

Enhancing Wisconsin's Urban Forests

Creating a Voice for the Urban Forest in Wisconsin



OUTCOMES

Champion: Joe Wilson
Lead Facilitator: Matt Duvall
Total number of participants: 65

Objectives for session.

1. Develop collaborative partnerships within urban forestry and across disciplines within the forestry community.
2. Plan actions to move forward with the Statewide Forest Management Plan and identify individuals or groups that will take ownership of that action.

Outcomes.

Over 50 individual actions were identified by the four breakout sessions, but the sessions did not have time to prioritize the actions and produce a thoughtful and complete action plan. However, the urban forestry leadership team reviewed the products of the sessions and found two common action themes shared by sessions - assessment and awareness - as well as a more focused action from the Invasives breakout session. These three are reported here.

Action #1: Develop a continuous statewide urban forestry assessment.

Justification:

Wisconsin citizens living in urbanized areas benefit socially, ecologically and economically from the establishment and maintenance of our urban forests. Transformations in land use patterns, erosion of financial support, and the introduction of exotic pests are among a litany of agents that threaten the health of our urban forests and the extent to which their benefits are realized. Unlike the state's timberlands, which are monitored by the Forest Inventory and Assessment program, Wisconsin lacks critical information about the extent and health of its urban forest resource. This data and the information derived from it are critical to the development, implementation and evaluation of sustainable management strategies at the state, county and local levels.

Individuals/Organizations:

Committed: Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, State Urban Forestry Coordinator, University of Wisconsin,
Targeted: Wisconsin Council on Forestry, USDA Forest Service, WI DNR, Wisconsin Arborist Association, Wisconsin Landscape Federation, local officials, municipal foresters, local tree boards, consulting urban foresters, regional planning committees.

Timeline:

Short-term:

1. Communicate to the Governor that a continuous statewide assessment is essential to manage and maintain the health of our urban forests.
2. Utilize Wisconsin's Statewide Forest Plan and the State Urban Forest Strategic Plan to demonstrate the priority of this need.

Mid-term:

1. Allocate/secure funding and resources to develop a sampling and assessment protocol. 2004-2006
 - Review existing protocol and sampling procedures.
 - Identify the information needed from a statewide urban forest assessment.
 - Estimate a budget for the development of the assessment protocol and sampling procedure.
 - Create partnerships necessary to develop the protocol and sampling procedures.
 - Develop or tailor existing protocols and sampling procedures to meet Wisconsin's urban forest information needs.
 - Ground truth the assessment protocol and sampling intensities in various locations across WI.
 - Establish the location of permanent inventory plots across WI.
 - Estimate the costs associated with a statewide assessment.

Long-term:

1. Allocate/secure funding and resources to conduct a baseline statewide Urban Forest assessment. 2007
2. Disseminate assessment data and information for use at the state, county, and local levels. 2008
3. Continue the assessment cycle. 2008

Indicators:

- A statewide urban forest assessment is initiated.
- Monies are allocated for the development of the assessment protocol and sampling procedures.
- Partnerships are formed that will facilitate the development of the assessment protocol and sampling procedures.
- The assessment protocol and sampling procedures are developed.
- The assessment protocol and sampling procedures are evaluated.
- Money is allocated/secured to conduct the statewide assessment.
- Statewide urban forest assessment is completed.
- Increased urban forest management capacity at the local level.
- Increased urban forest management capacity at the regional level.

Perceived obstacles/barriers:

- Unknown resources and funding needs
- Continual funding
- Federal buy-in
- Data analysis

Resources needed to achieve action:

- Staff and equipment to coordinate assessment and collect field data (federal, state &/or contract)
- Staff, software to analyze data
- Annual funding - dependent on level of partnerships developed

Action #2: Launch a statewide urban forest public awareness and education campaign

Justification:

The national, state and local policy makers and staff, the public and even the traditional forestry community have a misperception that community trees are a “frill” instead of an essential service. This is resulting in the erosion of funding and support of urban forestry at the national and local levels. Recent research and ongoing ecological analysis have finally described what urban foresters knew all along, that urban trees provide qualitative and quantitative social, ecological and economic functions and benefits. Urban forests are, in fact, the “green infrastructure” of a sustainable community and if managed, they are the only part of a community’s infrastructure that appreciates in value, benefits and function over time.

Individuals/Organizations:

Committed: Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, WDNR urban forestry program, UWSP L.E.A.F. Program, UW Extension Basin Education Program, Urban Open Space Foundation, Wisconsin Arborist Association, Wisconsin Landscape Federation

Targeted: community foresters, national, state and local staff/officials, utilities, forestry and natural resource professionals

Timeline:

Short-term:

1. Identify potential partners, officials and critical players
2. Green Industry “Day on the Hill” relationship building with state lawmakers
3. Key individuals or groups need to become organized and develop methods to carry out goals regarding awareness.

Mid-term:

1. Survey for awareness of urban tree benefits
2. Produce marketing program w/tag ID or brand (e.g. Smokey Bear)
3. Educate local decision makers on the values of urban forest ecosystems, green infrastructure and balanced development.
4. Complete the urban forestry LEAF component
5. Find a “champion”
6. Local and regional decision makers need to be targeted with educational campaigns. One possible arena for enhancing awareness may be the comprehensive planning process.

Long-term:

1. Update & review/revise program as needed
2. Education needs to continue as new decision makers are elected or appointed. Successful conservation of wooded areas and individual trees requires active participation of all people involved in the land development.
3. Consider introduction of legislation aimed at incentive-driven conservation of existing critical forest lands within a community watershed.

Indicators:

- When the public has awareness beyond amenity only perception
- When community dwellers and policy-makers know that urban trees are valuable and are important as components of the community infrastructure and quality of life.
- Urban forest management is included in a community’s comprehensive or “Smart Growth” plan

- Local and regional partnerships (city, county, township, nonprofit) are developed which address land use issues, establish ordinances and tree protection plans, incorporate forested communities into land use planning, educate developers and form local committees to address these issues.

Perceived obstacles/barriers:

- Resistance to change.
- The belief that balanced development creates more work and may result in less development revenues and tax revenues.
- Institutional indifference
- Lack of campaign/program funding
- Lack of staff/personnel to perform work

Resources needed to achieve action:

- Need for dedicated, organized groups and individuals.
- Citizen support.
- Funds for research, publications and publicity.

Action #3: Identify, contain, and minimize the biological and socio-economic impact of exotic pests and plants on Wisconsin's urban and rural forest land.

Justification:

Urban areas are frequently the source of new introductions of invasive species particularly from infested shipping containers and imported goods. These exotic invasive pests and plants threaten the health, productivity and composition of our urban and rural forestlands which in turn threaten related social, ecological and economic benefits they provide.

Individuals/Organizations:

Committed: APHIS, DATCP, DNR, UW, Governor's Council on Invasives, IPAW

Targeted: Midwest Invasive Plant Network, local contractors, Wisconsin Landscape Federation, Wisconsin Arborist Association, other industry groups.

Timeline:

Short-term:

1. Develop Risk Assessment Protocol

Mid-term:

1. Develop laws and legislative authority
2. Integrate/coordinate efforts of different organizations/agencies
3. Exchange information on successes from other states
4. Provide scientifically accurate brochures

Long-term:

1. Many actions not yet prioritized

Indicators:

- Development of the protocols
- Harmony of the groups involved

Perceived obstacles/barriers:

- Socio-economic factors must be considered

Resources needed to achieve action: Not yet identified

Partnerships Forged:

- The urban forestry theme identified several opportunities that require new partnerships to accomplish the two focus areas identified at the conference – assessment of the urban forest resource, and public education - including APHIS, DATCP, and IPAW among others. The long-term success of both traditional and urban forestry may ultimately rest in solidifying potential partnerships with professionals working on issues related to land use planning and forest fragmentation, exotic invasive species, private woodland ownership, and the forest products industry.
- Participants were diverse, representing a broad spectrum of agencies and organizations within and related to urban forestry. All of the interests present joined in developing an action plan to build partnerships and advance the agenda of urban forestry. Each theme created tangible action plans, but for these action plans to ultimately be successful, further discussion and inclusion of other partners is required. The very nature of some of the management actions, (e.g. control of exotics) mandates a broad array of participants and agencies if they are going to be effective.
- Urban forestry professionals often lament that conversations about urban forestry typically only involve the usual suspects preaching to the choir. However, the Governor’s Conference offered urban forestry an outstanding opportunity to reach out into the broader forestry community, and that goal was certainly accomplished. The urban forestry session at the Governor’s Conference included many more interests than normally participate in the urban forestry conversation. For example, participants included representatives from County forestry, Land and Water Conservation, and local government officials. While this session drew the attention of diverse groups and new profiles, the concurrent sessions made it somewhat difficult to reach the broadest possible audience attending the conference.

Connections with other Themes:

- Work on the urban forestry theme primarily identified opportunities for connecting with individuals and organizations working on issues expressed in the other themes. Specifically, the most obvious link is with the BMP and awareness issues in the Invasive theme as these were issues in the urban breakout session. The urban forest assessment will identify the economic value of the urban forest resource linking it to the Forest Based Economy theme in the areas of business climate, bio-fuels and timber products, and it will also relate to the Land Use theme in regards to development, urbanization and fragmentation on the urban fringe. The awareness actions will not only provide models for the awareness actions identified by most of the other issues, but it will also improve the forestry community's awareness of the extent and value of sustainable urban forests which will help the other themes to see their overlaps with urban forestry.

Summary:

There was mixed success in our two objectives.

Objective 1. Develop collaborative partnerships within urban forestry and across disciplines within the forestry community.

The urban forestry session recognized good opportunities for expanding partnerships with the broader forestry community and for integrating the efforts of several agencies and organizations. However, the structure of the conference kept each issue largely in its own silo. Involvement in one other breakout session allowed participants an opportunity to bring their views to another issue, but for the remaining five issues the exposure was brief and superficial. It is imperative that the conference organizers sit down and review where common ground exists. Identifying partners, real or imagined, is simply a mental exercise if they/we are not brought together under a unified plan of action.

Objective 2. Plan actions to move forward with the Statewide Forest Management Plan and identify individuals or groups that will take ownership of that action.

The urban forestry session successfully set three prioritized and focused action agendas, however for the most part, possible individuals and groups to lead the actions were simply identified. In addition, many other actions were identified without any means of prioritizing or following through. The leadership teams and individual organizations should use this raw data to encourage further work.

Despite some of the structural and time constraints, the Governor's Conference provided a much-needed forum to bring together the many aspects of forestry. Urban forestry in particular benefited from this opportunity not only to share its message with the forestry community, but to consider traditional forestry issues and see the potential common ground. We hope that the other themes also saw these connections, as we believe that urban forestry can be a vital partner in addressing a wide array of forestry concerns. The result will likely be cooperation and collaboration that otherwise might not have taken place had it not been for this conference.

We strongly urge the conference leadership team to continue to meet on an ongoing basis to encourage and facilitate further partnership development within and between theme groups.

As was mentioned in this report, the urban forestry breakout sessions identified many actions which were not prioritized or placed into an action plan. Nonetheless this is important information that partners could use when developing their own plans or when exploring possible collaborations. These actions were recorded in session matrices and are included as a separate appendix to this report.