

Wisconsin DNR Urban Forestry Semiannual Report

July 1—Dec. 31, 2025



FY26



Wisconsin DNR Urban Forestry

Our Role

The division's role is to maximize public benefits from urban and community forests by building the capacity of existing and new partners through direct assistance and encouraging and supporting partners in accomplishing their goals.

Our Audience

Our primary audience includes urban forestry professionals of local governments, nonprofits, tribal governments and private industry. We also partner with industry associations, the federal government, higher education and K-12 schools.

Our Direction

Financial Assistance

We will assist urban and community partners through state grant awards and share other funding opportunities to increase urban forestry efforts and to recover from catastrophic storm events.

Technical Assistance

We will increase support for urban and community partners to build and maintain robust forestry programs and local capacity through technical assistance and education.



Financial Assistance

Urban Forestry Grants Application Improvements *(N. Spafford and J. Dampier)*

After a rigorous review process, the urban forestry Grant application form and budget documents were updated. This review included analysis of past submitted applications, review of grants programs from other states and review of other DNR grants programs. The updates also accounted for noted challenges from UF team members, as well as grant application review team members.

The process also ensured alignment with DNR Division of Forestry Urban Forestry priorities, including Wisconsin’s Forest Action Plan and Strategic Direction. The goal of these updates is to improve the applicant experience and streamline administrative processing. They also help prioritize funding projects that contribute to increases in canopy cover, urban forest health and community capacity. The last review and overhaul of the Urban Forestry Grant Application form occurred in 2015.

The DNR Urban Forestry Grants team hosted two one-hour webinars to external partners. These webinars guided grant applicants through the application form updates and provided tips for submitting a strong application that aligns with the DNR’s Urban Forestry Program funding priorities. Between the two webinars, 55 potential applicants participated.

2026 Regular And Startup Urban Forestry Grant Awards *(N. Spafford)*

The revised 2026 Urban Forestry grant application was open July 1, 2025, through Oct. 1, 2025. We received 71 grant applications totaling over \$1.1 million. The DNR had \$559,680 available for funding, allowing 38 grants totaling \$549,858 to be awarded. These grants consisted of 16 Startup Grants and 22 Regular Grants. The remaining \$123,122 can be added to the 2027 grant allotment or to award a second round of funding if a catastrophic storm event is not declared prior to Feb. 15, 2026.

Applicants self-select to apply for Regular or Startup funding. The Regular Grant (maximum \$25,000 award) assists communities in advancing their urban forestry management. The Startup Grant (maximum of \$5,000 award) targets new or less developed urban forestry programs. Cities, villages, towns, counties, tribes and 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations in or conducting their project in Wisconsin are eligible to apply for an Urban Forestry Grant. The grants range from \$1,000 to \$25,000, and grantees must match dollar for dollar. Grants were awarded to projects that align with state and national goals to increase the urban forest canopy and the benefits it provides. The grant awards are in effect from Jan. 1, 2026 through Dec. 31, 2026.

UF Zones	Startup #	Regular #	Total #	Total \$
NC	1	1	2	\$21,220
NE	4	5	9	\$107,882
SC	2	4	6	\$102,975
WE	4	4	8	\$94,628
EC	4	3	7	\$95,000
SE	1	5	6	\$128,153
TOTAL	16	22	38	\$549,858

Financial Assistance Continued

Catastrophic Storm Grants *(N. Spafford)*

In an event of a declared State of Emergency, the DNR Urban Forestry Grant program allots 20% of its available annual funds to aid communities, nonprofits and tribes. The Catastrophic Storm Grant program funds tree repair, removal and replacement within urban areas following a catastrophic storm event for which the governor has declared a State of Emergency. These grants do not require a dollar-for-dollar match and may range from \$4,000 to \$50,000. A catastrophic storm means damage to urban forests caused by snow, ice, hail, wind or tornadoes.

On Aug. 9, 2025, a State of Emergency (Executive Order #272) was declared due to severe storms throughout the state. The following communities received urban forestry catastrophic storm grant funding for a total amount of \$26,621:

- Village of Cambridge, \$17,000
- Village of Fox Point, \$4,421
- Village of Sussex, \$5,200

Inflation Reduction Act Grants *(J. Dampier)*

The DNR Urban Forestry Program continues to administer \$4 million in grant funding to support urban forestry projects across Wisconsin. This funding comes from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) through the USDA Forest Service and is being used to improve urban tree canopy cover in Wisconsin communities. Thirteen organizations, including municipalities, tribal governments, one county and two 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations received funding. Accomplishments as of Sept. 1, 2025 include:

- 652 trees planted
- 760 trees maintained
- 5,723 trees inventories
- 112 people trained in arboriculture and urban forestry skills
- 1 urban forest management plan developed and adopted
- 1 tree board has been developed and is meeting regularly

Grant awards range from under \$100,000 to nearly \$500,000. Full project summaries for all 13 projects are available on the DNR's interactive map. As of Dec. 31, 2025, \$897,800 of the \$4 million has been invoiced, representing 22% of the total.

Financial Assistance Continued

IRA Contracts For Schoolyard Greening And Urban Forestry Education

(L. Buntrock)

Using IRA funds, the DNR is contracting with the following organizations to provide urban forestry education and enhance tree canopy at K-12 schools across the state: Milwaukee Public School District (MPS), LEAF – Wisconsin’s K-12 Forestry Program, Wisconsin K-12 Energy Education Program (KEEP) and Green and Healthy Schools (GHS).

- MPS is working with ReFlo to build 15 Outdoor Discovery Carts focused on urban forestry education that will be placed at K-12 schools within the City of Milwaukee. To date, carts have been delivered to the following schools: Humboldt Park, Kagel, Riverwest Elementary, Samuel Clemens Elementary and Walt Whitman. The carts include images of trees and leaves common to urban school yards laser engraved on the doors and interior support beams to enhance curricular connections and leaf identification. Lesson plans and other curricular activities that will accompany the carts continue to be developed and refined.



- LEAF launched a new project, “Enhancing school ground utilization and furthering urban forest educational outreach,” and hired a dedicated staff member to lead this work. They are identifying three schools to participate in this program. Additionally, they are updating the LEAF Urban Forestry curriculum. Lessons for grades 5th-8th are complete, and a graphic designer is finalizing a printed version.
- KEEP has used IRA funds to provide scholarships and tools to educators to attend the Summer Institute for Climate Change Education (SICCE). The cross-cutting theme for the Wisconsin cohort day was urban forestry.
- GHS is administering the “Teaching In and About Urban Forests Program.” The program will be led by Field Edventures in partnership with UW–Stevens Point Wisconsin Center for Environmental Education to support school site enhancements that increase tree canopy coverage and integrate urban forestry education into school curricula. Four school districts were selected through a competitive application process to participate in this program. The selected participants include Madison Metropolitan School District, North Crawford Elementary School, Hawley Environmental School and Taft Elementary School in the Neenah Joint School District.



Technical Assistance

Tree Stature Selection Trends *(E. Rogers, J. Dampier, D. Buckler)*

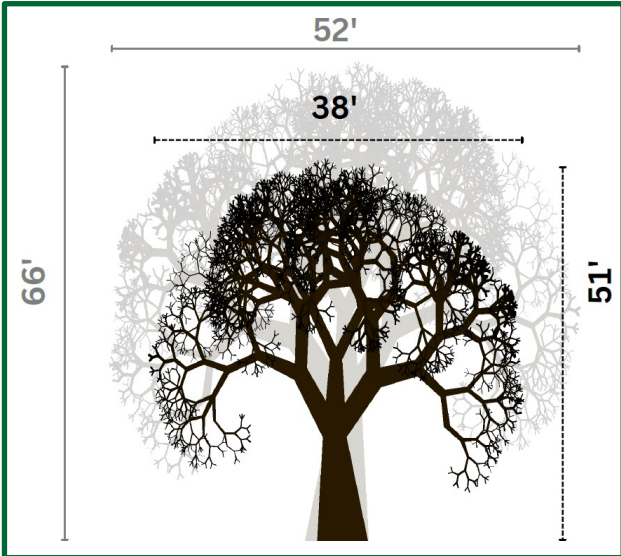
Members of the DNR Urban Forestry team completed a project over the summer looking at communities' species selection trends for trees growing along streets and boulevards. The project stemmed from an inkling we had that, over time, urban forestry practitioners have been selecting

smaller statured trees for planting. Using street tree inventories that the team had archived over the last two decades, the data revealed a consistent trend across Wisconsin communities; communities were in fact selecting smaller statured trees to plant in community rights of way.

This trend may be a significant factor contributing to a shrinking urban forest across Wisconsin and other urban areas throughout the nation. Larger trees are known to provide exponentially greater benefits including pollution and stormwater reduction, habitat and food for wildlife, sequestration of carbon and the cooling of our cities through shade and evapotranspiration. The article

“Endangered Giants: Are Big Trees Becoming Obsolete

on Urban American Streets? Insights from Wisconsin Street Tree Inventories” was published in the October issue of the [International Society of Arboriculture’s Arborist News](#).



Urban Forest Inventory And Analysis – Statewide Data Available *(D. Buckler)*

Earlier in 2025, results from UFIA plots in Milwaukee and Madison were summarized in a significant step for the long-term project. Later this summer, raw data became available for the rest of the state. Though these data are not yet summarized, interpreted and fully reported, their publication marks another milestone in Wisconsin’s ability to understand the entire urban forest across the state, not just publicly managed trees and not just those in our biggest cities.

New Tree Inventory Summary Sheets Completed *(D. Buckler)*

Summaries of tree inventories and canopy data were created for each community in Wisconsin with available inventory data. These new documents are a one-stop-shop for local decision-makers and tree advocates to understand their community trees. The sheets document species, genus, structural composition, canopy cover and the ecosystem services provided by those trees.

Technical Assistance

Networking Group Meetings *(O. Witthun, E. Rogers, B. Wahl)*

UF coordinators host networking group meetings throughout the year. These meetings provide an opportunity for partners to build relationships, learn from one another and connect with the DNR.

Coordinators in the Southeast and East Central Zones worked with Riveredge Nature Center (RNC) to host a meeting at their property. The 36 attendees were able to visit and learn from each other, as well as explore RNC land as the property manager discussed various UF-related projects including their community food forest, lowland planting tips and general reforestation nearly 20 years post-EAB.



The South-Central Zone hosted networking meetings in July and October. The first meeting showcased how the City of Madison deals with tree and infrastructure conflicts. The focus was on sidewalks and the many workarounds that are possible when engineering and forestry join forces to preserve trees. Issues such as sewer laterals and other utilities were also touched on. The second meeting invited municipalities to see a demonstration of a complete root crown excavation and root corrections/ pruning utilizing air excavation at the Village of Dane's Capitol Valley Park. The demonstration

included a presentation on how to identify trees that may be good candidates for root crown excavation, as well as pros, cons and after-care.

Technical Assistance Continued

CTMI VI Session I Successful (*O. Witthun*)

The first of three sessions for the 6th cadre of the Wisconsin Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI) successfully kicked off in November! It was all-hands-on-deck as DNR UF staff hosted, instructed and led exercises for 32 students from across the state. Past CTMI students, community foresters, utility foresters, UW Extension staff and a tree board member also served as instructors. 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. It focuses more on management and leadership because there are other opportunities for technical arboriculture training in our state. The first session was held Nov. 5-6 in Green Lake and focused on the foundations of urban forestry.



The second session in March (Green Lake) covered planning, operations and biology. The third session in June (Stevens Point) will bring it all together, culminating with a tour of the city's forestry operations and a formal graduation event. In addition to attending all the sessions, participants are required to complete a project that benefits their community's forest. After completion of this sixth cadre, CTMI will have trained urban forestry staff representing a population of nearly three million people. That's 50% of our total population here in Wisconsin!

Fall Urban Forestry Workshops (*O. Witthun*)

DNR Urban Forestry partnered with UW- Extension horticulture agents to host a fall workshop series on the identification and management of invasive woody plants. One-day workshops were held in each DNR UF zone, for a total of six identical workshops across the state. These occurred in the Milwaukee, Eau Claire, Wausau, Green Bay, Oshkosh and Madison areas. Mark Renz (a professor and Extension weed specialist with the University of Wisconsin) acted as the lead instructor working with three of his colleagues. Each workshop consisted of an indoor portion in the morning, followed by an outdoor portion in the afternoon. The registration cost was intentionally made affordable at \$40, and the number of participants was capped at 60 attendees for most locations. There were 263 attendees registered for the entire state across the six workshops!



Partnerships Continued

The Urban Forestry Program, Including SWSDIP Interns, Complete Cemetery Tree Survey (*D. Buckler*)

The fourth year of the Urban Forestry summer internship program was a great success. Kylie Dypvik and Zachary Stockdale - Pederson worked on a variety of projects, but their main focus was a tree inventory of southeast Wisconsin cemeteries. Together with other urban forestry staff in the Milwaukee office, they inventoried almost 400 trees across 108 properties. Insights from that study are being shared with cemetery managers to encourage more tree planting and better management of trees in these important spaces.



Wisconsin Arborist Association (*B. Wahl, A. Krause, L. Buntrock*)

DNR Urban Forestry Staff attended and participated in the Wisconsin Arborist Association (WAA) strategic planning workshop. The workshop helped WAA review and update its current strategic plan, setting the stage for the next five years.

Staff continued their support of WAA's educational endeavors behind the scenes by serving on the organization's Program Committee and front-and-center by presenting at the summer conference. Jay Dampier and Nicolle Spafford shared tips on how to better work with municipalities and nonprofits based on direct feedback from surveyed DNR urban forestry grantees. The summer conference in Fond du Lac and Fall Seminar in East Troy had a combined attendance of 387 people. This represented staff from 39 cities, villages, towns and counties in addition to attendees from the business and academic sectors.

Oshkosh Tree Planting Event With Gov. Evers (*O. Witthun*)

DNR urban forestry staff attended a tree planting event at Lakeshore Park in Oshkosh on Thursday,



Nov. 20, 2025. Thirty volunteers from Cummins Inc. in Oshkosh planted and mulched 40 trees. Funding was provided by Cummins Inc. in collaboration with the Arbor Day Foundation and Great Lakes St. Lawrence Governors and Premiers.

The event culminated with a visit from Gov. Evers (a known tree advocate) who didn't hesitate to get muddy alongside the volunteers. Despite being a cool November day, the wind and rain held off, making for an enjoyable morning while getting all the trees in the ground. The 40 trees consisted of 24 species, 21 genus and 12 Wisconsin-native species.

Partnerships Continued

Partners In Community Forestry Conference 2025 *(P. Lindquist)*

The Urban Forestry Team sent Patricia Lindquist to the annual Partners in Community Forestry Conference in Henderson, Nevada in November. This conference is a two-day gathering for individuals nationwide from industry, nonprofit and state, local and federal agencies to come together to collaborate and share ideas, research and interests. Patricia attended sessions covering the topics of technology and related tools for urban forestry management; communication tools and strategies to share the myriad of benefits for a healthy urban forest; schoolyard greening; tree protection ordinances; municipal wood waste utilization; international perspectives on urban forestry; managing natural areas and many more.

Patricia also attended the Urban & Community Forestry Coordinators National Meeting as Wisconsin's representative. She met with UF State Coordinators, Volunteer Coordinators and Federal Program Managers from around the country. Topics of discussion included future roles for urban and community forestry; successful state-led initiatives; supporting urban forestry in small communities; program funding; updates from the Arbor Day Foundation, USDA Forest Service, American Forests, International Society of Arboriculture and more.

As a result of attending this meeting and conference, Patricia is better positioned to interact with counterparts from other states and USFS staff as well as participate in regional planning initiatives and help develop partnerships. Additional knowledge was gained through discussing national and regional policies with state counterparts, resulting in a broader UF policy perspective. These sessions provided a greater understanding of innovative, successful and replicable national, regional and state initiatives that can be used to strengthen program delivery at all levels.



Partnerships Continued

Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council (*J. Janness*)

The Council met in September at the Food and Farm Exploration Center in Plover. New members participated in an orientation session, and Linda Cadotte ran her first meeting as Council Chair. Changes to the by-laws were discussed and information from each of the issue groups was requested for the Biennial Report.



The December meeting was held virtually. Changes to the by-laws were approved, as was a draft of the Biennial Report. During this meeting the Council decided to take a more active role in the 2026 WAA/DNR Urban Forestry Conference by leading a listening session and hosting a display in the expo center. Mike Jentsch, West Bend Director of Parks, Recreation and Forestry, presented to the Council on community engagement and awareness.