



Urban and Community Forestry Society Annual Conference Program

Monday, November 18 and Tuesday, November 19

[Register for the UCFS and/or Partners in Community Forestry Conference!](#)

Monday, November 18

1:00-4:00pm – Pre-Conference Tour – Emerald Necklaces to Blue Island Bus Tour

Location: Meet at the Wabash Street entrance

Pre-registration required. Fee of \$50 for UCFS Members, \$55 for non-members

From Emerald necklaces to Blue Islands, join the Urban and Community Forestry Society and the City of Chicago Forestry for a tour of some of city's most historic and leafiest showstoppers. This tour will feature stops at one of Chicago's best kept secrets, the Garfield Park Conservatory where Chicago Park District Staff will provide a private tour of the naturalistic landscapes contained under the glass roof. The Conservatory is just one part of the "emerald necklace" park and boulevard system that attendees will experience. A driving tour will showcase five of the classically-design boulevards where recreation meets transportation. Chicago Department of Transportation officials will share how they work with Forestry to draw people outside to an environment that is both safe and inviting. Finally, the tour will stop at Blue Island Avenue, the "greenest street in America," with an unprecedented demonstration of cutting-edge sustainable design and "complete streets" principles have been implemented in the public right of way.

5:00-6:00pm – UCFS Fun Run

Location: Meet in the hotel lobby.

Additional \$30 registration fee

Participate in 2-mile run-walk excursion along a portion of the Lake Michigan waterfront. Proceeds support scholarships for MFI and the UCFS Arborist Exchange program.

Registered participants also received a t-shirt!

6:00-8:00pm – Municipal Forestry Institute (MFI) Reunion

Location: 2Twenty2 Tavern, 222 S Wabash Ave, Chicago, IL 60604

Additional fee of \$30 per ticket with payment accepted at the door.

Join the Municipal Forestry Institute reunion on Monday, November 18 to reconnect with your fellow attendees and meet graduates from other classes. Bring a friend who might be interested in future MFI classes!

Tuesday, November 19

Location: State Ballroom

7:00-4:00pm – **Registration**

7:00-8:00am – **Breakfast with the Exhibitors**

7:00-8:00am - **First-time attendees Breakfast with UCFS Members and Friends**
In the State Ballroom

8:00-8:10am– **Welcome**

Rachel Habig-Myers, Urban Forester, Fairfax County and UCFS Board of Directors President
Leslie Berckes, Executive Director, Urban and Community Forestry Society

8:10-8:40am – **Welcome from the Host City**

Joe McCarthy, Senior City Forester, City of Chicago Bureau of Forestry
Raed Mansour, Director for the Office of Innovation, Chicago Department of Public Health

The City of Chicago was experiencing an 11-year consecutive decline in its street tree population on top of losses in personnel and institutional knowledge, decreases in tree planting, and multi-year delays in pruning and tree removal. However, the convergence of a US Forest Service Resiliency grant to conduct a random sample tree inventory and develop an urban forest management plan, a new Urban Forestry Advisory Board, and a Bloomberg Associates-funded tree planting tool developed with the Department of Public Health came together to stabilize the city's tree canopy. Learn how the Bureau of Forestry is navigating these issues to grow healthy trees for the Windy City.

8:40-9:20am– **Keynote: Trees, Tech, and Togetherness: Nature's Role in Easing Urban Loneliness**

- *Keynote sponsored by PlanIt Geo*

Dr. Nadina Galle, Ecological Engineer and author of *The Nature of Our Cities: Harnessing the Power of the Natural World to Survive a Changing Planet*

In a world where 90% of our time is spent indoors and one in two adults in the U.S. experience measurable loneliness, building social connections and reconnecting with nature is more crucial than ever, especially in our cities.

Dr. Nadina Galle, a Dutch-Canadian ecological engineer, explores this vital relationship in her new book, *The Nature of Our Cities: Harnessing the Power of the Natural World to Survive a Changing Planet*. She reveals how often-overlooked urban nature can not only fortify cities against climate challenges but also combat the

loneliness and mental health epidemic in society. Through her "Internet of Nature" concept, Nadina illustrates how technology and the natural world can converge to offer innovative solutions.

In this keynote, Nadina will showcase global initiatives that exemplify these principles—from emailing trees in Melbourne to texting trees in Halifax and talking trees in Amsterdam. Each of these projects uniquely addresses loneliness. Nadina will challenge the audience to view technology not as the cause of these issues but as a tool to foster connections with urban forests. She will demonstrate how we can create lasting health solutions that prioritize nature first and technology second.

9:20-9:35am – Cultivating Community Connections: A Holistic Approach to Urban Forestry Engagement

Danielle Devier, Senior Urban Ecology Analyst, Seattle Parks & Recreation
Jamie Lim, Lead Arborist, Seattle Parks & Recreation

This presentation highlights the transformative power of community engagement in shaping resilient urban forests in Seattle. By fostering partnerships with advocacy groups, nonprofits, educational institutions, and Indigenous communities, the city has created vibrant green spaces benefiting both people and the environment. Drawing from real-world experiences, strategies for community involvement in tree initiatives will be shared.

9:40-10:00am – Break

10:00-10:30am – Baltimore TreeKeepers: A City-Led Urban Tree Stewardship Community

Fred Chalfant, Urban Forester, TreeBaltimore, Baltimore, Maryland City Department of Recreation and Parks

Baltimore TreeKeepers is a free, city-run program that trains residents in proper tree planting, pruning, and best care practices. Since its founding in 2013, over a thousand residents have participated in the classes! Certified TreeKeepers are authorized to plant and/or prune in the city right-of-way and lead volunteer events of their own. In this presentation, leaders from TreeBaltimore will explain how this municipally-led tree stewardship program has been integrated into citywide planting and young tree maintenance goals while improving community engagement and interagency cooperation.

10:30-10:40am– Tree Equity Handbook

Ian Leahy, Senior Advisor - Urban Forestry, American Forests

Introducing the new Tree Equity Handbook, a free resource with interactive forms that help practitioners build an equity-focused urban forestry program! Learn how to use the tool to assess program needs, recruit the right coalition, and strategically plan using equity-oriented data.

10:40-10:50am – **Prioritizing Tree Maintenance Using Tree Equity Data**

Grant Jones, Forestry Superintendent, Village of Oak Park, Illinois

Tree equity can be used to prioritize tree maintenance and not just to prioritize tree planting. The Village of Oak Park, Illinois implemented a root collar excavation program to grow the canopy and extend the life of existing parkway trees. Urban heat island maps were used to prioritize tree care work on approximately 230 trees—with little resident push-back and ultimately big benefits to the trees' long-term health.

10:50-11:20am – **Nuestros Bosques (Our Forest)**

Amaris Alanis Ribeiro, Director of Forestry and STEM, Hispanic Access Foundation

Glenda Gonzalez, Forestry Program Manager, Hispanic Access Foundation

Marilyn Saenz, Grant Portfolio Associate, Hispanic Access Foundation

Moy Mendez, Executive Director, Hope Center

From big cities to faith-based organizations, Hispanic Access Foundation aims to increase equitable access to urban tree canopy while increasing community engagement and decision-making in local urban forestry in disadvantaged communities. Learn about real-world case studies and specific community engagement tips like hosting an event for Latino Conservation Week.

11:30 am-1:00pm – **Lunch and Awards Ceremony**

UCFS Annual Awards Ceremony

Rachel Habig-Myers, Urban Forester, Fairfax County and UCFS Board of Directors President

Urban Forestry Credentialing

Caitlyn Polihan, CEP and Executive Director, International Society of Arboriculture

LGBTTree Affinity Group Welcome

Alex Grieve, Forest Health Specialist and Outreach Coordinator, Urban Forestry Division Washington, DC

Madeleine Rauhe, Urban Forest Supervisor, City of Santa Monica, California

1:00-1:15pm – **STOP, Collaborate, and Listen - Shade, Shade, Baby!**

Kristine Kimbro, Urban & Community Forestry Coordinator, Arkansas Department of Agriculture

Arkansas's Shade Trees on Playgrounds (STOP) program, in existence for over 20 years, addresses the dual goal of educating youth about the benefits of trees and decreasing the risk of adult skin cancer by providing shade trees for playgrounds and outdoor learning areas across the state. This presentation will explain the program, provide tips urban foresters can use to begin similar collaborations with schools and child care facilities in their areas, and share success stories achieved through the program.

1:15-1:45pm – Educating Future Urban & Community Forestry Professionals

Sara Barron, Director of Urban Forestry Programs, University of British Columbia

As an emerging profession, urban forestry is increasingly being taught across the world with few opportunities for discussion of what the profession encompasses, especially for urban forestry students. University of British Columbia convened a group of urban forestry educators from across the world to discuss competencies and learning outcomes that all urban forestry students should be taught. The presentation will discuss the results of the collaborative study and make suggestions for how tenured urban forestry educators and professionals can work together to support young people as they leave school and enter “the real world.”

1:45-2:15pm – Revolutionizing Collaborative Urban Forestry Efforts in North Saint Louis County

Joe Oelke, Director of Forestry and Community Conservation, Beyond Housing
Jack McDonnell, Forestry and Community Conservation Program Manager, Beyond Housing

An unlikely collaboration of an affordable rental housing non-profit, 22 small municipalities, and the Missouri Department of Conservation has resulted in healthier canopy for a historically-disinvested region in north Saint Louis County, Missouri through the Beyond Housing initiative. Not every municipality can afford to have a staff arborist, so Beyond Housing brings together community foresters to provide services such as hazardous tree mitigation, no-cost tree planting events, educational opportunities for students, and safety training for public works staff. Learn how this unique collaboration came together.

2:15-2:25pm – Shade Equity in the Desert

Nicole Gillett, Urban Forestry Program Manager, City of Tucson, Arizona

What significance does a tree hold in the desert? In Tucson, shade provided by trees extends beyond beauty; it ensures safe passage for children walking to school, offers shelter to wildlife like bobcats, and can be a matter of life or death in extreme heat. "Shade Equity in the Desert" will delve into the practicalities of establishing Tucson's Urban Forestry Program while highlighting the transformative impact such initiatives can have in a city with glaring disparities in tree distribution.

2:30-2:50pm – Break

2:50-3:20pm – From Plan to Practice: Integrating Green Infrastructure Across the Palmetto State

Cara Specht, Coastal Region Urban Forester, South Carolina Forestry Commission

Explore South Carolina's pioneering Statewide Green Infrastructure (GI) Plan, a collaborative effort mapping core habitats and connectivity corridors. Learn how stakeholder engagement and strategic planning tackle land conversion threats, enhance landscape resilience, and drive sustainable growth. Discover real-world integration in projects across the state for tangible conservation outcomes.

3:20-3:50pm – TreePhilly: Building Our City’s Community Forestry Program

Erica Smith Fichman, City Forester, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Parks & Recreation
Kate Illes, Acting Manager of Community Forestry, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation

One year ago, the Philly Tree Plan—a comprehensive, 10-year strategic plan for Philadelphia’s trees— was released. With the plan in motion, the City achieved an early goal by hiring Philadelphia’s first City Forester to lead the Urban Forestry Unit. With new leadership in place and a guiding vision, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation’s TreePhilly program can work to expand its scope and impact as the City’s comprehensive Community Forestry program. Hear highlights of the plan and how the City intends to implement its key objectives.

3:50-4:20pm – Centering Tribal Communities in Urban and Community Forestry

Hilary Olivos-Rood, Grant Program Administrator, Oregon Department of Forestry
Brittany Oxford, Community Assistance Forester, Oregon Department of Forestry

Tribal forestry and communities are an integral component of land management, yet historically and currently there is little precedent for centering these communities with meaningful and explicit engagement. In 2023, the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF) was awarded \$10M of Inflation Reduction Act funds from the U.S. Forest Service to establish a unique urban and community forestry grant program exclusively for the nine Federally Recognized Tribes of Oregon. ODF will share experiences in intentional Tribal engagement including successes, limitations, and growth opportunities.

4:20-4:30pm – Closing

Rachel Habig-Myers, Urban Forester, Fairfax County and UCFS Board of Directors President

5:00-6:00pm – Annual UCFS Member Meeting

Location: State Ballroom

Rachel Habig-Myers, Urban Forester, Fairfax County and UCFS Board of Directors President

Urban and Community Forestry Society members are invited to the annual meeting of members. Hear from Society leadership on the status of the organization, new initiatives, and the long-term strategic direction. Members will also have an opportunity to ask questions and discuss issues that are of importance to them.

6:00-7:30pm – Reception with Urban and Community Forestry Society and Sustainable Urban Forests Coalition

Location: Exhibitor Hall

Mix and mingle with your tree people!

7:00-8:00pm – UCFS Affinity Group, LGBTree Social

Location: Salon 12

Join a meet-up and social for LGBTQIA+ urban forestry professional!