



2023

Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council

Biennial Report

Presented To:

**Wisconsin
Department of
Natural Resources**

2023 WISCONSIN URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL BIENNIAL REPORT

On behalf of the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council, I present the 2023 Biennial Report to the Department of Natural Resources. This report summarizes Council actions and accomplishments over the last two years.

Contained within is information about our four issue groups, including a list of accomplishments and future plans for each group. Also included is a summary of urban forestry grants and award winners for the last two years, plus an update from the Wisconsin Council on Forestry.

Most importantly, this report contains a list of general updates and accomplishments for the Urban Forestry Council and urban forestry program, and a list of advisory recommendations. Support for our recommendations and ideas will help to maintain and improve the valuable services the urban forest provides to the citizens of Wisconsin.

Matt Koepnick, Chair
Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council



Advisory Recommendations

Review the Existing Urban Forestry Grant Rules

The 2023-2025 Biennial Budget increased funding to urban forestry grants by \$350,000 over the biennium. Given this increase in funding, the Urban Forestry Council recommends reviewing and potentially revising the urban forestry grant rules to determine if there might be an opportunity to support larger and/or longer term grant requests.

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Grant Program

Wisconsin was awarded \$4,875,000 in IRA funds. As the process of determining grant rules and details moves forward, we recommend continuing to engage the Council as part of this review process. We recommend focusing on accountability and tracking both successes and challenges associated with the disbursement of these funds.

Program Funding and Staffing

We recognize that maintaining urban forestry staff is critical to effectively meeting goals, running grant programs, and operating other programs. The Council continues to recommend that DNR strives to create full-time, permanent positions for all urban forestry staff rather than limited term positions, to ensure continuity and long-term program success.

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 credits were offered for a responsible leaf management program and for increasing urban forest canopy in their community. The Council reiterates our recommendation from the 2019 and 2021 biennial reports in urging WDNR to cooperate among divisions to allow for stormwater credits for tree planting and maintenance, in recognition of established and ongoing research.

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).



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.

Membership

OFFICERS

Mr. Matt Koepnick, Chair

Representing the Society of Municipal Arborists
& Municipal Arborists in Medium Sized Cities
City Forester, City of Racine

Ms. Linda Cadotte, Vice Chair

Representing Municipal Arborists in Medium Sized Cities
Director of Parks, Recreation & Forestry, City of Superior

Dr. Shahla Werner, Past Chair

Representing DATCP
Plant Protection Chief, DATCP

MEMBERS

Ms. Katie Aspenson

Representing City Planners
Planning Manager, City of Onalaska

Dr. Kirsten Beyer

Representing Higher Education
Associate Professor & Director, Medical College of Wisconsin
Adjunct Assistant Professor, UW-Milwaukee

Ms. Wendy Braun, PE

Member-at-Large Representing Stormwater Issues
Stormwater Engineer, Wisconsin DOT

Mr. Travis Derks

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

Mr. Jeff Edgar

Representing the Nursery/Green Industry
Owner, Silver Creek Nursery

Mr. Lee Fredericks

Representing Elected Officials and Commercial Arborists
Village Trustee, Village of Slinger
Western Great Lakes Territory Manager, Rainbow Ecoscience

Dr. Tricia Gorby

Representing Higher Education
Director, Natural Resources Institute, UW-Madison Extension

Mr. Randy Krouse

Representing Municipal Arborists in Large Sized Cities
Forestry Services Manager, City of Milwaukee

Mr. Michael Lawrenz

Representing the Wisconsin Arborist Association
Arborist, Hoppe Tree Service

Mr. Paul Morrison

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

Membership

MEMBERS

Mr. Brian Pelot

Representing Municipal Arborists in Medium Sized Cities
City Forester, City of Green Bay

Mr. Robin Powers

Representing the League of Wisconsin Municipalities
Director of Marketing & Administration

Mr. Ben Reince

Member-at-Large
Executive Vice President, Wachtel Tree Science

Mr. August Ridder

Representing Utility Arborists
Program Manager Vegetation Management, Xcel Energy

Ms. Christa Schaefer

Representing the Wisconsin Department of Transportation
Landscape Architect, WDOT

Mr. Jordan Skiff

Representing Public Works
Wastewater Superintendent, City of Sheboygan

Mr. Matthew Staudenmaier

Representing Municipal Arborists in Medium Sized Cities
Forestry Supervisor, City of Eau Claire

Mr. Jonathan Stickels

Representing the Green/Nursery Industry
Nursery Manager, Mariani Plants

Ms. Sarah Toomsen

Representing the American Society of Landscape Architects
Manager of Planning & Development, Milwaukee County Parks

Mr. Jeffrey Treu

Member-at-Large Representing Statewide Natural Resource
Advocates
Regional Forester, WE Energies (Retired)

Mr. Rex Zemke

Representing Interested Wisconsin Citizens
District Groundskeeper, Wausau School District

EXOFFICIO MEMBERS

Ms. Laura Buntrock

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Partnership & Policy Specialist

Ms. Jennipher Janness

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Outreach Specialist

Ms. Jill Johnson

United States Forest Service
Midwest Urban Forestry Coordinator

Mr. Jeff Roe

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, Division of Forestry
Urban Forestry Team Leader

Council Overview

The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council is currently comprised of 24 voting members, representing a diverse spectrum of urban forestry interests. Members represent a variety of industries that include elected officials, municipal foresters, landscape architects, private arborists, tree nurseries, educators, urban wood users, and many others.

Members are appointed to 3-year terms by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Secretary. Members in good standing have the option of renewing for an indefinite number of terms.

In addition to attending four Council meetings per year, members are required to serve on one or more standing committees, or one of our four issue groups, both of which are listed below. Additional information about the issue groups can be found on the next several pages of this document.

Standing Committees:

- Executive Committee
- Nominations & Orientation Committee
- Awards Committee

Issue Groups:

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



Stevens Point, June 2023

Stormwater Issue Group

The purpose of the stormwater issue group is to raise awareness of how increasing the urban forest canopy can positively impact stormwater runoff quality and quantity. Trees provide considerable stormwater volume and pollution control through rainfall interception and intensity reduction, stormwater infiltration and uptake, and nutrient load reduction.

Leader: Wendy Braun & Christa Schaefer

Members: Lee Fredericks, Linda Cadotte, Jordan Skiff, Brian Pelot

DNR Support: Laura Buntrock

Trees & Stormwater Credits

- The committee continues to work with WDNR staff regarding the use of trees to achieve stormwater credit in MS4 areas.
- In December 2022, staff from USGS, WDNR, and PV & Associates presented to the Council about stormwater research and leaf management. WDNR is reviewing leaf management data and is considering offering stormwater credits. WDNR is working towards a 'standard for phosphorus removal'. Phosphorus removal in urban water quality is being incorporated into the WinSLAMM modeling program. The continued research incorporates Wisconsin's stormwater credit options, and WinSLAMM stormwater modeling so that we can play a role in shifting the paradigm about trees and stormwater.

Funding Opportunities

- The committee reviewed ways to use Inflation Reduction Act funding for stormwater mitigation in disadvantaged communities. There was interest in seeing if the grant program would accept design for bioswales, retaining ponds, and uptake areas.
- The committee is reviewing how WisDOT can incorporate trees and provide guidance for tree placement along roadways through the Carbon Reduction Act. One challenge is that there is a lot of staff turnover and it may be difficult to find someone familiar with the Carbon Reduction Act.

Outreach to Other Groups

- A representative from the Council spoke at the North American Stormwater and Erosion Control Association of Wisconsin about invasive trees and leaf management.
- An article was also printed in the Wisconsin League of Municipalities publication titled "The Municipality Magazine".

New Goals

- In 2023 the committee plans to request a literature review of the use of biochar for stormwater. Biochar is a charcoal produced from plant matter - incorporating biochar into soil is a way to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere while also providing stormwater benefits. Based on the results of the review the committee will recommend what additional research might be needed.
- The committee is considering inviting MnDOT, UW-Green Bay staff, or other experts to present on their experiences using biochar for stormwater uses.

Workforce Development Issue Group

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

Leader: Ben Reince

Members: Katie Aspenson, Jeff Edgar, Matt Staudenmaier, August Ridder, Randy Krouse, Brian Pelot, Michael Lawrenz

DNR Support: Brian Wahl

The Urban Forestry Council recently reviewed all issue groups with the purpose of determining whether individual groups still have work to do and if they should continue operating. It was determined that the workforce development issue group has made progress and that there is still more to accomplish.

Arboriculture is now a recognized trade industry in Wisconsin and the arborist apprenticeship is growing - private employers continue to utilize the program with the goal of developing skilled journey workers.

One focus for this group has been to visit middle schools, high schools, colleges and universities as guest speakers to share information about our industry and continue to increase awareness.

Moving forward, this group will continue to focus on raising awareness. Some questions to be answered include:

- How can public and private entities promote various career pathways that lead to our industry?
- How can the the DNR urban forestry program continue to support these awareness efforts?

The time, focus, and efforts of this group will be to continue to find ways in which the DNR urban forestry program can assist in raising awareness, with the goal of having employees choose to work in the urban forestry and arboriculture industries intentionally, rather than by accident or luck.

Public Health and Trees Issue Group

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 sharing that evidence with public health practitioners, health care organizations, foresters, urban planners, architects, municipalities, and communities more broadly.

Leader: Dr. Kirsten Beyer

Members: Tricia Gorby, Rex Zemke, Christa Schaefer

DNR Support: Olivia Witthun, Good Health Grows on Trees Team

Refined Focus

- In 2022, the committee advised the DNR to focus on the health benefits that trees provide to students, staff, and faculty of k-12 schools and patients, families, providers and staff of health care facilities.

Financial Support for K-12 Greening

- DNR is partnering with UW-Stevens Point LEAF and a utility company to create an outdoor classroom at a Wisconsin middle school with its use focused on STEM curriculum.
- Approximately \$400,000 of the DNR's FY23 Inflation Reduction Act award will be used to support schoolyard greening activities.

Outreach and Education

- Information on the public health benefits of urban trees was provided to Aspirus Health Care via their webinar series in April 2023. This webinar was made available to all their locations across central and northern WI, as well as Michigan's U.P. Aspirus Wausau Hospital is Wisconsin's third Tree Campus Healthcare designee from the Arbor Day Foundation.
- DNR provided two presentations at the 2023 Midwest Environmental Education Conference which included information on the public health benefits of trees.

Arbor Day Foundation Recognition Program Participation

- Wisconsin currently has 2 Tree Campus K-12 recognized schools through this Arbor Day Foundation program, from its inception in 2020 (Adams Friendship Area School District and Cumberland Middle School).
- Wisconsin currently has 4 Tree Campus Healthcare recognized facilities through this Arbor Day Foundation program, up from just two at its inception in 2018 (Amery Hospital & Clinic, Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Edgerton Hospital and Health Services, and Westfield's Hospital & Clinic).

Tree Species Diversity Issue Group

The purpose of the Tree Species Diversity Issue Group is to promote the importance of tree diversity in urban forests. Urban tree diversity is important when attempting to create a healthy, beneficial, and resilient urban forest. Having a variety of trees can increase the aesthetic value for residents and create habitats for plants and animals.

Leader: Jeff Edgar

Members: Brian Pelot, Jeff Treu, Jonathan Stickels, Randy Krouse

DNR Support: Patricia Lindquist

Report on 2022-2023 Activities:

The Tree Species Diversity Issue Group works to promote the importance of urban forest diversity, and provides resources for urban foresters to facilitate the expansion of their urban tree and shrub species palates. To that end, the Group is working with the UFC Awards Committee to consider adding a category of award that would recognize and publicize outstanding efforts by a community to improve or expand their local urban forest diversity.

Group members also wrote articles for the [September 2022](#) and [April 2023](#) edition of DATCP's monthly nursery e-news, What's Growing On promoting the results of DNR's recent urban tree species diversity survey and providing a link to a website from the Oregon Association of Nurseries, www.nurseryguide.com, providing a nursery growers offering a huge selection of tree species.

Future plans are underway to create a list of licensed nursery growers that have significant and diverse selections of trees available for sale. Members of this issue group that also serve on the Wisconsin Arborists Association programming committee helped shape the agenda for the summer 2023 meeting. This included a DATCP presentation (loosely based on research by entomologist Dr. Doug Tallamy, his lab, and the Wisconsin pollinator protection plan) on the importance of planting a diverse array of native tree and shrubs in urban and community forests to support birds and specialized native pollinators.

Finally, the Tree Species Diversity Group recently lent their expertise to the DNR urban forestry team staff in finalizing their recommended lists of small, medium and large park trees, based on their knowledge of how well various species survive in Wisconsin in the face of stressors such as black knot of cherry and sycamore anthracnose.

Wisconsin Council on Forestry

The **Wisconsin Council on Forestry** 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 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 Council on Forestry is reviewing its priorities to ensure they align with goals outlined in the recently updated Forest Action Plan.
- The Council also set up several committees to focus on specific topics like transportation, public policy, budget issues, and forest products.
- A profile committee has been active in reviewing the Council on Forestry website, advocating for a WDNR liaison to work more directly with the Council on Forestry, and preparing a fact sheet for state legislators.

Points of interest from the most recent Council on Forestry meeting:

- State legislators were invited to attend a forestry information session that was sponsored in part by the County Forest Association in Spooner on 9/25/23. The association is also starting a marketing campaign that will run on streaming services throughout the State.
- A state budget update led to discussion about forestry related items that were excluded from the proposed state budget. Budget items excluded are invasive species (\$1.2M), tree planting (\$790K), nurseries (\$628K), forest regeneration (\$1.3M), landowner grants (\$620K), a strategic roadmap for the forestry industry (\$775K), forestry center (\$300K), county wildlife (\$256K), and careers (\$195K).
- An evening reception celebrated the fact that a DNR goal of connecting with 20,000 *new* forest-owning landowners was surpassed. As of 6/30/23, over 21,000 landowners walked their land with a DNR or consulting forester within the past few years for the first time.
- It was noted that several geographic areas in Wisconsin were significantly affected by drought during the summer of 2023.

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.

The Awards Committee Chair is Lee Fredericks. Other committee members include Kirsten Beyer, Wendy Braun, Linda Cadotte, and Tricia Gorby. DNR support is provided by Jenn Janness who joined the WDNR urban forestry team in October 2023.

There are five categories of awards:

- **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 citizen, 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.

2023 Award Winners



John Gall

Recognized with the **Lifetime Achievement** award for assisting dozens of communities and entities in enhancing their urban forestry programs, especially the Village of Fox Point



Mequon Nature Preserve's
Marty's Playspace

Mequon Nature Preserve's nature-made playground that uniquely promotes the green movement for children of all ages received the **Innovations in Urban Forestry** award



John Wayne Farber

Recognized for his **Leadership** in community forestry management

2022 Award Winners

Next Gen: Mequon Nature Preserve Environmental Education Programs

Project Partnership: Johnson's Nursery Community Tree Planting Program

Innovations in Urban Forestry: Two Award Winners

- Award winner: Elton Rodgers
- Award winner: Cedarburg Green

Leadership: Andy Sims

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 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.



2022 Grant Summary

- 52 grants totaling \$866,425.29 were awarded
 - 15 grants were start-up grants
 - 7 grants were catastrophic storm grants

2023 Grant Summary

- 65 grants totaling \$631,875.61 were awarded
 - 24 grants were start-up grants
 - 0 grants were catastrophic storm grants

2022 Grant Award Details

East Central: 9 grants (including 1 catastrophic grant) were issued for a total of \$181,649.24.

North Central: 5 grants (including 2 catastrophic grants) were issued for a total of \$124,687.50.

Northeast: 12 grants (including 6 start up and 2 catastrophic storm grants) were issued for a total of \$201,360.93.

South Central: 10 grants (including 3 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$134,181.50.

Southeast: 9 grants (including 2 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$130,535.62.

West Central: 7 grants (including 4 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$59,632.50.

2023 Grant Award Details

East Central: 4 grants were issued for a total of \$42,165.44.

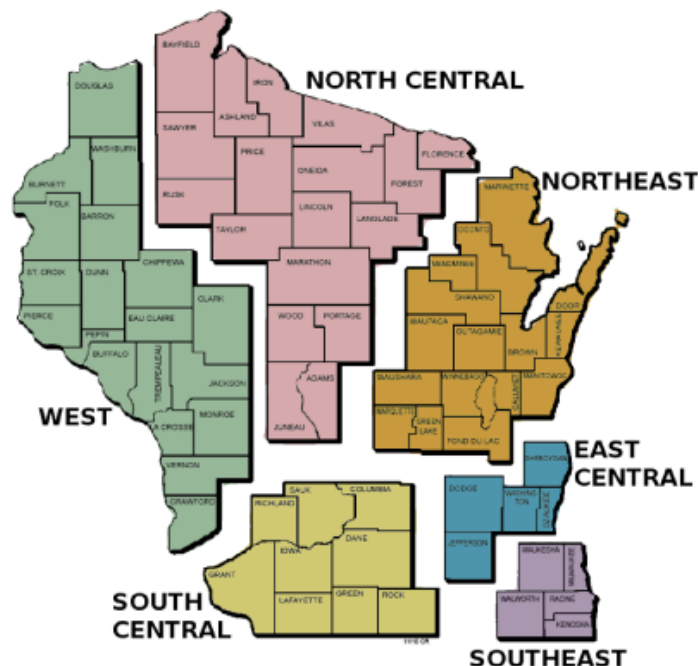
North Central: 9 grants (including 2 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$159,065.50.

Northeast: 12 grants (including 5 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$169,535.62.

South Central: 21 grants (including 9 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$233,198.30.

Southeast: 7 grants (including 1 startup grant) were issued for a total of \$83,689.04.

West Central: 12 grants (including 7 startup grants) were issued for a total of \$113,757.33.



Updates & Accomplishments

Inflation Reduction Act (IRA)

In 2022 the United States Forest Service announced that \$1.5B 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, \$250M 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 WDNR's grant request, and Wisconsin was ultimately awarded \$4,875,000 in funding.

As of this writing, the urban forestry program is working through an emergency rule change process to request changes to the administrative code surround the Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Grant program to allow for the equitable and efficient disbursement of IRA grant funds to local entities for projects focused on disadvantaged communities.

If the rule changes are approved they will be temporary and will only apply to IRA funds.



*FY 2023 state allocations in millions of dollars

Updates & Accomplishments

Inflation Reduction Act - continued

The rules and policies associated with the regular and start-up grant programs will remain intact. The Urban Forestry Council was provided the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed emergency rule change process associated with these funds.

Wisconsin Community Tree Management Institute

The Wisconsin Community Tree Management Institute (CTMI) wrapped up its fifth class mid-June 2023. 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. Conversely, they may have the technical skills, but lack the leadership and management experience.

This graduating class of 29 CTMI students represented 25 communities, two nonprofits, one regional planning commission and one attendee from the DNR forest products team, representing a combined population of over 251,000 Wisconsin residents.

Members of the Urban Forestry Council and State Forester Heather Berklund continued the tradition of participating in the graduation event which included a conversational mixer and dinner. Congratulations to all CTMI graduates!



2023 CTMI Graduating Class, Stevens Point

Updates & Accomplishments

Internship Program

The DNR Urban Forestry team welcomed two urban forestry interns to the Milwaukee office for eight weeks during this past summer. This was the second year of a collaborative program between the department, the USDA Forest Service, and Southern University and A&M College, a public historically black land-grant university (HBCU) in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

An official 5-year internship agreement is now in place and 2023 marked the first year of of this new agreement.

WDNR Forestry Staff Updates

The Urban Forestry Assessment Specialist position, filled by Dan Buckler, oversees data collection and analysis projects across the State to help partners and the public understand what trees are growing where, and why they are important. This position has been a federally funded LTE position, but is now a federally funded FTE position.

After 32 years as a WDNR Urban Forestry Coordinator, Kim Sebastian retired in August 2023. She has provided assistance to dozens of communities and has been a key part of building one of the best urban forestry programs in the county. Kim's contributions to urban forestry in southeastern Wisconsin will be remembered for years to come.



Kim Sebastian

Wisconsin Urban Forestry Grant Program

The recent Governor's 2023-2035 Biennial Budget increased funding to urban forestry grants by \$350,000 over the biennium. Increasing the urban forestry grant budget has been a Council recommendation for the last several budget cycles. In 2024, the annual allotment will increase by \$175,000 to further fund urban forestry projects. Also available this grant cycle is an additional \$145,000 in federal funding to be used for emerald ash borer treatment and ash tree removals and replacements. In total, \$806,680 is currently available in regular and startup grant funding for 2024, with an additional \$139,920 in reserve for catastrophic storm grants.



Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council



This report would not be possible without the contributions of committee members, issue group leaders, individual urban forestry council members, and Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources urban forestry staff.

Thank you for your technical and editorial guidance.

<https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/topic/urbanforests/members>