

VT Urban & Community Forestry Program Quarterly Report
December 2020 – March 2021

Desired Future Condition 1: Biological Diversity		
Conserve biological diversity across all landscapes.		
Strategies		Priorities
1.1	Promote sustainable planning, use, and management of public greenspaces in villages and downtowns, such as village greens, town forests, parks, trails, playgrounds, and other public gathering spaces.	✓
1.2	Increase awareness, support, and implementation of planning for urban and community forests at local, regional, and statewide scales.	✓
1.3	Encourage long-term conservation efforts such as acquisition and planning by partners to keep forests forested and address forest fragmentation.	
1.4	Promote biological diversity and resiliency in urban and community forests through planning, use, and management that sustain diverse forest types and tree species, conditions, and age.	

Town Forests Recreation Planning

- Forests for the People/Town Forest Educational Events: Two events remain as we near the end of this USFS Landscape Scale Restoration Grant:
 - Bench Building Workshop: this event is on hold until post-COVID (hopefully summer 2021)
 - Community Governance Project and Training: We are now under contract with the Northern Forest Center to complete a three-phased project by September to better understand governance issues, gaps in skills and knowledge, and what has worked well, particularly for town forest committees:
 - Phase 1: Convene a project working group and identify questions, survey audience, and focused interview participants
 - Phase 2: Discovery: surveys and interviews
 - Phase 3: Summary of findings, likely a white paper
 - Phase 4: Information transfer via an online workshop for practitioners

Forest Planning

- **Forest Integrity Project:** This USFS funded project continues to move forward with a new end date of 6/30/22. Project partners are Forest Ecosystem Monitoring Cooperative (FEMC), Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission (CVRPC), the Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC), VT Fish & Wildlife, and VT Forests, Parks & Recreation. Project updates during this quarter include:
 - FEMC's contributions to the project are complete. FEMC developed regional forest fragmentation risk maps for each Regional Planning Commission to better aid municipal technical assistance for forest planning.
 - VNRC's contract was extended until May 2021 to accommodate one final deliverable - the completion of the updated *Community Strategies for VT's Forests and Wildlife* guide.
 - CVRPC has been leading an effort to better understand how municipalities have, can, and hope to support local forest products businesses. A survey was sent out last year and project partners have been meeting regularly to discuss next steps. Chapter revisions in VNRC's *Community Strategies* guide (mentioned above) will incorporate much of what the group has learned.
 - UCF will be utilizing funding through this project to contract with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns to support the new tree warden statutes, as well as partnering with 10 municipalities to draft shade tree preservation plans (more on this under DFC #5 below).
 - The final component of this project is a comprehensive outreach campaign/development of fact sheet and guides to facilitate use of the project deliverables. We will be developing and RFP this spring.

Desired Future Condition 2: Forest Health & Productivity		
Maintain and enhance forest ecosystem health and productivity.		
Strategies		Priorities
2.1	Identify, facilitate, and/or transfer research by academic, government, or community-led science initiatives that improves our understanding of urban and community forests, including urban forest inventory and analysis (Urban FIA).	
2.2	Survey, monitor, and support slow the spread and prevention efforts of invasive species that impact urban and community forests.	
2.3	Expand resources to assist communities to prepare for, mitigate, and recover from threats to urban and community forests including severe weather, fragmentation, climate change, and invasive pests.	✓
2.4	Increase communities' capacity to create resilient urban and community forests through growing or acquiring high-quality trees and a diversity of species.	

2.5	Encourage landscape level planning and management activities that maintain health, productivity, and ecological functions of urban and community forests in light of climate change.	
2.6	Conduct technical assistance to communities, including volunteer groups, in order to help them understand, evaluate, and/or implement actions to advance sustainable urban and community forestry programs.	✓

Urban FIA: As we near the completion of the first full cycle of data collection for Urban FIA (7 years), the USFS and the Northwest-Midwest State Foresters Alliance are beginning to facilitate discussions about how to access and use the data. We participated in one such meeting in late February, focused on an update about Urban FIA nationally and the multiple data portals/tools available or in development to support states and partners accessing the data. Check out the [My City's Trees app](#)!

Municipal Technical Assistance

- **Ash Inventory:** We continue to support towns statewide in ash inventory efforts. Between December 2020 and March 2021, we continued to support ash inventory training and data retrieval for Essex, Charlotte, Shelburne, Peacham, and Saint Michael's College.
- **EAB Planning:** We continue to support towns statewide in planning for EAB. In this quarter, we provided online presentations on a variety of aspects related to municipal EAB planning and ash tree management for the Vermont Local Roads Program to audiences from Putney, Pittsford, Chester, Granville, Ripton, Norwich, Jericho, Danville, South Burlington, Vergennes, Cabot, Charlotte, Shelburne, Grafton, and Underhill. We also presented EAB municipal planning considerations and FAQs to the Addison County Transportation Advisory Council and advised the Montpelier Tree Board and Vermont Buildings and General Services regarding ash tree management on the forested parcel behind the Vermont Statehouse.

Urban Forest Health Outreach and Education

VTinvasives website

- Continued to improve the structure of EAB information on VTinvasives.
- **VTinvasives E-News:** 1 produced.
- Continued to support 'Report It' submissions.
- Managing listserv to provide updates to EAB Infested Area Map and state news.

EAB Response & Planning

- Vermont utility companies continue to meet quarterly on EAB; the last quarterly meeting was in January and focused on strategies for prioritization of ash management and removal along utility corridors.
- In late 2020 UCF released a suite of [6 case studies](#) about how municipalities have and are managing for EAB here in Vermont and beyond; we have received positive feedback about these case studies and hope to produce more this summer by potentially hiring an intern from Antioch College's graduate program.
- We have continued to support planning for EAB and ash management on state lands; Grand Isle State Park has been chosen as a pilot state park to explore economically feasible options to deal with the large number of ash on the property, particularly around the campsites. In addition to UCF, State Lands foresters, Forest Protection staff, and Parks are represented in the planning group.

EAB Outreach

- All in-person EAB Outreach events for the past quarter were cancelled due to COVID.
- ***Checklist and Resources for Managing EAB in Town Forests***: UCF worked with County Foresters, FPR Forest Health, and the Vermont Land Trust foresters to create a planning guide to help municipalities make good silviculture decisions for Town Forests in the context of EAB. The final resource has been reviewed and edited by all partners and will live on the UCF website.
- The Forest Pest Outreach Program (FPOP) program, which funds Ginger's position, is planning an educational campaign targeted to recreationists in 2021. This will consist of a combination of press releases and social media campaigns targeting birders, nordic skiers, snowmobilers, hikers, fisherpeople, hunters, mountain bikers and other outdoor recreationist groups about the signs and symptoms and how to report multiple invasive forest insects. It will include information on EAB as well as other pests such as Asian long horned beetle (ALB), spotted lantern fly, hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA), and oak wilt. Updates this quarter include:
 - We shared a guide to "holes made in trees" with participants in the Winter Bird Count and our Facebook post reached over 2,900 people with over 600 engagements.
 - In February we did another Facebook campaign with recreation groups asking them to share information on HWA; it reached over 11,000 people with over 500 engagements.
 - We sent out a press release on HWA, EAB, and ALB that went out to 36 weeklies, 8 dailies, and 4 news stations. It was picked up by at least a handful of outlets.
 - We mailed trailhead signs on invasive pests to 8 nordic ski centers.
- We sponsored a webinar training on spotted lantern fly, given by FPR's Savannah Ferriera, targeted at state agency staff.
- We will be coordinating another **EAB Awareness Week** this spring, from May 15th to 22nd.
- Ginger gave a presentation on EAB to students at Vermont Technical College in Randolph.

Desired Future Condition 3: Forest Products & Ecosystem Services		
Maintain and enhance forest contribution to ecosystem services.		
Strategies		Priorities
3.1	Facilitate opportunities to utilize urban wood including after natural disasters or pest infestations.	
3.2	Identify and facilitate opportunities to integrate local agroforestry into urban and community forestry in public spaces.	
3.3.	Promote awareness and use of urban and community forestry practices to protect water quality in rural and urban Vermont landscapes through implementation of low impact development (LID), green stormwater infrastructure (GSI), and sound silvicultural practices that support resilient community trees and forests.	
3.4	Promote awareness and use of urban and community forestry practices at the municipal level to adapt climate change strategies that mitigate urban air temperatures, water and air pollution, and support biodiversity.	✓
3.5	Monitor and explore opportunities for forest carbon credits for urban and community forestry in Vermont.	
3.6	Promote awareness and stewardship around the ecosystem services of community forests and other public spaces.	
3.7	Fund, promote, and record progress on implementation of best practices and outreach initiatives that support functional ecosystems at local and regional scales.	✓
3.8	Facilitate impact mitigation of invasive forest pests at regional and statewide levels and the associated ecosystem services and cultural losses resulting from infestations and the decline of specific impacted tree populations.	

Water Quality

In January we participated in an introductory meeting with Alison Adams, the UVM Extension/SEA Grant Watershed Forestry Coordinator. Joining the meeting was FPR's Keith Thompson, Private Lands Program Manager and Dave Wilcox, Watershed Forester. The group discussed potential areas of collaboration and where our work already does or may overlap.

Black Ash & EAB

In December 2020, we met with representatives from VT FPR and Chief Don Stevens from the Nullhegan band of the Abenaki to discuss black ash availability on state lands and the future of black ash living in the landscape and harvested and pounded into splints for basketmaking. We have communicated with representatives from the US Forest Service, the University of Maine, and the Vermont Land Trust to plan for black ash inventory and seed saving workshops in Vermont. Vermont Fish & Wildlife also provided input regarding where black ash is found on state-owned or state-managed land and would be available for harvest by Abenaki basket-makers.

Energy Saving Trees/Vermont Community Canopy

- 2021: We are under contract with the Arbor Day Foundation to run this program in the spring in two select municipalities (TBD, likely Newport and Bennington). We will be giving out 316 trees.
- Funding: We have received two years' worth of funding to run this program through an air quality settlement fund via the Air Quality Division at the Department of Environmental Conservation. This funding has very few strings attached, and we were fortunate to receive it!

Desired Future Condition 4: Land Ethic		
Maintain and enhance an ethic of respect for the land, sustainable use, and exemplary management.		
Strategies		Priorities
4.1	Create awareness and foster recognition of the ecological, social, cultural, and economic contributions that urban and community forests provide to Vermont, and the need to sustain forest health and productivity to ensure continued benefits for this and future generations.	✓
4.2	Maintain and expand public outreach, social media, and technology transfer.	
4.3	Educate and engage the public, including students, in urban and community forest stewardship and community science, including Vermont Tree Stewards and Forest Pest First Detectors.	
4.4	Educate landowners, tree wardens, forestry professionals, professional arborists, municipal staff, and land managers on the benefits of urban and community forest stewardship.	✓
4.5	Promote the implementation and demonstration of sustainable forest management on private and public lands, including town forests.	

4.6	Promote urban and community forests as an opportunity to respond to the COVID 19 global pandemic and help Vermont communities restore civic life, build social connections, spark economic vitality, and improve environmental sustainability.	✓
4.7	Support volunteer groups, particularly municipal tree committees, conservation commissions, and town forest committees, in issues of community governance and leadership.	

Arbor Day

- Growing Works of Art Contest: Entries are coming in! Theme: *Healthy Trees, Healthy Lives*.
- Tree Steward Awards: Nominations are due March 31st in four categories; information [here](#).
- Tree City, Tree Campus Higher Education, Tree Line USA: 2020 Redesignation applications were due in February.
- Public Places Awards: Partnering with VPA, VT ASLA to host 2021 awards. Nominations will be due in May.
- Arbor Day (or month!) 2021: We are planning a month-long celebration in lieu of our in-person Arbor Day Conference. Components include:
 - Arbor Day Tree Planting Grants (see under DFC 5 below).
 - Partnership with VT Department of Libraries to distribute 50 Arbor Day kits that include sugar maple seed starting packets, an Arbor Day scavenger hunt, and Arbor Day tree crafts/activities.
 - A social media campaign focused on weekly tree maintenance themes.
 - “Coffee chat” style weekly online conversations with Vermont municipal & utility arborists.

Vermont Big Tree Program

- We are updating the VT Big Trees Program, but our work with ANR’s IT gurus is on hold (lower priority than some major projects). We have received ~15 nominations over the past couple of months (more people spending time in the woods?), so we are hoping to move on this as soon as possible.
- In December we met with the FPR Private Lands leadership team (Regional County Foresters) to request feedback on our plan and to start to update the very outdated existing list of Big Tree Champions.

Forest Pest First Detectors

- Purple Prism Traps: Coordinated a planning meeting with partners from FPR and Agency of Ag for the 2021 volunteer program.
- Ailanthus/Tree of Heaven: Have been having conversations with FPR Protection staff regarding engaging the FPDF network to monitor for ailanthus statewide to help monitor for spotted lantern fly.

- Online FPDF Course: We are in the process of creating an online Forest Pest First Detector course. It will be offered in the spring/summer seasons. The course will cover foundational concepts about invasive forest insects: EAB, hemlock wooly adelgid, Asian long horned beetle, spotted lantern fly, beech leaf disease, and oak wilt. The course will also cover opportunities for volunteering.
- Online Community Volunteer Toolkit: We are creating an online “toolkit” which is essentially a well-organized and designed compilation of mostly pre-existing resources that dedicated volunteers can access on topics such as: how to work with municipalities on preparedness and management plans; how to train volunteers to conduct tree inventories; how to design and implement public outreach and education campaigns. The UCF team has been discussing what this might look like before we start to work on the design.
- We set up a listserv for FPDFs to communicate with each other; so far, about 30 have signed up.
- We recruited and trained 3 volunteers to participate in a HWA monitoring and phenology project in Windham County

Backyard Woods Course

- 2021 Course: Will host this program in the spring on a new learning management system.

Greening Schools Program

We will be assisting Horsford Nursery in running its Greening Schools on Arbor Day program again this spring. Free trees are offered to schools in Addison and Chittenden County and UCF coordinates the logistics. We are hoping to recruit other nurseries to offer similar programs for other counties’ schools and wrote an article about the program for the spring Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association’s *Dirt* newsletter

Forestry Education Programs

- ourVTwoods.org: We continue to plug away at the development of the Heartwood podcast. COVID-19 has made it difficult to move this project forward. We have requested an extension on our grant from the Agency of Agriculture, Food & Markets that supports this project with a revised launch time frame of March 2021.
- Professional Webinar Series: The on-demand forestry webinar library is up and running. 118 licensed foresters have created an account in the library to access the webinars. Since June 2020 the webinar library has provided over 598 continuing education credits for VT licensed foresters impacting the management of over 1,160,130 acres of Vermont’s forests. We are working with partners to develop an approval process to add partner webinars to the library to keep content fresh and relevant. The webinar library was designed and built by Tamarack Media. Check out the webinar library [here](#).
- Women Owning Woodlands (WOW) VT: We continue to support this partner initiative of VT UCF, Vermont Coverts, Vermont Land Trust, the Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation, Vermont Woodlands Association, UVM Extension, and the Women’s Agricultural Network.
 - We submitted a grant proposal to the High Meadows Fund for phase 2 funding for training on facilitated learning circles.

- The US Forest Service LSR grant proposal that was submitted last October ranked very high (#1!!) and will most certainly be funded, though the final list of funded projects has not yet been released.

Town Forests Stewardship Demonstration and Leadership Training

FPR, UVM Extension, and the Vermont Land Trust have begun work on a new LSR grant titled ***Community Forests as Models of Stewardship***. The goal of this project is to highlight community forests as models of stewardship through planning, developing, mapping, and promoting stewardship demonstration sites, addressing various management challenges, new educational programming that trains community leaders on stewardship, and professionals on working with communities. Highlights this quarter include:

- Forester Facilitation Training: We are planning a spring 2021 webinar series to address some of the common challenges of town forest planning; potential topics include virtual community engagement and navigating conflicts in community planning.
- Collaboration with the Northern Forest Center: We have limited funding to support a new collaborative project with the NFC to address identified needs and issues around community governance. NFC will be leading a new initiative including:
 1. Surveying community volunteers and practitioners to understand existing challenges,
 2. Developing a white paper that outlines issues and identifies best practices, and
 3. Hosting a training for practitioners to share what we learned and improve technical assistance to communities around governance issues.
- Community Leadership Training: Curriculum development is underway for a leadership training program for municipal officials and volunteers engaged in town forest stewardship planning, management activities and decision making.
- Demonstration Project Library: We will be conducting 2 focus groups with potential user groups to inform our work with partners to develop a template for a demonstration library, to be hosted by VT ANR, to document and highlight best practices in forest planning and management in town forests in Vermont.
- A summer intern (hosted by VLT) has been working on compiling demonstration site case studies and best practices.

Media/Communications:

- Social Media: Continue to support our social media account (Facebook); the team rotates posting responsibilities weekly.
- Newsletters: Bimonthly TREEmail; biweekly VolunTREEmail template has been updated and reduced frequency to once a month.
- Listserves: A listserv has been created for the municipalities with which we are partnering to develop pilot Shade Tree Preservation Plans so that they can share information, network, and ask questions.

- Website: Continue to maintain and improve the site - www.vtcommunityforestry.org. We will be engaging in a website upgrade (from the Drupal 7 platform to Drupal 8) this summer and will soon begin to lay the groundwork for that website transition.

Desired Future Condition 5: Legal, Institutional, & Economic Framework		
Vermont has a legal, institutional, and economic framework in place for forest conservation and sustainability.		
Strategies		Priorities
5.1	Sustain and expand funding opportunities to support local, state, and regional efforts for urban and community forest stewardship, health, and sustainability.	✓
5.2	Educate state leadership, including legislatures, secretaries, commissioners, and division/department directors of programming efforts, opportunities, and challenges.	
5.3	Educate communities, volunteers, and residents about urban and community forest policies, governance models, rules, and laws including Vermont's Tree Warden statutes.	✓
5.4	Advocate for policies, programs, and initiatives that assist in urban and community forest stewardship, health, and sustainability.	
5.5	Strive to strategically identify emerging issues and meet immediate challenges and establish an appropriate level of infrastructure and staffing.	
5.6	Foster strategic partnerships to deliver innovative urban and community forestry programming and support organizational capacity.	✓
5.7	Promote and cultivate cross-program and cross-agency cooperation and communication, within Vermont as well as with regional and national partners, to improve efficiency and effectiveness.	
5.8	Maintain and develop data management systems, ensure indicators are appropriate to monitor progress, and share data among partners to enhance internal and external communications and collaborations.	
5.9	Support professional development, continued learning, and succession planning for program staff.	
5.10	Foster an organizational culture within the program that rewards excellence, celebrates accomplishments, encourages teamwork, and recognizes achievements.	

5.11	Increase access to the benefits of trees and urban and community forests for all Vermonters by applying a lens of environmental justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity across programming.	✓
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Tree Wardens

- Tree Warden Statute Amendments: Governor Scott signed the [new legislation](#) into law in early October.
- VLCT Project: We are under contract with the Vermont League of Cities and Towns' Municipal Assistance Center to develop a suite of online resources, such as a legal FAQ and model ordinance language, to support municipalities in understanding and adopting the amended tree warden statutes. VLCT will also host a minimum of 2 online trainings on the statutes.
- We have updated our [web resources](#) with information on the new legislation.
- Tree Warden Reporting Button: We have been working with our Agency of Digital Services to develop an online database and form for municipalities to use to report who their tree warden (a new requirement of the amended statutes). The form will be accessed via a "button" on the Forestry Division and UCF webpages and the form itself is web-based.
- Tree Warden School: UCF will be offering this self-guided online curriculum this spring. Online content is supplemented with three live, facilitated meetings. Over 25 tree wardens have signed up so far. The course will run mid-March through mid-April.
- Shade Tree Preservation Plans: As part of the guidance UCF is providing related to the new tree warden statutes, we will be working with 10 selected municipalities over the new year to develop shade tree preservation plans. The components and goals of the plans are outlined in the statutes, but we will work with each community individually to ultimately develop a suite of templates as more communities consider adopted a plan. The program will support East Montpelier, Monkton, St. Albans, Charlotte, Hartford, Johnson, Middlebury, Mount Holly, Shrewsbury and West Windsor to draft their municipality's shade tree preservation plan over the next calendar year. Unofficially, we're also working with the Town of Shelburne to update their comprehensive urban forest management plan and include required components of a shade tree preservation plan.

Financial Assistance to Communities

- 2020 Grants:
 - Caring for Canopy grants program and special Emerald Ash Borer Management grants are in process and most have opted for an automatic extension due to COVID-19. [See grant awardees here.](#)
 - EAB Management grant projects partners (East Montpelier, Northfield, Essex/Essex Junction) will be part of a suite of case studies about ash removal along rural roads; project participants have checked in regularly with UCF staff. East Montpelier has

completed its project as of end of November and UCF staff visited the ash tree removal and tree planting sites to assess the full impact of the projects. UCF staff have participated in regular check-ins with the USFS and other participating states (Ohio and Indiana).

- **2021 Grants:**
 - Ash Tree Management Grants: 7 municipal projects were funded and are underway. [See grant awardees here](#).
 - Arbor Day Tree Planting Grants: we will be offering 21, \$1000 grants for tree planting and tree stewardship projects. Applications are due March 26th. We are happy to be able to offer these small grants with no match requirement and hope that it enables smaller municipalities and new partners to apply.
- UCF staff are considering how to better tell our story through the projects funded and municipalities supported financially over the years. We are starting to add these to our website and are making some alterations to our [Community Map](#) to be able to show the impact of UCF's funding statewide.

Financial and Programming Partnerships

UVM Extension: 2020/2021 grant agreement has been executed and it's already time to start thinking about the 2021/2022 agreement.

US Forest Service:

- We submitted a Landscape Scale Restoration Grant proposal to support the Women Owning Woodlands Network through demonstration projects, trainings, mentorship, and enhancing communications and it ranked #1; we are awaiting official word on funding allocation.
- We are anticipating announcement of a grant opportunity specific to state Urban & Community Forestry Programs, due to a substantial increase in federal budgeting.
- Elise sits on the i-Tree Academy planning committee; this course is being offered nationally for the third time this spring.

Urban Forest Economic Study: VT is one of 11 state partners engaged in an economic impact study of urban forestry in the northeast region. A survey was sent to a random selection of key stakeholders in VT in August and we continue to hear updates about the responses as they come in.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity (JEDI) work

- Joanne, Elise, and Ginger had a conversation with Maggie Gendron, the new Deputy Secretary at the Agency of Natural Resources, regarding our program's engagement with JEDI topics and issues. Maggie will be focusing on providing resources and tools to ANR staff/departments, connecting work happening within the Agency, and supporting a new position in the central office.

- After our October staff meeting focused entirely on UCF and JEDI, Joanne and Ginger developed a list of strategies that we identified could be effective in increasing access for underserved audiences to our programming. We have started to discuss moving forward on some of these strategies and continue to block out focused time at our quarterly staff meetings.
- UCF engaged in several conversations with staff from the Champlain Valley Office of Economic Opportunity (CVOEO)'s Mobile Home Program regarding the need for occasional risk tree assessment for their clients (mobile home residents). The Mobile Home Program advocates for the rights of mobile home park residents but does not have funding available to pay for a tree risk assessment when situations arise (2-4 times a year). We sent a survey out to Tree Risk Assessment Qualified (TRAQ) arborists statewide to gauge interest in volunteering their services when needed; 4 arborists signed up for this pro-bono work and there has already been one call to assess a tree at a mobile home park in Bolton.

Professional Development

- Elise, Joanne, Gwen, and Ginger attended a New England/New York UCF Program virtual meeting in January, hosted by the USFS. Elise presented on the Vermont Tree Warden Statute Amendments and Joanne presented on the Resilient Right-of-Ways Project.
- Elise stepped down from the Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association Board after serving a 2-year term.
- Kate continues her EdD program at UVM this spring, remotely.
- Joanne passed the Core Pesticide Safety exam and Category 10: Demonstration and Research exam given by the Agency of Agriculture. She is now certified to provide advice on pesticide use.

Program Staffing

- Maintaining weekly check-ins online.
- Staff met twice in December to discuss and finalize our 2021-2026 UCF Strategic Action Plan.
- All UCF staff are working from home for the foreseeable future.

Council

- The Leadership Committee met in February to discuss the March meeting.
- Council will continue to meet virtually for at least the next two quarterly Council meetings.
- Council reappointment letters will be going out soon!