation of green industry professionals, bringing people together to work on common goals and teaching kids and adults the importance of being part of a well-functioning ecosystem. Mike's positive influence has spread far and wide and will impact future generations.

2025 Award Winners

Lifetime Achievement: Mark Freberg

Mark Freberg served as the City Forester of Green Bay for 35 years during which he held several leadership positions, including with the WAA and Urban Forestry Council. He has been on the forefront of promoting species diversity, combating invasives and community involvement. Mark's community-minded outlook and his proactive approach put the Green Bay Forestry Division in a position to be able to respond quickly to threats to the canopy, as well as expand the benefits to residents.



Photo courtesy of Mark Freberg



Photo courtesy of Komatsu

Project Partnership: Komatsu & Milwaukee Parks Foundation

Komatsu and Milwaukee Parks Foundation were recognized for their partnership, which began in 2023 resulting in an annual Earth Day volunteer event rotating between parks with the most need. This event incorporates tree planting, education and area park history. Komatsu staff have expressed that they have gained as much as they have given and appreciate learning about proper tree planting and care.



Photo Credit: Wisconsin DNR

Award winners and council members, WAA/DNR 2025 Annual Conference.

2025 Award Winners

Innovations In Urban Forestry: Wauwatosa Forestry Department

This award recognizes Alex Krutsch and the Wauwatosa Forestry Department for their innovative efforts to engage the community through the [Tosa Tree Dashboard](#) and virtual tree tour. The dashboard is updated in real time from the field and allows users to click on any tree where details, facts and the maintenance history will be displayed. The Wauwatosa Forestry Department is setting an example for other communities of how to be proactive and engage the public in new and interesting ways.



Photo courtesy of the City of Wauwatosa

Next Gen: Willow River Company

Willow River has been engaging high school students at the annual Build My Future trade show through the St. Croix Builders' Association since 2021. These students are getting a unique insight into urban forestry careers while climbing trees and talking to tree care staff. Through this event, they have interacted with over 4,000 students, making this one of the most effective means of exposing youth to urban forestry careers.



Photo courtesy of Willow River Company

2024 Award Winners



Photo courtesy of the Village of Rochester

Lifetime Achievement: Christopher Birkett

Christopher Birkett served as the Director of Public Works in Rochester from 2007 through the end of his tenure in October 2023. His work includes conducting a tree inventory, developing a program to manage problem trees and increasing tree diversity in the village. He took his commitment and outstanding dedication a step further and established an arboretum to address a multitude of issues in the community. The work that he has done in the Village of Rochester will ensure that future residents can enjoy trees for decades to come.

Leadership: Julia Arata-Fratta

As mayor of the City of Fitchburg, Julia Arata-Fratta is a passionate supporter of trees in the community. She understands the vital social and ecosystem services the tree canopy provides to the city and the positive impact trees have on residents' physical and mental health. While serving as an alderperson, Julia guided the draft tree preservation ordinance through city committees and councils. Once elected mayor, she continued to champion the ordinance and brought it to the common council which passed it with a unanimous vote. As the city continues to develop at a rapid pace, this ordinance will give policymakers the information they need to incorporate existing trees in the development process.



Photo courtesy of the City of Fitchburg



Photo courtesy of the City of Port Washington

Leadership: Jon Crain

Since Jon was hired in 2011, he has been responsible for completely transforming the Forestry Department in the City of Port Washington. Under his leadership, Jon has increased the inventory of city-owned trees by more than 50%, saved approximately 25% of the ash tree population, removed acres of invasive species, restored wetlands, improved species diversity, established numerous partnerships, secured multiple grants, developed the GIS for forestry, established a nursery and donated countless volunteer hours. Jon also engages the next generation by working with school and community groups to instill an appreciation of trees and their benefits.

2024 Award Winners



Photo courtesy of the City of Mauston

Innovations In Urban Forestry: City Of Mauston's Living Food Pantry

This award recognizes Jordan Wilke and the City of Mauston's Living Food Pantry. Fruit-bearing trees and an irrigation system were strategically planted in a city park, making fresh fruit accessible to the public and differentiating it from traditional community gardens. This multiphase project is designed for future expansion to address the ongoing needs of this area classified as a food desert. This project exemplifies innovation, resilience and community spirit. This visionary initiative has not only breathed new life into a struggling urban space but also set a shining example of sustainable urban forestry and community engagement.

Project Partnership: Wachtel Tree Science, Johnson's Nursery And Ronald McDonald House Charities

This award recognizes the time, trade expertise and the professional skills two exceptional green industry businesses in southeast Wisconsin have contributed to this project since 2008. Wachtel Tree Science and Johnson's Nursery's commitment to planting and maintaining the trees at Ronald McDonald House Charities ensures that visitors have a relaxing environment to surround themselves with, including a well-maintained landscape. This project is an excellent example of how landscape and nature can act as a comforting source of health and healing, especially to those enduring hardships.



Photo courtesy of Wachtel Tree Science



Photo Credit: Wisconsin DNR

2024 award winners pose for a picture with Gov. Tony Evers.

Urban Forestry Grants

The Urban Forestry core grant program continues to be a critical incentive and the DNR's primary tool to facilitate sustainable urban and community forest management and emergency response.

The recent Governor's 2023-2025 Biennial Budget increased funding to urban forestry grants by \$350,000 over the biennium. The Urban Forestry Grants Program received a \$350,000 biennium increase and had additional federal funding. The grant program was still oversubscribed in 2024 and 2025. All sizes of Wisconsin communities, from rural to urban, participate in the urban forestry grant program. In recent years, a record amount of startup grants has been funded to communities to start or restart an urban forestry program. This trend continued in 2024 and 2025, with the funding the start of urban forestry programs in 36 new communities. With the increase in executive storm orders declared due to extreme weather, the emergency fund has continually been oversubscribed, drawing down potential grant award dollars from the Urban Forestry core grants that would assist communities in funding forest management, education and public outreach.

In 2024 and 2025, there were three executive emergency storm orders declared due to extreme storm damage in our Wisconsin communities. Between the three storm events, fourteen communities applied for \$375,400 through the Urban Forestry Catastrophic Grant Program. Ultimately, the 2024 and 2025 grant years shared \$172,500 in decreased state funding available for Regular and Startup Urban Forestry core grants.

With more frequent storms causing severe urban forest damage, along with ongoing and emerging invasive species threats, there is a need for more funding to meet the growing needs of the Urban Forestry Grant Program.

Urban Forestry Grants For Schools

The DNR UF team is partnering with the DNR/Department of Public Instruction Green and Healthy Schools (GHS) program to develop and administer an IRA-funded competitive grant program available to priority K-12 schools. In October 2025, GHS received 11 applications, of which four will be awarded \$20,000 each. Grant funds will be used for urban forestry education and to improve and increase tree canopy on school grounds.

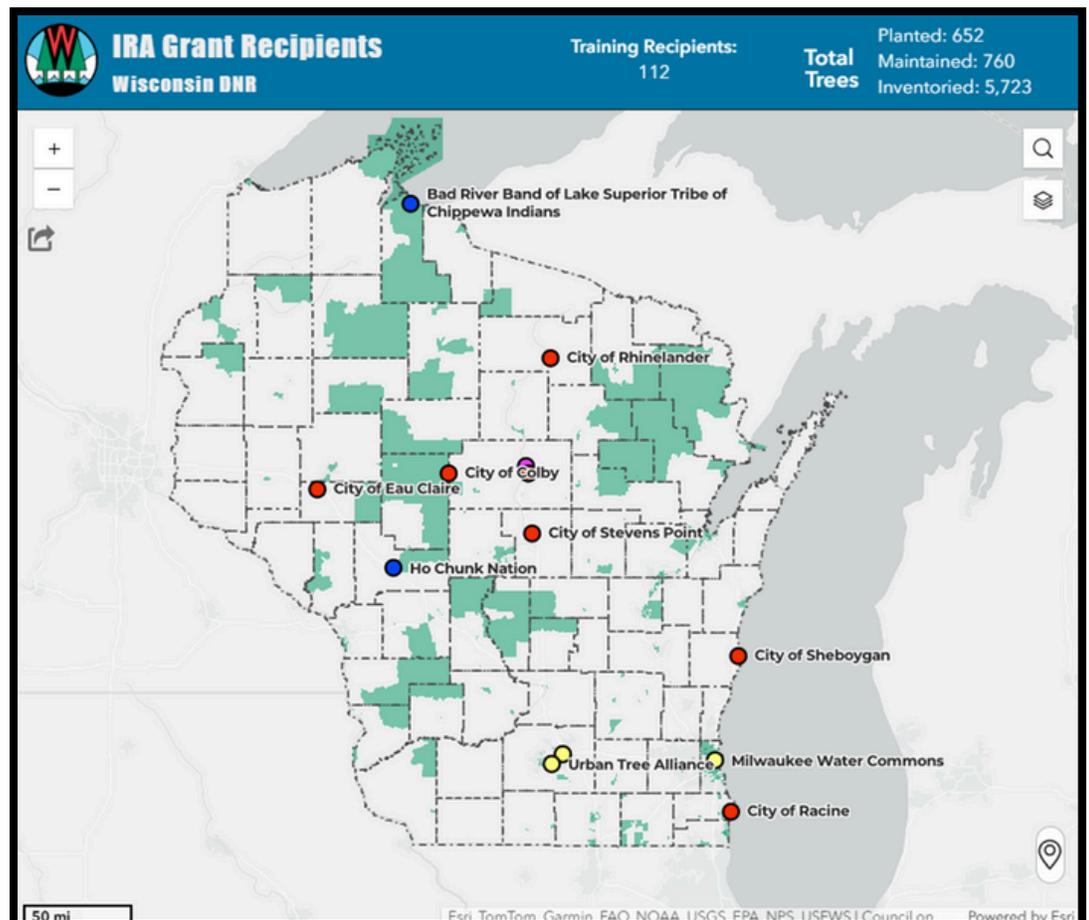
Urban Forestry Grants

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

In 2022, the United States Forest Service announced that \$1.5 billion in grant funds would be available to provide multi-year, programmatic, competitive grants to State agencies and other qualifying entities. Out of the total available, \$250 million was made available to state and territory forestry agencies that are working in disadvantaged communities to increase and maintain a healthy urban canopy and access to nature. The funding was designed to support these agencies' competitive sub-grant programs to ensure that funding flows as quickly and efficiently as possible to projects that support equitable access to trees and the benefits they provide.

The Urban Forestry Council (UFC) was engaged during the process of determining the DNR's grant request, and Wisconsin was ultimately awarded \$4,875,000 in funding. Of the \$4,875,000, \$4,000,000 was encumbered in a competitive grant program to achieve stated funding objectives.

On Sept. 3, 2024, 13 grants were awarded to Wisconsin organizations including municipalities, tribes, non-profits and a county. During the implementation phase, the UFC has been informed of progress and members have been updated and advice sought as deemed appropriate.



Urban Forestry Grants

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources offers urban forestry grants to cities, villages, towns, counties, tribes and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations in or conducting projects in Wisconsin. These grants fall into three categories: regular grants, startup grants and catastrophic storm grants.

Regular grants are competitive cost-share grants of up to \$25,000. Grants are to support new innovative projects that will develop sustainable urban and community forestry programs, not to subsidize routine forestry activities.

Startup grants are competitive cost-share grants of up to \$5,000. These simplified grants are available to communities that want to start or restart an urban forestry program.

Catastrophic storm grants are no match grants of up to \$50,000. These grants fund tree repair, removal or replacement within urban areas following a catastrophic storm event for which the governor has declared a state of emergency under s. 323.10, Wis. Stats.



2024 Grant Summary

- 86 grants totaling \$5,084,545 were awarded
 - 20 grants were start-up grants
 - 8 grants were catastrophic storm grants
 - 13 grants were IRA

2024 Grant Award Details

East Central: 9 grants (including 1 startup, 2 catastrophic storm grants and 1 IRA) were issued for a total of \$340,370.999.

North Central: 12 grants (including 1 startup, 1 catastrophic storm grant and 5 IRA) were issued for a total of \$1,099,288.64

Northeast: 12 grants (including 4 startup) were issued for a total of \$180,584.48

South Central: 17 grants (including 4 startup, 1 catastrophic storm grant and 2 IRA) were issued for a total of \$1,020,111.51

Southeast: 15 grants (including 3 catastrophic storm grants and 2 IRA) were issued for a total of \$1,195,020.47

West Central: 21 grants (including 10 startup, 1 catastrophic storm grant and 3 IRA) were issued for a total of \$1,249,209.12

2025 Grant Summary

- 47 grants totaling \$749,411 were awarded
 - 16 grants were start-up grants
 - 3 grants were catastrophic storm grants

2025 Grant Award Details

East Central: 8 grants (including 2 startup) were issued for a total of \$136,551.24

North Central: 5 grants (including 2 catastrophic storm grants) were issued for a total of \$168,781.71

Northeast: 9 grants (including 5 startup and 1 catastrophic storm grant) were issued for a total of \$98,925.29

South Central: 10 grants (including 3 startup) were issued for a total of \$105,670.58

Southeast: 7 grants (including 1 startup) were issued for a total of \$153,621.71

West Central: 8 grants (including 5 startup) were issued for a total of \$85,860.22

DNR Accomplishments Supported By The Urban Forestry Council



DNR Forestry Staff Updates

After 26 years with the DNR, Urban Forestry Coordinator Tracy Salisbury retired in the spring of 2024. She supported urban forestry efforts in communities throughout Northeast Wisconsin and spurred ongoing partnership projects including the Green Bay Packers First Downs for Trees program. Tracy's contributions to urban forestry in Wisconsin will be remembered for years to come.

Three new Urban Forestry staff have joined the team in the past two years. Jenn Janness joined as the Council Liaison/Outreach Specialist in October of 2023. Elton Rogers was hired in January of 2024 as the Southeast Urban Forestry Coordinator. Jay Dampier came on board in a project position as the IRA Grant Manager in June of 2024. In addition, Patricia Lindquist transferred from the North Central Coordinator position to the Northeast Coordinator position in June of 2024 but will cover both areas of the state until the North Central Coordinator position is filled.

Internship Program

The DNR Urban Forestry program hosted two interns each year during the summers of 2024 and 2025 in the Milwaukee office. The most recent year saw the internship fall under the State of Wisconsin Student Diversity Internship, a move that helped expand it from eight to twelve weeks long in order to accomplish more projects and enable the interns to gain more exposure to the forestry and urban forestry communities. Both cohorts primarily focused on tree inventory projects, including on Milwaukee Public Schools properties and across cemeteries in southeast Wisconsin.



DNR Accomplishments Supported By The Urban Forestry Council

Wisconsin Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI)

CTMI is hosting its sixth cadre. CTMI is an advanced training course designed specifically for people responsible for urban forest management who do not have a degree and/or experience in urban forestry. CTMI focuses more on management and leadership, because there are other opportunities for technical arboriculture training in our state.

The first session, Nov. 5-6 in Green Lake, will focus on foundations of urban forestry. The second session, March 3-4 in Green Lake, will cover planning, operations and biology. The third session, June 23-24 in Stevens Point, will bring it all together to summarize what was learned.

Participants are required to complete a project that benefits their community forest. A graduation event will take place the evening of Tuesday, June 23, 2026. There are 32 students registered. DNR staff, UW Urban Forestry professors, consultants, UW Extension, municipal foresters, utility foresters, tree board members and past CTMI attendees serve as instructors throughout the 6 days of training.

After completion of this sixth cadre, CTMI will have trained urban forestry staff representing a population of nearly 3 million people. That's 50% of our total population here in Wisconsin!



Wisconsin Council on Forestry

The **Wisconsin Council on Forestry** (CoF) is a diverse group of leaders in the forestry community who play a key role in Wisconsin's efforts to achieve sustainable forestry. **Jordan Skiff**, an Urban Forestry Council (UFC) member, is also a member of the Council on Forestry, representing the interests of people engaged in the practice of urban and community forestry.

- The CoF recently participated in a DNR effort to document some of Wisconsin's accomplishments related to the 2020 Forest Action Plan, several of which are tied to UFC issues. Specific urban topics included the Wisconsin DNR spearheading a multi-state study of the economic impact of urban forestry and continuing an urban FIA (Forest Inventory & Analysis) program. Noteworthy topics that affect both councils include biochar research, mass timber, and workforce programs.
- A major CoF initiative involves working with the Great Lakes Timber Professionals Association and the Wisconsin Paper Council to study the forest products industry in Wisconsin, and to provide a strategic roadmap to bolster the industry heading into the future. The latest state budget included \$1 million toward this effort. The initiative is titled WI Forests First (Forest Industry Roadmap & Strategies for Tomorrow). An executive team has been formed to guide the process, and next steps include forming a steering committee and hiring a project manager.
- Other CoF priorities which were not included in the latest state budget include support for Division of Forestry supply and IT needs, a staff member to support the CoF, and increased support for county forests and educational programs.
- Like its urban counterparts, the CoF is interested in the possible benefits of biochar as a soil amendment that can help filter water runoff, and as a beneficial use for residual forest products. Another topic of interest for both the Urban Forestry Council and CoF is mass timber construction. This innovative and sustainable use of forest products could be much easier for architects to incorporate if such products were expressly allowed in building codes. Currently, any mass timber project must demonstrate on an individual basis that it has comparable strength and fire-retardant characteristics to other types of high-rise construction.
- In late 2025, Wisconsin was given the opportunity to invest in an aviation fuel plant in Hayward. If the Forestry Revitalization Act is passed, the state would provide up to \$60 million in tax credits and a \$150 million grant to help offset the cost of an estimated \$1.5 billion plant. The CoF provided a letter of general support for this project, as creating markets for woody biomass like tree tops and sawmill residuals could fill an essential niche in Wisconsin's forest products industry.



Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council



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