

## Creating a Voice for the Urban Forest in Wisconsin

The majority (81%) of Wisconsin's population lives in urban areas. People and businesses living and working in Wisconsin's communities are impacted by the status of our urban forests, because forests in urban settings strongly influence the local environment, quality of life and economy. As development and urbanization increase across Wisconsin, the extent of the area under the pressure of urban environments increases, which highlights the need to understand the extent and status of urban forests in the state and, in turn, provide active management of our urban forests to ensure their long-term health and viability. Additionally, threats from exotic invasive species continue to increase. At the same time, pressures on local budgets are increasing and urban forestry programs are often one of the first and most heavily cut programs at both the state and local level.

Four priority issues from the Statewide Forest Plan are linked to urban forestry. Issues 8, 44, 45, 46 address invasive exotic species, increased urbanization, increased development, and a declining urban canopy respectively. Each of these issues as well as other critical and related issues such as funding and active management of the urban forest will be addressed directly in this session. We will use this conference as a starting point to begin building the collaborative relationships within the entire forestry community in Wisconsin as a foundation for future actions. The success of these efforts will depend on continued statewide support from the Governor's Council on Forestry and the WDNR for follow-up events to build on the foundations laid at this conference.

**Champion:** *Joe Wilson, Executive Director, Greening Milwaukee*

Joe Wilson is the Executive Director of Greening Milwaukee, a non-profit organization dedicated to increasing the tree canopy in the city of Milwaukee through programs of environmental education, awareness, and advice. He is responsible for harnessing enthusiasm throughout greater Milwaukee for a significant environmental improvement resource while building the internal infrastructure to support diverse activities, constituencies, and future aspirations. Joe holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in Public Administration from St. Edwards University, Austin, Texas and a Certificate in Strategic Planning from the University of North Texas. He is a member of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council. He is a member of the National Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council (NUCFAC) representing non-governmental positions from a city with a population of more than 50,000. He is currently the Chairperson of the NUCFAC.

## **The Erosion of Funding for Urban Forestry**

The majority (81%) of Wisconsin's population lives in urban areas. People and businesses living and working in Wisconsin's communities are impacted by the status of our urban forests, because forests in urban settings strongly influence the local environment, quality of life and economy. At the same time, pressures on local budgets are increasing and urban forestry programs are often one of the first and most heavily cut programs at both the state and local level. In the debate over funding allocations at both the state and local level, urban forestry often suffers from the perception of being an unnecessary infrastructure providing non-essential services. Education and advocacy are potential solutions to addressing the issues of fund allocation at the state and local level for both urban forestry services as well as applied level research and University Extension programming. The conference provides an opportunity for building the partnerships with the forestry community for successful advocacy and education.

**Leader:** *David Liska, City Forester, City of Waukesha.*

For the past 27 years David Liska has been the city forester for the city of Waukesha, WI, a 25-year Tree City USA. Prior to that he served 6 years as the forester for the Village of Chenequa, WI. He has a BS in forestry and an MS in urban forestry from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is currently the chair of the Wisconsin urban forestry council and a forestry faculty associate of the UW-Stevens Point. He was twice president of the Wisconsin Arborist Association and has been awarded Distinguished Service and Honorary Life Member of the WAA.

# Urbanization, Development, Fragmentation and the Decline of the Urban Forest Canopy

From 1992 to 1997, urbanization in Wisconsin increased by 271,000 acres across the state. That rate of urbanization was more than double the rate for the previous five-year period. Urbanization results in increased pressure on our existing natural resources and brings with it different attitudes relating to the stewardship of these resources. Citizens, property owners, business owners and local officials often fail to understand the economic, environmental and social benefits that the urban forests provide to the vast majority of Wisconsin's citizens. As urbanization and development increase across Wisconsin, destruction and fragmentation of wooded areas threaten the ecological integrity and functions of natural systems and the quality of life in urbanizing areas. At the same time, our existing urban tree canopy is declining, resulting in a loss of the benefits that the urban forest provides to the people and businesses in Wisconsin's communities. Citizens living in urban areas, developers, non-profit groups, government administrators, engineers, natural resource professionals, utility companies, etc. can and do have a significant impact on the quality of the urban forest canopy as development and urbanization expand. These issues are both immediate and ongoing. Much progress has already been made in some areas. However, these successes need to be built upon and successful models need to be applied throughout the state.

**Leader:** *Jeff Gorman, Parks and Urban Forestry Director, Village of Mount Horeb.* Jeff received his B.S. in Urban Forestry from the UW- Stevens Point and is an ISA Certified Arborist. Jeff is a member of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, Wisconsin Arborist Association and the Wisconsin Park and Recreation Association. Jeff is also chair of the Dane County Tree Board.

## **Invasive Species in the Urban Forest**

The majority (81%) of Wisconsin's population lives in urban areas. People and businesses living and working in Wisconsin's communities are impacted by the status of our urban forests. As most of the citizens in this state live in urban areas, we are the first to be impacted aesthetically and economically by invasive species. Holiday decorations, packing materials, specialty plants, nursery stock, etc., harbor non-native insects and diseases, and as they are shipped across the state, nation and globe, they carry these passengers with them. Often times, native plants have little or no immunity to the exotic diseases, and, in many cases, natural controls don't exist for these invasive insects. These pests are not only a threat to the urban forest, but also a threat to the ecology of our natural areas. Additionally, most people see value in planting the urban environment for esthetics, energy savings, noise and pollution control, etc. We use tough native and non-native plants that do best in this urban environment. Some of these plants that do well in the urban landscape may also do so well in natural areas that they overcome and replace the plants that are native to the area. The loss of some of these plants affects the general forest health and ecology of the area. Because this issue of invasive species crosses across boundaries of urban and native environments, we have many common areas of interest, and much has already taken place in the form of various committees on the state and local level. The issue of individual problem cases has to be determined as to their immediate threat to the forest, both urban and native. Due to their harmful impact, some issues need immediate attention, while others are not as critical. Using this conference to continue building partnerships with other areas of forestry would be very important to urban forestry and help the traditional forestry concerns.

**Leader:** *Jeff Edgar, part owner of Silver Creek Nurseries, Inc., Manitowoc, WI.* Silver Creek Nurseries, is a wholesale grower of nursery stock, which is distributed over much of the mid-west and some western states. Jeff is active in several local, state and national green industry organizations. Most recently he served as chair of the WI Urban Forestry Council and is currently a Senator for the American Nursery and Landscape Association.

## **Active Urban Forest Management: Meeting the needs of Wisconsin's communities**

Eroding funding and public misperceptions are barriers to active and financially equitable urban forest management. In light of these constraints, it is imperative that we stimulate increased efficiency, while maintaining or expanding effective urban forest management. It is crucial that as resource managers, be it municipal or private, we build a constituency that recognizes and values the outcome of the science upon which our profession is based. Furthermore, it is imperative that we arm ourselves with the findings of these scientific inquiries and that any and all dissemination conveys our current understanding of how active forest management contributes to the social, economic and ecological health of Wisconsin's communities. Meeting these objectives requires the collective focus of our profession to identify gaps in our current knowledge base that upon investigation and implementation would enhance our management capacity, thereby maximizing the resources potential. Additionally, it is equally important that we commit ourselves to support, financially or cooperatively, research endeavors that meet the needs of Wisconsin's communities in their efforts to manage the urban forest resource. These critical issues are being faced in all communities across the state, and all citizens living in urbanized areas, municipal administrators, elected officials, urban and community foresters, commercial and consulting arborists, urban and regional planners, etc. have a stake in their outcome. The primary focus should be confined to identifying and meeting the critical needs of municipalities within the state and achieving the objectives of the Wisconsin's State Urban Forestry Plan, and a timeline to address these concerns will be an outcome of this conference.

**Leader:** *Les Werner, Professor, University of Wisconsin Stevens Point*

Les Werner is a Lecturer in Urban Forestry in the College of Natural Resources located at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. Professor Werner instructs courses in Arboriculture, Amenity Forestry, Tree Structure and Function, and Urban Forestry. In addition, Les serves as the Faculty Advisor to the UWSP Chapter of the Student Society of Arboriculture, a special interest group within the International Society of Arboriculture. Professor Werner has over 15 years experience as a commercial and a municipal arborist and 3 years experience as an Instructor of Urban Forestry from Southeastern Illinois College. Les earned his Ph.D. from the Department of Horticulture, University of Wisconsin– Madison and his Master's Degree (M.S.) and Bachelor's Degree (B.S.) from the College of Natural Resources, University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point.