

Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council – 2007 Report

Executive Summary

As the WAA representative to the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, I am pleased to provide the membership of WAA with the Executive Summary of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council's REPORT 2007. The full report is available for viewing and downloading on the UF Council Web page at <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us/forestry/UF/council/>.

This comprehensive document focuses on both current issues and the future direction of urban forestry in Wisconsin and has been presented to DNR Secretary Matt Frank, State Forester Paul DeLong, and the Wisconsin Council on Forestry. I encourage each of you to take a few moments to review the report to assist you in becoming an informed advocate for urban forestry in Wisconsin. If you ever have statewide issues that you feel are important to present to the Urban Forestry Council, please do not hesitate to contact me.

*John T. Gall, WAA Representative
Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council*

More than at any other time in the history of the urban forestry program, Wisconsin communities are facing both difficult challenges and incredible opportunities. In response, the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council has amplified the voice of urban forestry by strengthening strategic alliances and engaging stakeholders in critical conversations on the issues facing Wisconsin.

Issues

- **Federal budget cuts threaten urban forest management.** The president's 2008 budget includes a 39% cut in urban forestry funding and the Forest Service's State & Private Forestry Redesign is scheduled to cut base funding to states by 65% over the next five years. This will eliminate seven urban forestry LTE staff, reducing services and compromising the ability to compete for future federal dollars.
- **Emerald ash borer threatens 5.2 million ash trees** within Wisconsin's urban forests. Replacement could cost communities **more than \$1.5 billion.**
- **Our tree canopy cover is only 14% and lacks diversity.** The average canopy cover provided by Wisconsin's **26.9 million community trees** is significantly below the 40% recommended by American Forests.
- Wisconsin's urban forests **annually provide over \$64 million in environ-**

mental services including **carbon sequestration, air pollution mitigation,** and **energy savings** which could be an effective tool to help address climate change and energy independence.

- **Wisconsin's urban forestry grant program is not meeting the state's needs,** funding only 56% of requests in 2007, not addressing the needs of the largest communities, discouraging the entry-level communities and providing no additional funding for recently enacted emergency storm response grants.

Future Direction

Based on these issues and data from Wisconsin's recent pilot urban forest inventory, the council has identified the following strategic directions for Wisconsin:

- **Manage the trees we have –** Maintaining the health and safety of existing trees will increase their benefits. Building sustainable programs to manage forest health and longevity is critical to sustaining these benefits through time.
- **Plant more trees –** Wisconsin could nearly triple the services provided by its urban trees if communities reached the 40% canopy goal, helping the state address greenhouse gas emissions and energy independence.
- **Increase biodiversity –** Ash and maple make up over 43% of Wisconsin's urban forest. This has set communities up for catastrophic loss to exotic diseases and insects. Planting a diverse population is essential to a sustainable resource.
- **Facilitate partnerships and collaboration –** DNR Forestry's role as a convener and facilitator is critical. Investment in the DNR Urban Forestry program is necessary and can leverage large-scale public benefits.

Recommendations

Embracing this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to address challenges and empower Wisconsin to maximize benefits and services provided by community trees, the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council proposes **The Wisconsin Community Canopy Initiative – 20 Million by 2020.**

This initiative will increase the tree canopy cover in Wisconsin cities, villages and urban towns by adding 20 million urban trees over the next thirteen years and preserving the 27 million existing trees, creating a resilient, diverse urban

forest that provides maximum environmental, social and economic services to the residents of Wisconsin. With only 15% of the urban forest on public property, success will require participation among governments, schools, businesses, foundations, nonprofits and private citizens. Over 62% of the mil tax revenues that fund DNR Forestry come from Wisconsin's cities and villages. However, only 2% of Forestry's expenditures are for urban forestry. While it is clear that all Wisconsin residents benefit from the primary and secondary products of traditional forests, it is also clear that Wisconsin's 4+ million community residents benefit directly from our urban forests. Current funding for urban forestry is inadequate relative to the large impact of this resource. The council recommends that the DNR increase funding from the Forestry Account to sustainably manage Wisconsin's urban forest ecosystems where the vast majority of our population lives and conducts business. For the state to play an effective role, the DNR must expand its ability to facilitate urban forestry collaboration with sustainable program staff and funding. It must:

- Convert existing unsustainable, federally-funded LTE staff to state-funded full-time staff
- Increase the urban forestry grant program by \$1.47 million annually to provide necessary incentives to local governments and nonprofits
- Institute a continuous urban forest inventory and canopy analysis to set resource goals, identify new threats, measure initiative results and quantify benefits to the public
- Provide an additional \$515,000 annually for contracts and cooperative agreements with private and public partners to provide technical assistance, outreach, education and research.

Wisconsin has a rich forestry tradition and is seen as a worldwide leader. The threats facing Wisconsin's young and growing urban forests are real. The benefits have been quantified. The goal has been set. In Wisconsin's "forward" tradition, the state must provide the leadership and investment to leverage additional public and private resources that support a resilient urban forest for the benefit of Wisconsin's residents.