

## UCFS Board Member Profile: Zach Wirtz

**Name:** Zach Wirtz

**City, State/Province, Country:** Lisle, Illinois, USA

**Place of Employment:** The Morton Arboretum

**Job Title:** Director of The Chicago Region Trees Initiative

**Educational level and major field:** Masters of Science, Forestry

**List any professional certifications:** ISA Certified Arborist

**List any other urban forestry, arboriculture, or related organizations you're involved with:** International Society of Arboriculture, Illinois Arborist Association, American Public Gardens Association



**LinkedIn profile link:** <https://www.linkedin.com/in/zach-wirtz/>

### **Brief bio:**

Zach Wirtz serves as the Director of the Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI) at The Morton Arboretum, leading efforts to build a healthier, more equitable urban forest across the Chicago metropolitan area and beyond. An ISA Certified Arborist, he brings deep expertise in urban forestry, tree stewardship, and community engagement to his role. His leadership focuses on improving regional canopy coverage, with a strong emphasis on advancing tree equity in historically under-resourced communities. Through collaboration with municipal leaders, non-profits, and residents, Wirtz equips local communities with the technical tools and policy frameworks needed for sustainable canopy management. He is a passionate advocate for viewing urban trees as critical public infrastructure essential for climate resilience, public health, and local biodiversity.

### **What makes you happy about being an UCFS member?**

What brings me the most joy as a UCFS member is the sheer breadth and collaborative spirit of our organization. It provides a welcoming space to grow both personally and professionally, while constantly expanding our collective knowledge. Urban forestry is inherently multidisciplinary - no single person or profession can manage a canopy alone. It truly takes a diverse village to nurture an urban forest, and UCFS is the platform that brings that village together.

### **What got you interested in the field of urban forestry?**

My passion for nature was sparked early through childhood camping, hiking, and exploring the outdoors. This eventually led me to the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to pursue forestry. I quickly became fascinated by the spaces where people and trees intersect - in our cities, public parks, wildland-urban interfaces - and in

efforts to expand access to nature. Having been so impactful in my own development, I wanted others to have access to nature in their own lives.

Building on my undergraduate background in urban forestry and GIS, I pursued graduate studies in urban forest governance to better understand the human side of tree management and decision-making. During this time, I dedicated myself to urban forestry education as a teaching and research assistant, mentoring students through the same foundational concepts that shaped my career.

Since graduating, I have worked in non-profit urban forestry and tree planting. Today, I am particularly interested in how we communicate the full value of trees, highlight the physical and emotional connections between communities and their canopy, and leverage green spaces to improve health and well-being across our cities.

**In what ways do you want to contribute to the [mission](#) and [strategic direction](#) of UCFS? Are you particularly interested in a certain area of board service such as governance, policy, outreach, financial oversight, etc.? Do you see any of your strengths being especially helpful to leading the organization?**

Early in my career, I joined the Wisconsin Arborist Association, ISA, and several related professional groups. While I highly valued these networks, I was consistently drawn toward a broader, landscape-level urban forestry perspective that wasn't always showcased. That is what I appreciate most about UCFS—it serves as a true home for urban foresters, unifying and elevating our field in a way that was previously missing.

As a board member, I want to channel my strengths in capacity building and resource leverage toward UCFS's outreach, education, and policy initiatives. Bringing a background in governance, I will work to ensure we include a broad spectrum of stakeholders in our decision-making and set a clear direction for our industry. My strategic priorities center on: 1) elevating professional visibility so urban forestry has a seat at the table in planning and community development; 2) building internal and external connections by bridging adjacent fields like urban planning and public health while creating collaborative spaces for tree managers; and 3) investing in the workforce pipeline by supporting universities, apprenticeships, and informal learning networks. Having benefited deeply from mentorship throughout my own path, I view board leadership as a duty to steward our profession today while equipping the next generation to advance it.

#### **Favorite tree and why?**

The Bur Oak (*Quercus macrocarpa*). Living and working in Illinois, I see firsthand how vital oaks are as a keystone species. They're built with incredible fire resistance, stress tolerance, and ecological value. Capable of living for centuries, bur oaks represent vital continuity in our landscape, standing as enduring anchors while the ecosystems and communities around them change. They connect us to the past, as well as the future of our places. On a personal level, I've always loved its deep, corky bark. It's a wonderful reminder that a little "quirkiness" adds character and resilience, and that unique, distinct individuals are often the ones who hold our communities together.