

VT Urban & Community Forestry Program Quarterly Report
June 2023 – September 2023

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

Since Kate Forrer's departure last October, VT UCF's engagement with Town Forests has been in flux. Just noting areas where we're considering next steps:

- Keith Thompson (Private Lands, FPR) continues to lead a Community Forests USFS Landscape Scale Restoration Project, which includes plans to develop a community forest volunteer leadership training curriculum. This would follow the general online format of the Town Forest Recreation Planning toolkit. This quarter, Joanne and Elise met with Keith to discuss the possibility of Joanne taking on this project over the winter months.
- Cecilia Danks and her new graduate student, Julie Frost, are beginning work on the Town Forest Census (NRCS-funded); UCF will remain on the coordinating committee of this project and will consider how to best integrate the results into town forest work supported by FPR and by other VT and regional organizations.
- VT UCF will continue to financially support basic upkeep of the ourvtwoods.org website; it remains unclear who (individual or organization) is appropriate and has the capacity to manage this online resource.

Environmental Leadership Course

Staff has engaged in conversations with the Dept. of Fish & Wildlife's Community Wildlife Program about being more engaged and involved in the Environmental Leadership Program (formerly Natural Resources 1 & 2). The program focuses on Conservation Commission members and municipal staff. Joanne will be assisting with the facilitation of the Environmental Leadership Program this fall and will also be offering two workshops on roadside vegetation management (Resilient Right-of-Ways) through the Community Wildlife Program's fall webinar series.

Collective Purchasing of Bareroot Trees

In August, VT UCF facilitated a virtual meeting between members of Branch Out Burlington, New England Nursery Sales, and representatives from several Chittenden, Washington, and Addison County communities to discuss potential opportunities for collective purchasing of bareroot trees. Both Branch Out Burlington and the City of Burlington put in an annual order to bareroot trees from the Pacific Northwest and NY, respectively, and are open to attaching smaller orders from municipalities that would not otherwise be able to reach the minimum order amount for a delivery of these smaller trees. The meeting was recorded and sent to an additional list of community representatives, and several communities have expressed interest in piloting this method of small tree procurement for the coming spring.

Engaging with the Nursery Industry regarding tree availability and sourcing

In August Elise presented to the membership of the Vermont Nursery & Landscape Association at their summer meeting to discuss upcoming funding opportunities and an inevitable uptick in tree planting activities in the coming years. Following the meeting, we have had several conversations with private nurseries about potential collaboration with communities, including contract growing and collective purchasing efforts.

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.	✓

Municipal Technical Assistance

- Ash Inventory and EAB Planning: UCF continues to support municipalities performing ash inventories and monitoring the health of public and private ash. Between June and September 2023, the towns of Vergennes, Marlboro, and Braintree received assistance with inventory methodology and data management.
- Public Tree Inventory: Our public tree inventory tool was first launched back in 2014; we have now modernized the tool, added new fields, and integrated with ArcGIS Field Maps and Survey 123 to replace the outgoing Collector app. This quarter we assisted the towns of Morrisville and Colchester with inventory of trees in public ways and places using our existing Public Tree Inventory tool.
- Ordinances and Policies: VT UCF continues to support shade tree preservation plan development, tree ordinance and tree policy review. Between June and September 2023, the towns of Brattleboro, Fayston, and Montpelier all received technical assistance regarding policy and ordinance updates.
- Municipal Training: UCF offered a series of three hands-on workshops with arborist Adam McCullough. The trainings provided municipal highway crews, city parks crews, State foresters, State Parks staff, and arborists with introductory training about rope strength, handling, knot tying, throw line use, and directional rope pulling that allows workers to fell trees without anyone in the strike zone. While there will still be some situations in which municipal and State crews will need to hire tree care professionals to address tree removals, UCF anticipates that this low-cost technique will help staff address 10-15% more trees that, without ropes, would be too challenging to remove in areas where there are people and property at risk. Each municipal crew left the workshop with a rope throwing kit to keep in their work trucks and all the skills needed to use it. The three all-day trainings in Montpelier, Rutland, and St. Albans served 37 municipal staff from 15 different municipalities statewide, 15 FPR staff, two private arborists, and one BGS staff person.

Resilient Urban Forests for All

VT UCF special project [Resilient Urban Forests for All Assistance Package](#) wrapped up this quarter. The **Town of Windsor** and the **Village of Lyndonville** were the partner communities. Joanne Garton and UCF intern Julia D'Alessio spent many field days working with these towns in line with a package valued at over \$20,000 that included funding for strategic planting or tree maintenance, urban tree inventory, tree care supplies and resources, and training for staff and citizens. After successful spring projects, both towns submitted their final reports, and their grant agreements were closed. Lyndonville planted 10 new trees downtown and Windsor planted 11 new trees.

Mapping & Vermont's Urban Forests

- The last time we ran an analysis on statewide urban tree canopy coverage was in 2012. This spring and summer we have been working with the ANR GIS team to update the map. After considerable back and forth, we're close to a final map: using E911 data to define densely populated areas in the state, the map shows tree canopy coverage within the "Urban Landscape Zone" at the census block layer level. We hope to use this map to better inform priority areas for technical assistance, funding allocation, and prioritization of planting areas and funding. The draft map is [available here](#) (username: FPRPartner, password: WOrktogether) and we hope to finalize this quarter.

Urban Forest Health Outreach and Education: VTinvasives website

- [VTinvasives E-News](#): 1 produced.
- Continued to support 'Report It' submissions.

EAB Response & Planning

- UCF received funding in 2022 from the USFS for a *Sustainable Urban Forests Resilience* project. Part of this project will involve strategic planning for EAB in Vermont and outreach to communities and organizations in the southern half of Vermont. Highlights this quarter include:
 - Worked with conservation planners at the Bennington, Rutland, and Windham Regional Planning commissions to identify potential partners to receive assistance with ash management planning. Partners must support vulnerable and underserved urban populations and be new to UCF. They can include school districts, affordable housing and community development organizations, faith-based institutions, and new municipal partners.

- Began conversations with potential partners, took a break after July floods as many of the groups were in areas affected by flooding. We are re-starting the conversations now with potential partners in Bennington and S. Bennington, Pownal, Fair Haven, Bellows Falls and Brattleboro.
- **Black Ash Field Naturalist Project:** UVM Graduate Student Charlotte Cadow wrapped up her year-long focus on the many facets of a Vermont-based community science data collection project focused on the current location of black ash, the expected ecological impact of the loss of black ash due to EAB, the cultural implications of the loss of black ash for the Abenaki people, and the logistical challenges surrounding preservation of black ash trees for future study. Highlights this quarter include:
 - The UCF program staff continue to learn about black ash tree treatment, seed saving, monitoring, and breeding through a series of webinars hosted by the University of Maine [Ash Protection Collaborative Across Wabanakik](#).
 - Joanne Garton attended the Black Ash Resources Gathering in Akwasasne, New York on July 25, 2023. The event brought together land managers, researchers, basket makers, and state and provincial government staff to discuss the present and future of black ash across its range.
- Program staff continue to notify town clerks and town managers/administrators when EAB has been confirmed for the first time in a municipality. This process corresponds with the uploading of updated Infested Area maps onto vtInvasives.org.

Pest Outreach

- The Forest Pest Outreach Program (FPOP) had been primarily focused since 2018 on EAB and hemlock wooly adelgid. The program has more recently broadened its education and outreach to include other invasive pests, such as jumping worms, and ones that are likely to be established in Vermont soon, such as beech leaf disease and spotted lanternfly and common vectors, such as moving firewood. Our Forest Pest Education Coordinator, Ginger Nickerson, has been focusing programming efforts on spotted lanternfly (SLF), an invasive leaf hopper which is rapidly moving north. Highlights this quarter include:
 - Designed and distributing 600 Don't Move Firewood posters (200 ea of three different versions) and 500 spotted lanternfly posters and 500 visitor checklists at State Parks and Visitor Centers, through FPR and VAAFM; and to Conservation Commissions and convenience stores through the FPDFs network
 - Designed and distributed 500 spotted lanternfly posters and 4,000 worker checklists to select nurseries, landscapers, and vineyards in "hot zones" (highly traveled areas near railroad corridors and rail trails)
 - Interviewed State, County, and Extension personnel in PA, CT and MA about their experience, lessons learned, and advice about SLF; writing white paper to share with VAAFM and FPR

- Distributing SLF traps and educational materials to 10 vineyards in “hot zones” who have high number of visitors from states already infested with SLF
- Wrote FPOP grant proposal for 2024-25. Specific efforts in FY 24 will focus on emerging pest threats, including spotted lanternfly and European cherry fruit fly, as well as continuing to raise awareness of Asian longhorned beetle and other species of concern for Vermont. We will:
 - Revise and tailor our on-line Forest Pest First Detector curricula for Master Gardeners
 - Develop and market an interactive game for 8- to 12-year-olds and their families on how to identify, report and slow the spread of key pests.
 - Launch two educational campaigns targeting outdoor recreationists: one targeting hikers, anglers, birders, and hunters on the importance of checking and cleaning vehicles and gear and another targeting the users of Vermont’s 39 rail trails covering 410 miles about how to identify and report tree-of-heaven and spotted lanternfly.
- The UCF team, led graciously by Ginger, attempted to recruit and hire an ECO Americorps member through the State of Vermont to support the Forest Pest First Detector Program. After several leads, we ultimately were unsuccessful in recruiting a candidate and are pivoting in this regard to consider working with UVM interns in the coming year instead.

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.	

Energy Saving Trees/Vermont Community Canopy

- **Funding:** The next two years of the program (2023 and 2024) will be supported by American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) dollars, as part of the Governor's 2022 budget and alignment with the Vermont Climate Action Plan. We are now under a 2-year subaward agreement with the Arbor Day Foundation that includes all of the ARPA reporting requirements.
- **Fall 2023 Free Tree Giveaway:** This quarter Gwen has been busy at work planning for and launching the fall free tree giveaways. 250 trees will be available for both residents of Brattleboro and Rutland, for a total of 500 trees. The registration sites have been launched, trees are flying off the shelves (figuratively), and the free tree pickup days will occur late September.

Fruit and Nut Tree Program

We are still under subaward agreement with the [Vermont Garden Network](#) (VGN) to support fruit and nut tree plantings at community gardens statewide, with a broad goal of increasing food access and exposure to the benefits of trees. This year [11 grant recipients](#) were awarded funds for fruit and nut tree planting and maintenance. This quarter we met with our VGN partners and discussed continuing the program for another year.

1t.org - Trillion Trees Pledge

VT UCF and FPR have made [a pledge to plant 5,000 trees](#) through [1t.org](#), a World Economic Forum initiative to accelerate nature-based solutions in support of the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. The 5,000 trees we are committed to planting in urban areas will be funded and supported through the Governor's 2022 budget (\$1 mil) and in alignment with the Vermont Climate Action Plan.

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

- Plans are underway for the 2024 Growing Works of Art contest. After years of collaborating with FPR's Conservation Education Program, VT UCF is taking over all coordination of the contest this year.

Recognition Programs:

- We support the [Tree City USA](#), [Tree Campus USA](#), and [Tree Line USA](#) program and this year the Arbor Day Foundation is launching a new application portal. This quarter we attended a training course on how to access and utilize the new portal and associated tools.

Forest Pest First Detectors

- No updates this quarter

Backyard Woods Course

- 2023 Course: The [fall 2023 course](#) is now open and will run October 2nd - November 3rd. As a reminder, Backyard Woods is a self-paced, free, online course designed for homeowners with less than 25 acres who want to learn more about the woods in their backyard: what's in it, who (wildlife) uses it, and how they can become better caretakers of it.

Forestry Education Programs

- Professional On Demand Forestry Webinar Library: With Kate's departure from UCF, the future of the professional on-demand forestry webinar library is still in flux. More to come on this, hopefully soon!
- ourVTwoods.org 2.0: With Kate's departure from UCF, plans are currently on hold for the redesign of the ourVTwoods website. Partners from UVM Extension, FPR, VT Coverts, and Vermont Woodlands Association had met a couple of times at the end of last year, but momentum here has slowed.
- 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.
 - The WOW project funded by the USFS Landscape Scale Restoration grant is moving forward; grant agreements are in place for partner organizations Vermont Land Trust, Vermont Woodlands Association, Vermont Coverts, UVM Extension, and VYCC.
 - UCF's Joanne Garton has stepped onto the WOW Steering Committee in the new year to keep the program engaged with the project and the group. She attended a day-long WOW collaborator retreat in Waltham, VT in July.
 - This summer, WOW VT hosted a woods walk at the Marsh Billings Rockefeller National Park for six attendees, and will host workshops on invasive plant management, bat habitat, and chainsaw safety this September and October.

Youth Engagement

- In June Elise led a half-day field excursion for students in the Burlington High School YES program focused on water quality and urban forests. Lesson: high schoolers at the end of the school year are a tough audience.

Media/Communications:

- Social Media: Continue to support our social media account (Facebook); VT Forests, Parks & Recreation now has social media channels and a process to submit posts that the UCF team has taken advantage of.
- Newsletters: Bimonthly TREEmail; monthly VolunTREEmail, semi-monthly bulletin for Forest Pest First Detectors
- Website: Continue to maintain and improve the site - www.vtcommunityforestry.org. While the site upgrade is mostly complete, we continue to work with Tamarack media on a few key features of the site (UCF Impact Map and Town Forest Stewardship Library).
- Across the Fence: Gwen and Chittenden County Forester Ethan Tapper were featured on an episode of UVM Extension's Across the Fence focused on the VT Big Tree Program and big tree list. [Check it out!](#)

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.	✓

Tree Wardens

- We have been working with ANR IT to make some improvements to our tree warden database and reporting portal to better serve our ability to support tree wardens and communities.

Urban Tree Planting Funding: FY22 Governor's Budget

The 2022 Governor's budget included **\$1 million for UCF** to plant 5,000 trees in urban areas to support Vermont's Climate Action Plan, funded through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Navigating the process to accessing these funds proved to be the process but we are now approved and moving forward. Highlights this quarter include:

- Posting and recruiting for an Urban Forester position; we received 17 applications, held 6 first round interviews, held 3 second round interviews, and have now offered the position to our top candidate (and are awaiting a response). Many thanks to our stellar Hiring Committee: Tim Smith, Darren Schibler, Elise, Joanne, and Gwen.
- Releasing and accepting responses to an RFQ for a block grant program to allocate the ~\$700,000 in grants for tree planting, with a goal of 2,000 trees planted in urban areas.

- Based on the results of the RFQ, we are developing an RFP for an entity to manage a block grant program that will be released later this month.
- Scaling up the Vermont Community Canopy Program (see DFC 3 above) to plant 3,000 trees on private property in 2023 and 2024.

Financial Assistance to Communities

- 2023 Grants: All 16 grant agreements are in place, and projects are underway; several have even already wrapped up and been closed out.
- 2024 Grants: We have an unprecedented amount of funding to grant out for 2024 projects and [our grant program was launched](#) on 9/6. Applications for all three categories will be due January 5th, 2024. This quarter we have focused on improving our grant application process, which has included:
 - transitioning our PDF and paper applications to an online fillable form application (common to all categories),
 - working with our IT department to create a [grants eligibility map](#) to clarify locations eligible for the three different grant categories, and
 - setting up Grants Office Hours to support applicants in project and application development over the course of four months that we are accepting applications.

Summary of available funds:

- \$70,000 will be available for Caring for Canopy Grants (1:1 match)
- \$125,000 will be available for Growing Urban Forests in the Face of EAB (1:1 match)
- \$300,000 will be available for Inflation Reduction Act State Allocation grants (no match, only “disadvantaged communities” are eligible) See section above.

Financial and Programming Partnerships

UVM Extension:

- Gwen has taken over as the PI on the UVM Extension grant.
- The 2023/2024 UVM Extension subaward agreement has been drafted, routed, and executed. We are officially under agreement.

US Forest Service:

- Elise is serving on the Northeast Midwest State Foresters Alliance (NMSFA) Trees & Public Health Committee.

Forests, Parks & Recreation:

- Elise served on the hiring committee for FPR's new Director of Forests (replacing the irreplaceable Danielle Fitzko). Oliver Pierson, current Program Manager for DEC's Lakes & Ponds Program, will be stepping into the position and will start in late September. We'll invite him to our December meeting to meet the Council.

Justice, Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity (JEDI) work

- Our program team continues to meet monthly to discuss topics of Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. Topics this quarter have included navigating unique partnerships, considering creative ways that our program can provide smaller and less complicated mini-grants or tree planting assistance, and debriefing Joanne's experience at the Black Ash Resources Gathering in Akwasasne, New York.
- The Agency of Natural Resources has officially launched its Environmental Justice Working Group and Liaison initiative to support implementation of the Vermont Environmental Justice Law (Act 154 of 2022). Elise is acting as both a member of the EJ Working Group and one of three Liaisons for FPR and will keep Council abreast to highlights of this work moving forward.

Professional Development

- After participating in the Green Communities Leadership Institute as a cohort member last year, Elise was asked to join the Core Leadership Team for the Institute and is now engaged in planning for the 2024 program.
- Elise and Gwen attended the Vermont Council on Rural Development's annual leadership summit in August.
- Joanne attended the Black Ash Resources Gathering in Akwasasne, New York in July.
- Joanne has started a semester auditing Tony D'Amato's Silviculture class at UVM.

Program Staffing

- Maintaining weekly check-ins online.
- We held our quarterly staff meeting in Montpelier.
- This quarter we recruited and interviewed for our new Urban Forester position; we are hoping we have good and exciting news to share at the Council meeting.

Council

- There remains one at-large vacant Council seat; Phoebus Potter, one of ANR's new Environmental Justice Coordinators, has tentatively volunteered to take the seat in the new year.

- Tim Smith and Scott Wunderle are serving as the Leadership Committee for the 2023 calendar year.
- We want to thank **Tim Smith** and **Darren Schibler** for their contributions to and time spent on the hiring committee for the new Urban Forester.
- Bi-annual Council recommitment letters will be sent out in September (apologies for the delay!)