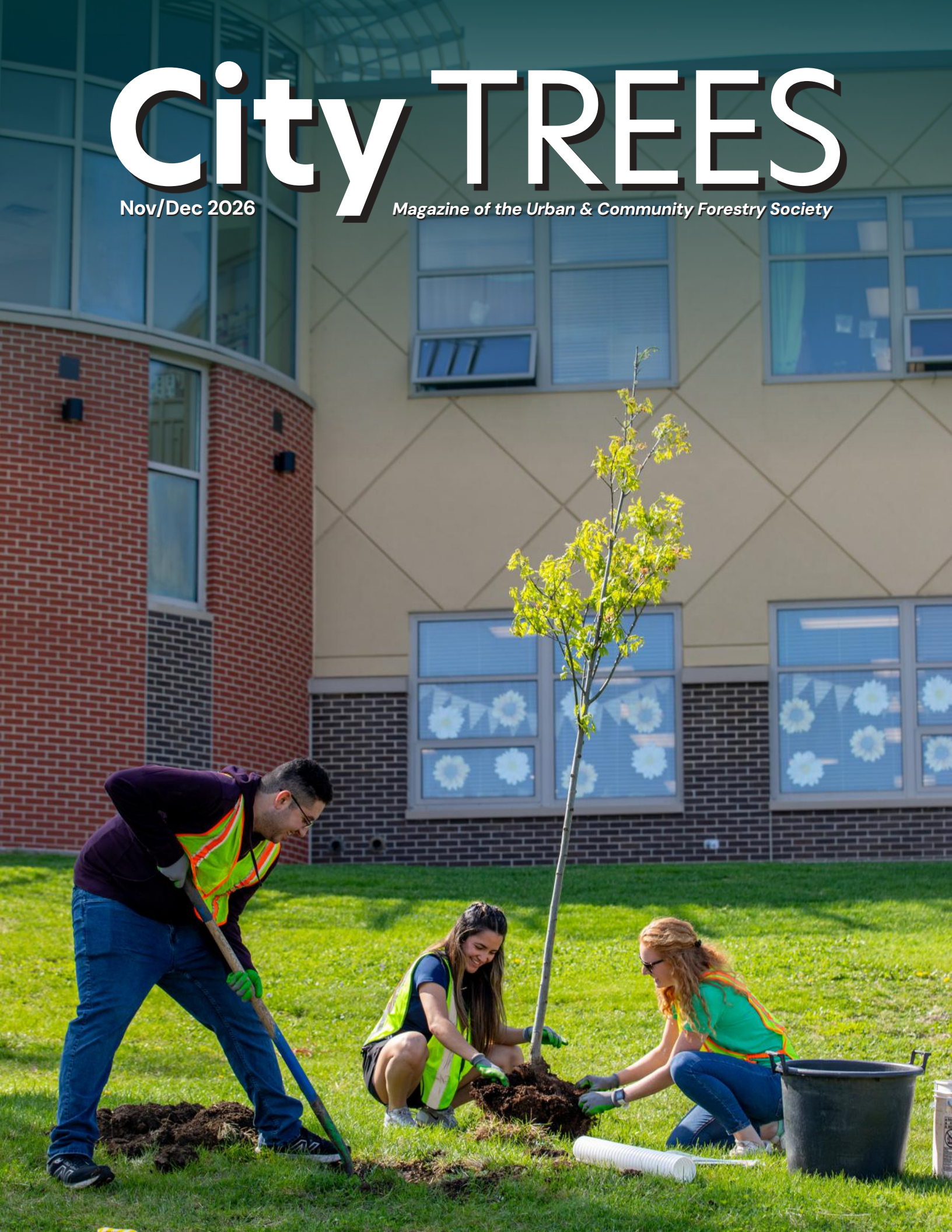
City TREES

Nov/Dec 2026

Magazine of the Urban & Community Forestry Society





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City Trees Nov/Dec 2026
Volume 64, Number 6

UCFS
URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY SOCIETY

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Cover: Tree planting volunteers in Des Moines, Iowa.
Photo Courtesy City of Des Moines Forestry Division.









President's Message

David Lefcourt



As I write my final President's Message, I find myself reflecting on how quickly this year has gone and, more importantly, how fortunate I have been to serve the Urban and Community Forestry Society once again.

Serving as president is a responsibility, but it is also a privilege. I am especially grateful to the UCFS membership for giving me the opportunity to represent you, support our profession, and help guide the Society during this past year. Our strength as an organization comes from the knowledge, experience, and commitment of our members, and I am continually reminded of the important work being done in communities around the world.

I want to extend my sincere thanks to our UCFS Executive Board and staff. The time and energy you give to UCFS often happens behind the scenes, but it is essential to everything we accomplish. From advancing our accreditation program and supporting the Urban Forest Foundation to planning educational opportunities and strengthening our organization, your commitment has helped move UCFS forward. I am grateful for your ideas, your willingness to tackle challenges, and, most of all, your continued commitment to our profession.

This year has also reinforced for me that the future of urban and community forestry depends on our willingness to work together. Whether we are managing mature urban forests, expanding tree canopy, addressing climate resilience, protecting trees during development, or developing the next generation of urban forestry professionals, we are stronger when we share our experiences and learn from one another.

As my term comes to an end, I am confident that UCFS is well positioned for the future. We have a strong foundation, an engaged membership, dedicated volunteers and staff, and an organization that continues to evolve with the needs of our profession.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve you again. It has been an honor, and I am proud to continue being part of the UCFS community. While I may be stepping away from the president's role, I look forward to remaining involved and supporting the Society and our profession for many years to come.

Thank you for all that you do for urban and community forestry.



Executive Director's Message

Leslie Berckes



Have you attended a UCFS Learning Series webinar this year? If not, you've missed some great discussions that cover many aspects of your daily work as a city forester. One of UCFS's driving goals is to help you feel your most confident in the work you do, and our educational opportunities are designed to do just that.

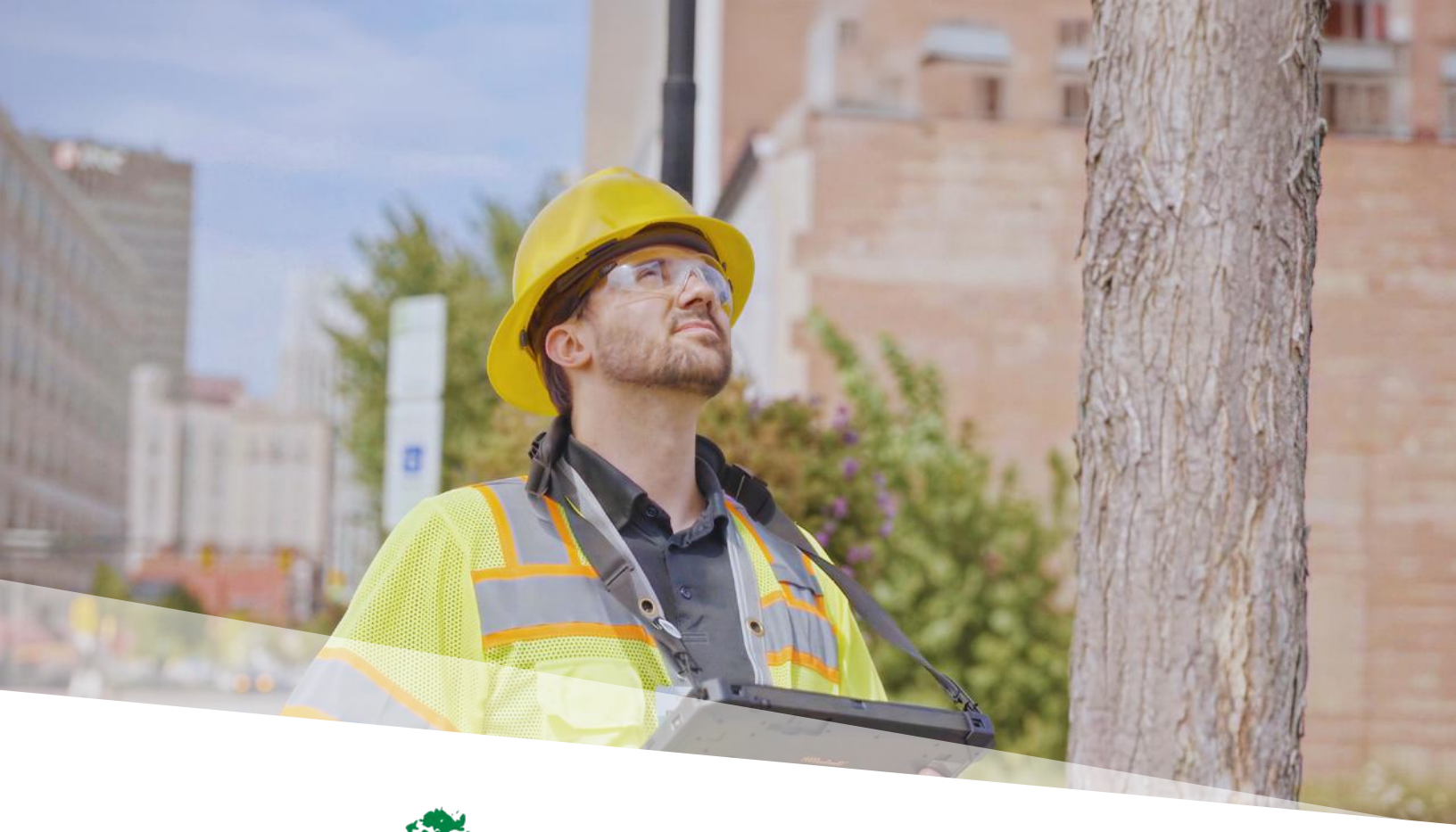
For a little peek behind the scenes, we utilize a planning framework called the "education ecosystem." This ecosystem is designed to support you and your colleagues—the community of professionals—who are dedicated to the stewardship of urban forests. Our goal is to blend mentorship, formal education, and networking opportunities into a cohesive whole that empowers you to advance your career and grow healthy and sustainability urban environments.

In early fall, we held three webinars that had record attendance.

- Trees vs. Sidewalks – the epic battle! Well, maybe battle is the wrong word, but you know what I'm talking about. We know this is an important topic and will host a workshop/networking style session in December 2026 to support the webinar. See also the story and pictorial in this edition of *City Trees* about conserving canopy while honoring PROWAG/ADA.
- Trees and Insurance – an issue becoming more prevalent and your Society is monitoring what matters to you. We hosted a webinar with the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) and learned about the perspective of insurance companies. There were so many takeaways, and I encourage you to watch the entire recording.
- Trees and Wildfire – this three-part series focused on how municipal foresters can and should prepare for potential wildfire. That includes folks who do not live in fire-prone areas. In the face of a changing climate, everyone should know the basics of fire science, create a pre-fire plan, and know how to recover post-fire.

As we hosted these virtual educational opportunities, we also held our first women and urban forestry networking session, got ready for our annual conference, and supported this year's mentorship program participants. We envision each of these elements of the "education ecosystem" like gears that click together and spin one another. We're here to support you so that you, our members, can do the important work of growing healthy trees!





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City Trees is the online, bimonthly magazine produced by the Urban & Community Forestry Society. The UCFS is a Professional Affiliate of the International Society of Arboriculture.

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Welcome New Members

Name	State/Province/Region	Country
Andrea Alaniz Salazar	TX	USA
Tomas Amado	CA	COL
Jenny Anjou		SWE
Maximiliano Arias	CBA	ARG
Olivia Arredondo	TX	USA
Benjamin Arruda	ME	USA
Filip Arsic Johnsson		SWE
Mark Ayton	WA	USA
Rob Ball	CA	USA
Yosef Beitz	IL	USA
Sebastian Bermani	SA	COL
Rolf Blomqvist		SWE
Vincent Bolullo	QC	CAN
Gabriel Bouchard	QC	CAN
Sydney Brasil	SP	BRA
Heather Brent	NC	USA
Hunter Brewer	AL	USA
Jesse Brighten	WA	USA
Isaac Brousseau	QC	CAN
Luis Buffa	CBA	ARG
Mason Cadena	TX	USA
Wendy Chapman	VA	USA
Yoan Charlebois	QC	CAN
Alaina Claeson	NY	USA
Stephanie Clarkson		SWE
Mathieu Clermont	QC	CAN
James Coiner	CA	USA
Bob Coombs	GA	USA
Veya Cox	TX	USA
Carey Craddock	CA	USA
Cephas Curtis	MI	USA
Jocelyn Dailey	NM	USA
Nathaniel Davila	CA	USA
Jeremy Demers	QC	CAN
Amelia Di Marco	QC	CAN
Eduardo Dominguez Sanchez	TX	USA
Anthony Dufresne	QC	CAN
Evan Earhart	WA	USA
Drue Epping	WA	USA
Mary Fastiggi	AZ	USA
Justin Feltner	FL	USA
Joshua Finley	TX	USA
Khayah Fleming	FL	USA
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Kimberly Frappier	WA	USA
Lars Freeman-Wood	WA	USA
Hattie Frisch	WI	USA
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Gwyn Gallagher	NH	USA
Zachary Gaulin	QC	CAN
Patrick Georges	FL	USA
Sidney Gregoire	QC	CAN
Jim Grob	WA	USA
Eowyn Hansrote	WV	USA
Joseph Hauser	NC	USA
Timothy Heartquist	CA	USA
Thomas Hendrick	VA	USA
Ross Hosea	TX	USA
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Kahealani Hrbacek	HI	USA
William Hubbard	MD	USA
Britney Huynh	TX	USA
William Iannopollo	CO	USA
Ousainou Ibrahim	WI	USA
Madison Jenkins	FL	USA
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Rowan Keifer	WV	USA
Laura Keil	WA	USA
Jennifer Killian	OR	USA
Robert Kinnucan	IL	USA
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Orsolya Lazar	PA	USA
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Dianne Yekel	FL	USA

Welcome

Facet NW

City of Lexington, Kentucky

In This Issue: Contributors



Leslie Berckes is the Executive Director of UCFS. She has nearly 15 years of urban forestry experience that includes actively managing urban tree canopy as well as helping people grow trees where they are needed the most.



Zach Bundy is the City of Columbus, Ohio Department of Public Service Arborist.



Fred Chalfant is an urban forester with the Baltimore City Department of Recreation and Parks. He is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist and Certified Urban Forest Professional.



Stephanie Helms is an urban forester for the Forestry Division of Baltimore City Recreation & Parks. She has also worked as an arboriculturist for the Seattle Department of Transportation and in state policy as executive coordinator for the Washington State Invasive Species Council.



Erica Smith Fichman is the City Forester at Philadelphia Parks & Recreation where she oversees street and park tree planting and maintenance, storm and emergency tree work, and the TreePhilly community forestry program. She was also the project lead for the 2023 Philly Tree Plan, a ten-year strategic plan for the equitable growth and care of Philadelphia's urban forest.



Matt Stewart is the Upper Arlington, Ohio Forestry Supervisor and Sidewalk Maintenance Program Manager.



Ryan Suttle is a Consulting Arborist & Urban Forester at HortScience | Bartlett Consulting, located in the San Francisco Bay Area. He serves on the Western Chapter ISA's Tree Care for Birds Committee.



Michelle Sutton is the editor of *City Trees*. She is a writer, horticulturist, and urban forestry subject matter specialist who earned her MS from the Cornell Urban Horticulture Institute.



Special thanks to *Steve Cothrel* and *Owen Croy* for providing photos for the PROWAG story.

Visit our website

ucfsociety.org to learn about all things UCFS, including the Municipal Forestry Institute, Municipal Accreditation, our Arborist Exchange program, Annual Conference, and more.

Preparing for the ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional exam?

The ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional credential will set you apart!

Thinking about taking the exam?

Here's a few tips to get you ready:

- **Start with a study plan.**

  Set a realistic exam date and tell people around you—letting others know of your plan can help keep you accountable.

- **Break it up.**

  Break exam domains into manageable weekly goals, schedule regular study sessions, and use real-world examples to reinforce concepts.

- **Don't study alone.**

  Join the **UCFS Certified Urban Forest Professional (CUFP) Group** on the Member Hub to discuss challenging topics, learn from peers, and stay motivated throughout your preparation.

Good to know!

The exam assesses your ability to apply knowledge—not simply recall facts. Focus on understanding how urban forest management, arboricultural practices, communication, and administration work together to create resilient and sustainable urban forests.



Do You Need More?

Let us know if you're interested in a UCFS-hosted CUFP Study Group.

UCFS News

How the Urban and Community Forestry Society Works for You

By Leslie Berckes, UCFS Executive Director

Each day, the Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS) works to provide urban foresters with the resources they need to grow healthy trees where people need them. UCFS does this through education, training, accreditation, networking, advocacy, mentorship, and more.



UCFS Member Meetup in Los Angeles, California in May 2025.

Supporting Members Every Step of the Way

If there's one thing we know about urban and community forestry, it's that no two days are exactly alike. One day you're dealing with storm damage, the next you're planning a tree planting initiative, responding to an invasive pest, or explaining the value of trees to elected officials and residents. The challenges are always changing, and so is our profession.

That's why UCFS exists. We provide opportunities to learn and grow professionally; we serve as a voice for our members on issues that affect the profession; and we keep a close eye on the trends, policies, and challenges shaping the future of urban forestry.

Whether you're a municipal arborist, consultant, nonprofit leader, utility forester, researcher, or educator, UCFS is working behind the scenes to help you stay informed, connected, and prepared for what's next.

Education That Helps You Feel Confident

One of the most important ways we serve our members is through education. UCFS members get access to a dozen or more Learning Series webinars each year that include ISA CEU opportunities. These webinars focus on the nuts and bolts of how to do your job better. For example, in 2026 UCFS offered webinars

on tree ordinances, sidewalks and trees, data collection, and storm recovery. We strive to deliver timely, practical information that members can put to work immediately.

But education is about more than earning CEUs. It's about connecting with peers, sharing experiences, learning from successes and setbacks, and building relationships that strengthen our profession. That's why members have access to the exclusive Member Hub where you can connect with others, get your questions answered, and learn from people from across the globe.

A Stronger Voice Together

As individual city foresters, you have an important advocacy role for trees in your community. Together, however, our voices carry much further.

UCFS helps elevate your concerns, priorities, and expertise. For example, members told us they were worried about the growing trend of insurance companies dictating tree care decisions. We tackled that issue head-on and formed partnerships with the Tree Care Industry Association, attended national meetings, and brought your concerns to the table.

By working with partners, engaging with decision makers, and promoting the value of urban forestry, we help ensure that the needs of our members and the communities they serve remain part of the conversation.



"Canopy Conversations" on topics like "Navigating the Politic Process and the Law" were a feature of MFI 2026 held at Jekyll Island, Georgia.



Seen here are some of the 2026 Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) attendees along with Education Facilitator Carolina Arango (front row, right).

Keeping an Eye on What Matters

The issues affecting urban forestry don't stand still. Emerging pests, changing regulations, funding opportunities, workforce challenges, and climate impacts all influence how we do our work.

Part of the Society's role is to monitor these developments and help members stay ahead of them. By sharing information, resources, and insights, we help members spend less time searching for answers and more time focusing on the work that matters most.

For example, UCFS's newly revamped Accreditation program sets the standards for urban forestry. Instead of searching around and comparing yourself to others, which can lead to imperfect results when each community is so different, you can now measure yourself against a set of international standards.

Closing Thought

At the end of the day, the Urban and Community Forestry Society is about people. It's about supporting professionals, building connections, sharing knowledge, and strengthening our collective ability to care for the urban forests that benefit our communities. Everything we do, from education and advocacy to issue monitoring and member engagement, is designed to help members succeed while strengthening the communities they serve.

Sponsor Spotlight

Helping Communiti

El Niño is an opportunity for communities to prioritize collabo
and stormwater management, and to plan for the shifting

El Niño Impacts

When Pacific Ocean waters warm, El Niño can shift seasonal weather patterns across the U.S., bringing heavier rainfall and flooding to the south and hotter, drier conditions to the north.



TREE MAINTENANCE

Well-maintained trees are les
tree failure during powerful s
response may still be necessa
protocols and permitting stra
can help communities act qu
damage happens.

Arborist Services



BIO-BASED STORMWATER CAPTURE

With wetter conditions, capturing rainwater through bioswales and rain gardens becomes a climate resilience and adaptation strategy, helping arid communities replenish underground aquifers while reducing stormwater management costs.

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**Whether you're updating tree species recommendations
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oration with local elected officials to strengthen urban forests
environmental conditions brought on by climate change.

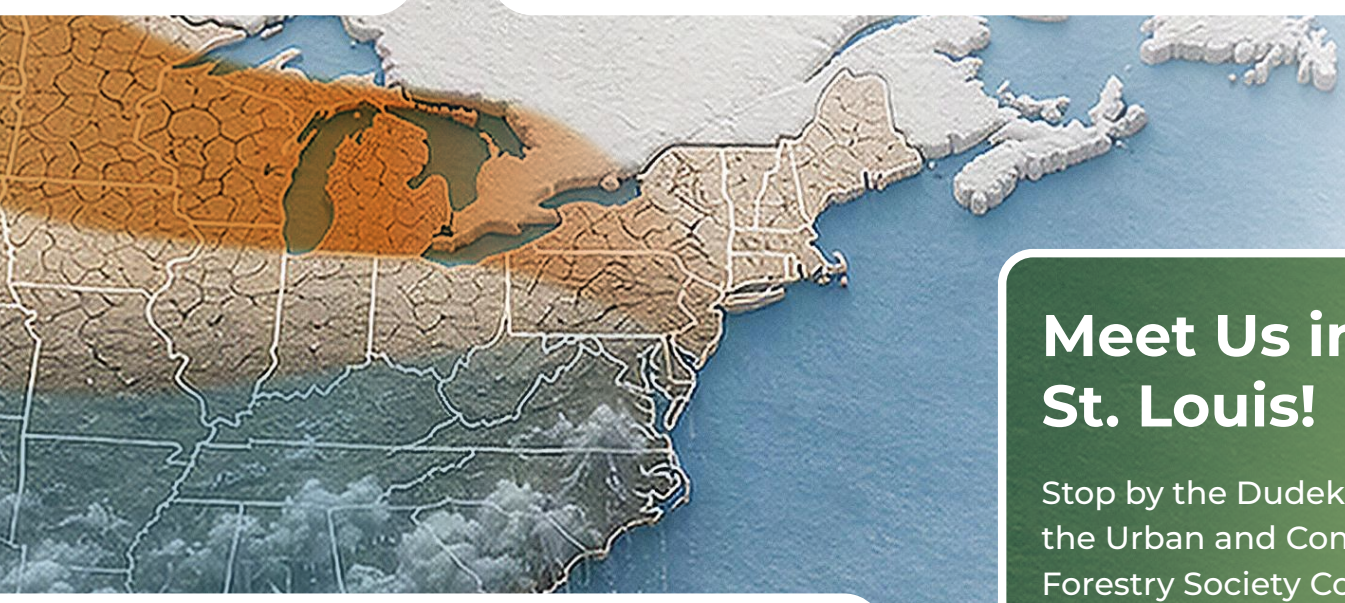
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TREE WATERING

Trees in the Northern U.S. may receive less fall and winter rain than usual, making supplemental watering critical for newly planted trees. In the South, wetter conditions may allow communities to scale back irrigation while monitoring soil moisture.

Habitat Restoration Services



Meet Us in St. Louis!

Stop by the Dudek booth at the Urban and Community Forestry Society Conference and Tradeshow in St. Louis, MO this November to connect with our urban forestry experts.

TREE SPECIES SELECTION

Tree species that have historically been mainstays of your urban forest might not be suited for shifting climate conditions. Regularly reviewing and updating your communities' recommended tree list helps ensure you're planting trees that will thrive for years to come.

ban and Community Forestry Services

s, adjusting tree watering and maintenance programs or support your El Niño preparedness and resilience efforts.

Conserving Canopy While Expanding Pedestrian Access under **PROWAG**

By Michelle Sutton, Editor, *City Trees*



When wholly replaced, this 36 inch (91 cm) in width sidewalk must be expanded to 48 inches (122 cm) or better to be PROWAG compliant.

Accessibility advocates in the U.S. won an important legal precedent with the passage of the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA) of 1968, which mandated that federal facilities remove obstacles to access. Advocacy momentum later yielded the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990.

While ADA guidelines address access to buildings on private land, Public Right-of-Way Accessibility Guidelines (PROWAG) concerns public sidewalks and streets, crosswalks, curb ramps, pedestrian signals, on-street parking, and other features of the public right-of-way.

PROWAG was formally adopted by the U.S. Department of Transportation in 2024 as part of its ADA standards for transit stops and pedestrian facilities. As of this writing (September 2026), PROWAG has not been adopted nor enforced by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

Nonetheless, many U.S. cities are working—either voluntarily or under consent decrees—to build PROWAG-compliant sidewalks and curb ramps. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for whole blocks of street trees to be removed—with or without meaningful urban forester consultation—prior to block-long sidewalk installations. Front-end interdepartmental collaboration and creativity will go a long way toward protecting at least some of the impacted trees.

Photos in this story show some of those creative options for tree preservation while providing PROWAG-compliant sidewalk width of 48-inch (122 cm), maximum grade of 5.0%, and maximum cross-slope of 2.1%. (The full Pedestrian Access Route requirements can be seen here.) >>

These are sweet gums (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), and the sidewalk was meandered within existing ROW, maintaining a full 48" (122 cm) width. Cross slope is trickier in this situation, as the new concrete must match grade with existing concrete at each end of each patch. Final grading will attempt to make the adjacent lawn easily mowable. —Photo and caption by Steve Cothrel



Per PROWAG, the **cross slope** of a sidewalk route not contained within a crosswalk must be 2.1% (1:48) maximum. Sidewalk **grade** is limited to **5.0%** (1:20). For exceptions and further detail, see the U.S. Access Board technical guidelines for Pedestrian Access Routes. Photo by Michelle Sutton



PROWAG must be followed with new construction and wholesale replacement. When an entire block of sidewalk is replaced as seen here, PROWAG requires, for example, a minimum sidewalk width of 48 inches (122 cm).



Older East Coast cities in the U.S. tend to have intractable ROW restrictions, leading urban foresters to focus on more promising streets, or to nearby parks, to increase overall canopy. Seen here, a block in Baltimore's Federal Hill neighborhood. Photo by Zoe Gensheimer

PROWAG has some flexibility in that compliance is asked to the "maximum extent feasible" around "significant natural or historic features" like rock outcroppings and other unalterable features of terrain and drainage, as well as historic structures. Baltimore City Urban Forester Fred Chalfant wishes that PROWAG included more specific guidance on street and park trees.

"Urban foresters know that street trees are significant natural features in terms of their many ecosystem and health-promoting benefits, but PROWAG doesn't shed any light on how to weigh that," Chalfant says. "It's important that we as UCFS compile our own recommendations for implementing PROWAG to make streets accessible while increasing and preserving canopy at the same time."

Chalfant notes that PROWAG doesn't have enough exceptions for old cities like Baltimore (founded in 1729) where rights-of-way are extremely narrow across much of the City. "I've looked at historic photos that show that even before ADA, many Baltimore streets could not accommodate more than a few trees if any," he says. Chalfant sees another challenging nuance within PROWAG: "There are different PROWAG requirements for new construction vs. renovations, and we are currently trying to learn the different options for canopy protection for both scopes."

Baltimore and Philadelphia are cities of similar age and right-of-way limitations. Conversations between Fred Chalant and Philadelphia City Forester Erica Smith Fichman led to Chalfant surveying colleagues around the country about their knowledge of, and questions about, PROWAG.

From there, a working subgroup of the UCFS Industry Trends Committee explored the topic further, leading UCFS to offer a Learning Series webinar about PROWAG, ADA, and tree and sidewalk conflict mitigation. UCFS will continue to monitor and report back on the status of PROWAG and how the Society can be helpful to its members as they navigate the rollout of these guidelines in their communities. >>



See also the UCFS Learning Series webinar on this topic.



Mature Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) in the Pigtown neighborhood of Baltimore. As with many blocks in the City, existing canopy means that sidewalks do not even meet previous ADA guidelines. Photo by Frederic Chalfant

Erica Smith Fichman, who manages the Urban Forestry Unit at Philadelphia Parks & Recreation, including the TreePhilly Community Forestry Program, says that the City of Philadelphia has not yet formally adopted PROWAG, because they cannot enforce newer PROWAG standards until they are recognized by the Department of Justice or Pennsylvania Department of Transportation (PennDOT).

In the meantime, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation is working with the City's ADA program lawyer, the Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems, Water Department, and Planning Commission to develop strategies in advance of the City's implementation of PROWAG. "The interdepartmental conversation is critical," Smith Fichman says. "None of us wants this to be a disability rights vs. trees conversation. We are seeking creative ways to abide by PROWAG and protect canopy in light of limited budgets."

Smith Fichman's team has mapped out the streets that are going to be most impacted by PROWAG's implementation and is thinking proactively about how and where canopy can be retained or added. "For instance, there are streets where we can advocate for mid-block bump-outs that take up just one parking space but allow both for a larger shade tree to be planted and for needed passable space on the sidewalk," she says. "We've talked about whether there are ways to make the tree pit itself walkable and PROWAG compliant, if we can find high-performing, low-maintenance materials. And we're working with the Water Department to achieve new, even more narrow—but longer—tree pits that may support medium-maturing trees. As a unit, we're being as flexible as we can."

What advice does she have for urban foresters who are just dipping toes into the PROWAG waters? "Gather your team and your internal advocacy mechanisms," she says. "Push your streets department to use the most flexible interpretation of the guidelines possible to allow time for you to develop strategies to ensure that you can still plant trees in the densest neighborhoods. Find your allies among colleagues across the departments but also figure out what the world of solutions could be outside of urban forestry—be flexible and creative. For instance, your city's transportation planner and city planner might have policy suggestions that can help you find solutions. Explore all options." >>



Meandering sidewalk to accommodate mature red maples (*Acer rubrum*) on Kerr Street in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada. Photo by Owen Croy, who says, "Older cities in Canada have some of these conflicts as we renovate more ROW areas to include accessibility ramps. In newer and growing cities on the west coast of Canada, this doesn't seem to be as large an issue, as ROWs tend to be larger and the trees are not yet mature."

"Find your allies among colleagues across the departments but also figure out what the world of solutions could be outside of urban forestry—be flexible and creative."

—Erica Smith Fichman

"In Upper Arlington, some residents have granted some portion of their easement to accommodate the new sidewalk and the existing tree. There's even a whole block of sidewalk that moved onto private property after three neighboring residents expressed the desire to save the existing trees."

—Matt Stewart



On this Upper Arlington block, neighboring residents collectively donated a portion of their land as an easement to preserve the mature canopy they all enjoy. Photo by Matt Stewart

Matt Stewart (MFI 2026) is the Upper Arlington, Ohio Forestry Supervisor and Sidewalk Maintenance Program Manager. He works directly with the Engineering Department, and over the last several years has worked to open minds to alternatives to uprooting trees when replacing sidewalks.

"We do a lot of meandering/curving around trees—as long as we're staying in the right-of-way (ROW)—and we recently added grinding of panels and leveling/slabjacking for our Sidewalk Maintenance Program. When we do new sidewalk installations, we're going for the maximum width the ROW allows, to preserve trees and create larger planting spaces for the future. We're looking at bumpouts and a possible code alteration to get 7-foot-wide (2.1 m) tree lawns going forward.

Resident advocacy is a big factor as well. In Upper Arlington, residents must pay for sidewalk replacement but when we talk about the alternative—to remove trees—they tend to get on board with preserving the trees. They come to us and ask, 'I see where X was done for my neighbor's tree, can that be done for ours?' Residents have granted some portion of their easement to accommodate the new sidewalk and the existing tree. There's even a whole block of sidewalk that moved onto private property after three neighboring residents expressed the desire to save the existing trees."



This "root-zone bridge" is a segment of a shared-use asphalt path, and is 6 feet (1.8 m) wide. Slopes were all compliant when it was built. The surface is like a back deck on a house and easily traversed by a wheelchair. Many park path bridges are built of the same material. However, wood surfaces can be slippery when wet, so this has to accounted for. —Photo and caption by Steve Cothrel

"After several years of stopgap measures like asphalt patches, Seattle DOT Engineering said they needed to remove all the mature red maples on this block to install new sidewalks and curbs. However, Engineering and Urban Forestry brainstormed together to move the sidewalk outside of the red maples after the road was narrowed and the curb moved. This expanded available soil volume for the red maples and their successors."

—Stephanie Helms

UCFS Member Stephanie Helms logged experience with PROWAG when she worked as an Arboriculturist for the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) Urban Forestry Division from 2018-2023. Since summer of 2025, she's been an Urban Forester for the Forestry Division of Baltimore City Recreation & Parks after returning to urban forestry from a previous policy position.

"I learned a great deal in Seattle about trying to preserve mature trees during construction," she says. "Baltimore is a different world altogether, with the older-city narrow sidewalks Fred referred to. As sidewalks are brought up to PROWAG standards via renovation or replacement, the challenge is not only to protect existing trees but also to protect or create adequate tree pits."

Helms says that each city's ADA Coordinator/Program has its own interpretation of PROWAG and how to enforce the guidelines. While some cities await official adoption from the DOJ, Seattle was out front in adhering to PROWAG for sidewalks and curbs. (The City of Seattle's 2015 Trees and Sidewalks Operations Plan says, "Sidewalks shall provide a minimum four-foot-wide clear zone along the path of travel, per PROWAG Sections R302.3 and R302.4").

Despite the good will of all, why might tree preservation in light of PROWAG continue to be so challenging? "In both Seattle and Baltimore, trees are mandated to be protected through construction," Helms says. "But even when planning review comes together perfectly and you have solid plans for moving or raising the sidewalk, if you find an anchor root when you lift the concrete that can't be safely cut or built around, you will still have to remove that tree. Another factor can be unintentional communication and coordination breakdown, due to crew turnover and rotation or other factors, that mean tree protection practices aren't consistent."

Fortunately, there are success stories. Helms describes a block in South Seattle lined with mature red maples (*Acer rubrum*) that provide some of the most substantial shade in the neighborhood, but growing in a planting strip of just 18 inches (46 cm) width. "Granted, we had by this time stopped planting red maples in Seattle because of sidewalk heaving, >>



A curved sidewalk in Upper Arlington, Ohio gives a large tree more room for its root flare. "Columbus and other neighboring cities have reached out to us about our Sidewalk Maintenance Program and its policies and standards," Matt Stewart says. "Over time, this has created a collaborative information-sharing network." Photo by Matt Stewart

but in places where canopy is so scarce, the species in question can become less important than retaining mature canopy," Helms says.

After several years of stopgap measures like asphalt patches, SDOT Engineering said they needed to remove all the red maples to install new sidewalks and curbs. However, Engineering and Urban Forestry brainstormed together to move the sidewalk outside of the red maples after the road was narrowed and the curb moved. This expanded available soil volume for the red maples and their successors.

"Here in Baltimore, we have good relationships with our ADA Program folks," Helms says. "They will call us in when a plan for increased access could impact trees. Then the plan makes its way to the construction team, who will call and involve us where they need consultation on trees as the project progresses."

Helms says the biggest impact she and her colleagues see with PROWAG is that for some streets there is simply not adequate room for trees pits of any kind. "In those scenarios, we look at the neighborhood as a whole, and the location of nearby parks and existing canopy," she says. "Where can we increase canopy that still benefits all residents as they move through the neighborhood?"

Helms's advice for working vis a vis PROWAG—or really, in any urban forestry context—includes having the phone number and the ear of the people who have the power to give you a seat at the table for plan review. "Prioritize building interdepartmental relationships, which is not always easy, but it can pay off, because when we coordinate and collaborate, more trees can be retained," she says. She recommends memorizing the engineering specs to the best of your ability. "Sure, it's added work—but that knowledge means you will respond faster, gain respect, and be included more meaningfully. Engineers like a good puzzle, so if you can help them solve one, you're more likely to be considered part of a true team, which can be fun."









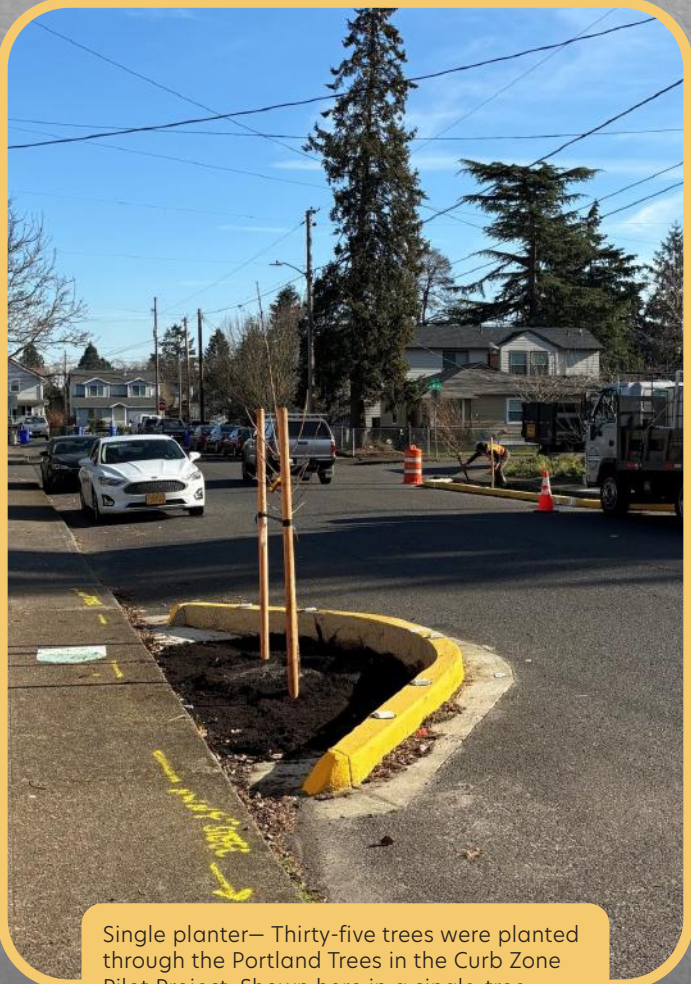
PROWAG does not apply to sidewalk repairs and renovations. Slabjacking is a form of sidewalk repair. "The slab must be intact. The operator drills holes in strategic places. Grout is injected under pressure, magically raising the lower section of pavement. Then mortar is used to cap holes, and a curing compound is applied. When done it's almost invisible, it's done in hours, and it was at the time about one-third the cost of concrete replacement." — Photos and caption by Steve Cothrel

Zach Bundy is the City of Columbus, Ohio Department of Public Service Arborist.

"The Columbus Department of Public Service has a program, Tree Root Repair, that specifically addresses sidewalks that have been made non-compliant by tree/hardscape conflicts. It also has a separate sidewalk shaving contract that avoids tree impacts altogether. This program does a great job of including our Forestry Department at every stage of the process, and we get the final say on whether or not the impacts incurred by each tree will be significant enough to warrant removal. Forestry is also finalizing bid documents for slabjacking, looking to Upper Arlington for advice."

Portland, Oregon's Trees in the Curb Zone Pilot Project

Photos Courtesy Portland Bureau of Transportation



Single planter— Thirty-five trees were planted through the Portland Trees in the Curb Zone Pilot Project. Shown here in a single-tree planter is a Turkish hazel (*Corylus colurna*).



In this double planter is City Sprite Zelkova (*Zelkova serrata* 'JFS KW1').

With a $500,000 grant from the Portland Bureau of Environmental Services, the Portland Bureau of Transportation (PBOT) converted parking spaces to tree planting beds. Called the Trees in the Curb Zone Pilot Project, it is an early implementation project of the Portland Pedestrian Design Guide (PDG, 2022). One of the biggest things the project team heard from the public during the PDG process was the desire for innovative tree planting treatments.

In preparation for the grant application, PBOT and Portland Parks & Recreation's Urban Forestry staff conducted a citywide site analysis of potential corridors and decided to focus the pilot on a cluster of streets in the under-canopied Lents neighborhood. Planning and engagement for this pilot project took place over 2022-23, planting site construction took place in two phases in 2024 and 2025, and trees were planted in two phases in January 2025 and February 2026. The trees planted as part of this pilot project are owned and maintained by the Portland Parks & Recreation Urban Forestry team.

One downside of planting in the curb zone is that it does eliminate a parking space(s). However, in addition to the many ecosystem services trees offer to both to humans and wildlife, the curb zone plantings—more so than parked cars—are experienced by drivers as "pinch points" that tend to calm traffic.



One triple planter was constructed as part of this project; it is more than 60 feet (18 m) in length and accommodates three American hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*).



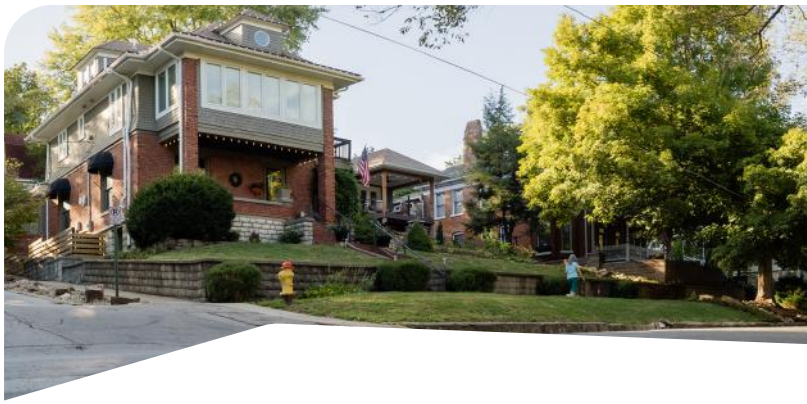
Quad– One entire block-long planter accommodates four bald cypress trees (*Taxodium distichum*).

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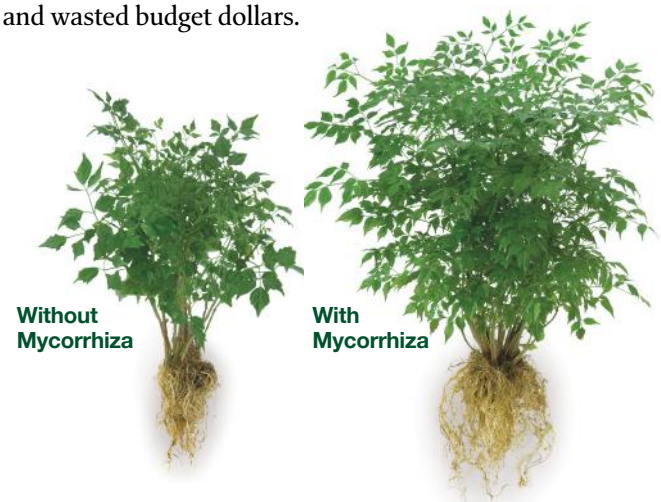
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Evaluating the Habitat Value of Dead Trees or Branches for Urban Wildlife

By Ryan Suttle, Consulting Arborist and Urban Forester, HortScience | Bartlett Consulting

Dead trees and branches are important sources of food and shelter for wildlife of all kinds, including bats and other mammals, invertebrates, and our focus here: birds. Cavity-nesting birds use dead, dying, and decaying trees and branches to excavate their nests and raise their young. Human communities may benefit from cavity-nesting birds as well. For example, owls commonly nest in cavities and act as a biological control on rats, squirrels, and other pests. Recent research has also shown the mental health benefits of bird song for humans (Browning et al. 2026). Increasingly, the ecological importance of tree and branch features traditionally considered to be defects demands more attention—as does our role in stewarding this resource.

As arborists and urban foresters, we also have a responsibility to maintain trees in the context of risk. Dead, dying, or damaged trees (snags) or branches are incredibly valuable to wildlife while potentially being more likely to fail. Our role as tree managers is to recognize both, and to make thoughtful management decisions. Balancing the risk and benefit of these biological resources is difficult and stretches our skills as tree managers.

In the most recent edition of the industry-essential Tree Risk Assessment Best Management Practice (Smiley et al. 2025), the authors state that "selection of suitable wildlife habitat trees must consider the risk, as well as its value for wildlife." While the BMP offers detailed guidance to systematically assess the risk of trees, it offers little guidance about how to evaluate their value for wildlife. This article will present some thoughts and advice for approaching this evaluation, mostly focusing on dead trees or tree parts (Photo 1).

Habitat value cannot be determined solely from dead or alive status. While dead trees or tree parts are often quite valuable habitat, assessment of them should consider several factors, including landscape context and physical structure of the snag. The diversity and quantity of wildlife species present is also a consideration, as this is the strongest measure of habitat value.

In my practice, I begin this risk-wildlife benefit analysis of snags by asking questions:

- Where is the tree located? (Thinking of both potential targets in the case of failure and landscape habitat value).
- What risk is posed?



Photo 1: An all-but-dead Northern California black walnut (*Juglans hindsii*) snag.

- What habitat features are present or likely to develop in the future?
- What wildlife currently exist in this area, or could exist in the future, that might reasonably use those features?

The first step in my process for assessing wildlife value is examining the landscape around the tree. A tree doesn't exist in a vacuum. For most tree management problems, the tree's site context drives decision making. Managing trees for habitat value is no different. In general, snags that are located in higher quality habitat may be more valuable than those located in low-quality habitat. Habitat value features to look for would include nearby sources of water, high diversity of plant species of different heights and structure, and/or low amounts of impervious surfaces and human activity. Tree Care for Birds and Other Wildlife includes a helpful pre-work inspection form (see page 33) to evaluate general habitat value of a site.

Simply put, a snag located in higher value habitat is more likely to be visited and used by wildlife. A dead tree surrounded by water sources, other snag features in the landscape, and a diversity of tree and shrub cover for foraging would attract wildlife. The same dead tree isolated in a habitat-poor landscape, such as a single dead tree in a small parking lot island, would be less attractive to wildlife.

Another strong predictor of wildlife value of a snag is its physical structure. Features such as cavities (decayed or excavated), heart rot, broken branches, loose bark, cracks, or accumulations of organic material in cavities or branch unions can provide >>



Photo 2: A red-tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) resting on a broken branch, taken through binoculars during a tree risk assessment.

opportunities for roosting, nesting, and/or foraging substrates (Photo 2). In general, more variation in structure increases the value of a snag (Table 1). A large dead tree with different sizes of branches and different sizes and development stages of cavities would be more immediately valuable to wildlife than a dead tree where all lateral branches have been removed and only a trunk remains.

The more features from Table 1 that snags possess, the more valuable the snag. Since snag characteristics will likely change over time, an evaluation could also include determining what features listed above might occur in the future if some or all of the snag were retained in the landscape.

Evaluating the features present in a potential habitat tree also benefits from a return to the landscape context. I like to consider specific wildlife in the landscape that may benefit from them. I live in Oakland, California, and one example that commonly comes up in my work is the Acorn Woodpecker (*Melanerpes formicivorus*). From the Wildlife BMPs (Bassett et al. 2026): "One important species to arborists in California is the Acorn Woodpecker, which creates its nests in cavities of trees and stores acorns in granaries in snags, dead branches, and other wooden structures."

These granaries serve as multi-generational food storage, sometimes holding tens of thousands of acorns housed in custom-drilled holes. As the acorns dry and shrink, the woodpeckers will move them around from hole to hole to ensure that they are wedged tightly enough that other animals would have difficulty removing them. It is truly incredible!

Acorn Woodpeckers are most common in oak or mixed pine-oak woodlands, away from heavily urbanized areas. I most frequently see acorn >>

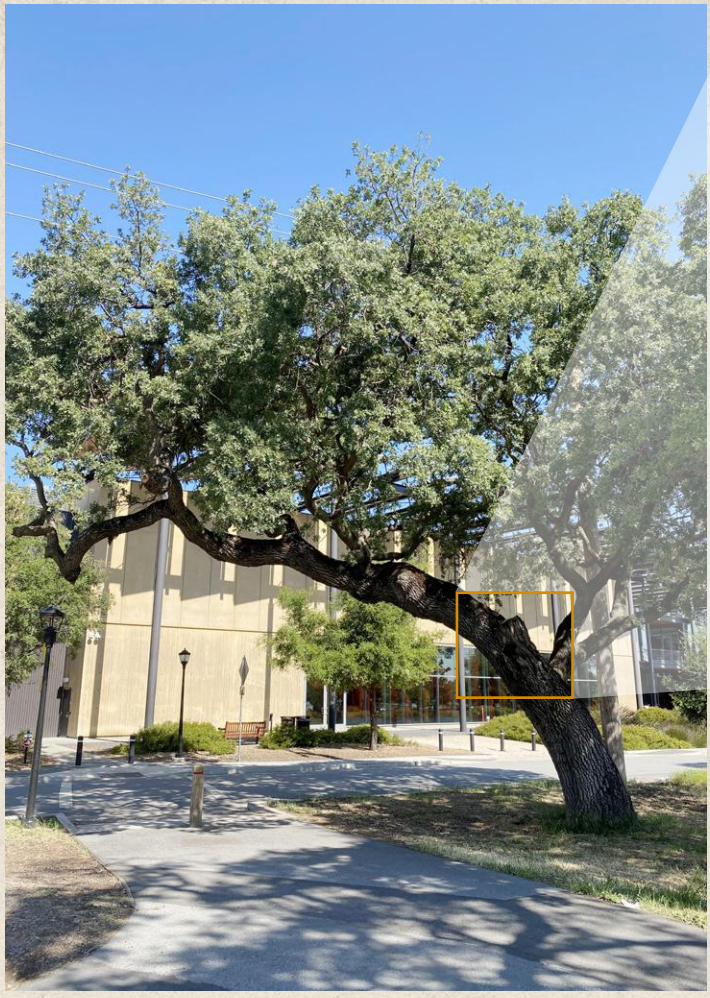
Table 1. Habitat tree features and considerations.

Tree feature	Habitat value consideration
Woodpecker-excavated cavities	Provide nesting and roosting sites for woodpeckers and subsequently for secondary cavity users (e.g., bluebirds, tree swallows, nuthatches) that cannot excavate their own cavities.
Natural decay cavities	Create long-lasting refuges and nesting sites; possibly larger than excavated cavities, offering habitat to larger owls or mammals.
Heart rot	Softer internal wood allows for cavity-excavating birds (e.g., woodpeckers) to create nesting cavities, while sound wood on exterior of trunk offers structural support; cavities then used by secondary cavity-dependent animals.
Loose or exfoliating bark	Crevices used by bats and invertebrates for roosting, shelter, overwintering, and reproduction. Birds may also forage beneath loose bark.
Cracks, fissures, and splits	Provide narrow refuges and roost sites, particularly for bats, reptiles, amphibians, and arthropods.
Broken branches	Can initiate decay and cavity formation, provide small refuges, and increase structural complexity.
Dead branches	Offer unobstructed perches used for hunting, territorial defense, singing, resting, preening, and watching for predators; substrate for decay-associated organisms.
Large diameter trunk	Can support larger cavities and may persist longer in the landscape than smaller diameter trunks.
Soft, decayed tree or tree part	Facilitates cavity excavation and supports fungi, beetles, larvae, and other decomposer organisms that become food for wildlife.
Harder, recently dead tree or tree part	Can persist for longer periods as standing structure and provides bark, branches, perches, and substrate that subsequently develops decay features.
Fungal decay and fruiting bodies	Support fungi-dependent invertebrates, contribute to wood decomposition, and help create cavities and other structural habitat.

granaries in mature or old valley oaks (*Quercus lobata*) with large-diameter dead or damaged branches, or entirely dead trees (Photo 3 and inset). When making management decisions about these trees or features, especially in areas near oak woodlands, I often think of the potential implications for the Acorn Woodpecker.

If you choose to incorporate similar wildlife-informed management into your practice, consider learning more about some tree-dependent wildlife in your area and what tree species or tree features may be most valuable to them. A useful tool for this when it comes to birds is eBird, a worldwide bird observation database and community science project managed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Users record birds they see or hear at a particular time at a specific place, creating an invaluable body of observations that show what birds may be present in the area. eBird also reveals the habitat type each bird species needs, which can shape tree management priorities.

What does this mean in an urban forestry setting? In heavily urbanized cities, habitat is often degraded and fragmented. Habitat features traditionally viewed as defects, such as tree cavities and dead trees and branches, are systematically removed from the landscape. As such, wildlife that are dependent on these features are not well supported in urban environments. As managers of urban trees, we have an opportunity to enhance the ability for wildlife to thrive in our urban environments. >>



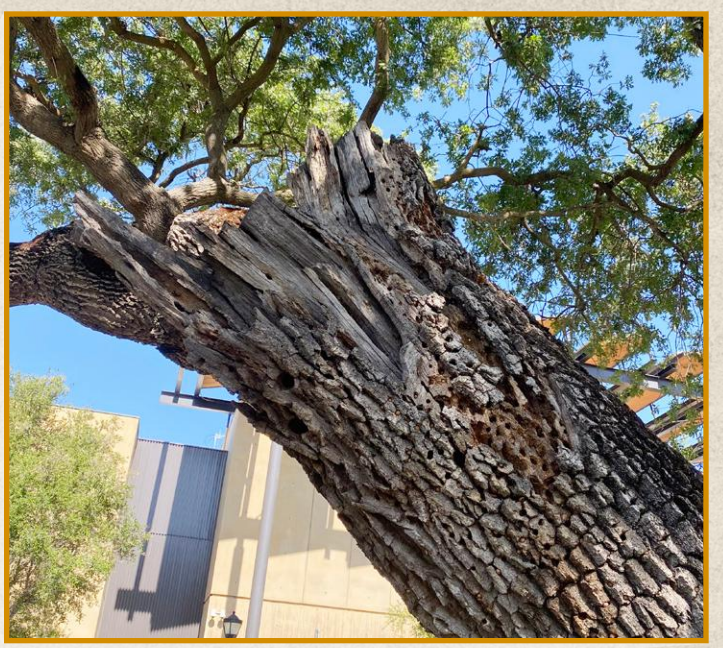


Photo 3 (left): A mature valley oak (*Quercus lobata*).

Inset: Scaffold branch failure with Acorn Woodpecker holes lower on the stem.

Pre-Work Inspection Form - California

Inspector: _____ Level of Training: _____

Date: _____ Time: _____ Weather: _____

Planned Work: _____

Work Area: _____ Work Scheduled: _____

Habitat Value

☐ Low	☐ High	☐ Sensitive
☐ High human use and infrastructure	☐ Low human use and infrastructure	☐ Adjacent to water bodies
☐ High impervious surfaces	☐ Low impervious surfaces	☐ Adjacent to dry water channels
☐ Low plant species diversity	☐ High plant species diversity	☐ Riparian vegetation present
☐ Low plant structural diversity	☐ High plant structural diversity	☐ Critical habitat
☐ Far from water bodies	☐ Close to water bodies	☐ Known sensitive species
☐ Few mature, dead, or dying trees	☐ Many mature, dead, or dying trees	
☐ Few/no wildlife present	☐ Abundant wildlife present	

Breeding season	Habitat Value		
	Low	High	Sensitive
Breeding season Feb 1 – Aug 31	Wildlife Trained Arborist	Wildlife Biologist	Wildlife Biologist
Non-breeding season Sep 1 – Jan 31	Awareness Training	Wildlife Trained Arborist	Wildlife Biologist

Breeding Season

☐ Breeding Season – Feb 1-Aug 31

☐ Non-breeding Season – Sep 1-Jan 31

Level of Training

☐ Awareness Training

☐ Wildlife Trained Arborist

☐ Wildlife Biologist

Inspection

- Scan the sky, trees, ground, shrubs, and branches
- Check trunk and branches for cavities and holes in ground.
- Listen for wildlife sounds.
- Look for wildlife flying or running away
- Watch the movement of any females

☐ Concentrations of white colored droppings

☐ Wildlife exhibiting breeding behavior

☐ Wildlife carrying nesting materials

☐ Repeated wildlife visits to area

☐ Nests that may have eggs or young

Nest Type: _____

Nest Location: _____

Change to Work Plan: _____

_____

_____

Emergency

☐ Young out of nest

☐ Injured wildlife

☐ Contacted Wildlife Rehab Center

Rehab Center: _____

Situation: _____

_____

Advice Given: _____

_____

Action: _____

_____

_____

https://treecareforbirds.com/bmps-and-handouts/

In some cases, the risk posed by habitat trees may outweigh the benefit posed. Not every dead tree or dead branch should be preserved as a snag for wildlife. But in some cases, particularly when target occupancy is infrequent or rare, it may be a good option. Prioritizing trees with the greatest habitat value can streamline this process and assist practitioners in maintaining wildlife trees that will contribute the most. That said, what comes next once you decide to preserve a habitat snag? Ultimately, managing a tree for wildlife does not have to be an all-or-nothing decision between retention and removal. Reducing a snag, retaining or reducing dead branches, preserving a living cavity-bearing stem, and monitoring a tree as it continues to decay may all be appropriate options depending on the circumstances and level of tolerable risk.

I view creating a wildlife snag with targets as a commitment to continued monitoring and management. Like living trees, snags change over time. But unlike living trees, the condition of dead trees or dead branches can only deteriorate. Likelihood of failure will increase as the tree or tree part loses stability due to factors such as decay or excavation by wildlife. Consequently, the tree or part may also be more difficult or dangerous for workers to remove the longer it exists in the landscape. Management of snags should be paired with a plan for continued monitoring and eventual removal or failure. Managers should reassess habitat snags at intervals that are appropriate for individual situations. For my practice, I have found that annual assessment, and assessment after major storms, works well.

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