

Michigan Urban and Community Forestry Council



An advisory committee to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

Letter:

February 4, 2019

Ms. Deb Begalle State Forester
Michigan Department of Natural Resources Forest Resources Division
PO Box 30452
Lansing, MI 48909

Dear Ms. Begalle:

As you are aware, trees are significant assets in the urban environment. As they mature, trees not only increase in value but also provide important ecosystem services like stormwater management, improved air quality, reduced heat island effect, increased property value and traffic calming. These services are vital in our communities as they both improve quality of life and save money for our citizens.

Just as important, urban forests provide valuable habitat for wildlife, and provide Michigan urban dwellers with an opportunity to connect with nature on a daily basis, building their understanding and appreciation of the incredible variety of natural resources that make our state unique.

However, despite both a growing recognition of the contribution of trees to the built environment and efforts to plant and care for trees, several studies have demonstrated tree loss remains a problem in our communities. Between 2009 and 2014, urban tree canopy cover in the United States declined by roughly 175,000 acres per year or an average decline of about 1%¹. Michigan is not immune to these dynamics, losing an estimated 3,810 acres of urban tree canopy between 2008 and 2014 or slightly more than the national average.

¹Nowak, D.J., and E.J. Greenfield. 2018. *Declining urban and community tree cover in the United States. Urban Forestry & Urban Greening* 32: 32-55. March, 2018.

Many issues are leading to the decline in our urban canopy including introduction of invasive species like Emerald Ash Borer, Hemlock Woolly Adelgid and Oak Wilt. As we recognize the myriad benefits our urban trees provide, while acknowledging the many threats they face, it becomes ever more important

that the State of Michigan and its community partners prioritize time and resources to support and sustain Michigan's urban forests.

In support of this effort, the Michigan Urban and Community Forestry Council (MUCFC) works to improve urban and community forests by disseminating information and education through collaboration with partners and leveraging resources to support community efforts statewide. While the council provides support and guidance to the DNR's Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) program, we also initiate discussions, engage stakeholders, build partnerships, and spread awareness of the immense value that trees provide to our built and urbanizing communities. In 2018 alone, the MUCFC supported the efforts to the Michigan UCF program which reported the following accomplishments:

- assist 308 communities where approximately 55% of Michiganders live;
- facilitate and record 7,142 volunteer hours contributed in program related projects and events;
- support the planting 2,561 trees in communities statewide through assistance and programs;
- award \$240,000 in UCF program grants which leveraged \$720,000 in local matching funds;
- celebrate 117 communities, 5 campuses and 2 utilities earning Tree City/Campus/ Line USA award;
- support professional dialogue in response to SB 1188 the "Vegetation Removal Preemption Act";
- strengthen the UCF partnership between DNR and MSU through addition of a new urban forestry faculty member, Asia Dowtin, to MSU Department of Forestry and MUCFC;
- continue and expand a private-public-nonprofit partnership to provide technical services, training, and tree planting in four communities of the Lower Grand River watershed in 2019.
- share ideas, lessons-learned, and future goals with USFS, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin state UCF councils during a combined annual conference call; and
- make professional presentations at multiple national and international conferences and meetings.

The MUCFC recognizes that the strategies outlined in the State's forest action will help monitor long-term trends, establish priorities, and track progress in community forestry efforts. To these ends, we must identify, analyze and incorporate appropriate data to create local and statewide strategies that protect, enhance, and expand urban forests.

Additionally, we encourage MDNR to consider increased funding for urban forest management and re-planting at the municipal level. Activities in local communities need to be data-driven, community - based and compliant with current best practices. The State and its partners can help provide tools that help local communities better manage their urban forests - from tree planting to maintenance and including preservation.

With these goals in mind, MUCFC members are excited by the possibilities in 2019 to continue Michigan's urban and community forestry progress. Our members hope to support the State's efforts through a few key priorities:

- support Kevin Sayers and the UCF program;
- host the Michigan Tree City USA program and awards;

- promote Michigan, the DNR and MSU Forestry as leaders in urban and community forestry;
- strengthen geographic and cultural diversity among committee membership;
- develop urban and community forestry goals and metrics to support revisions to the State's forest action plan;
- evaluate and prioritize strategies (e.g. grant program, technical transfer, workshops) to build capacity of local communities to manage urban and community forests through the forest action planning process;
- convene partnerships and facilitate conversations around key urban and community forestry issues in Michigan such as oak wilt, tree protection ordinances, training of arborists, developing career-based education programs to promote and attract more diverse forestry leaders, etc.;
- disseminate information on urban and community forestry emerging issues, industry-accepted best practices, and new ideas to industry stakeholders; and
- maintain connections to regional/state councils and national partners to share and generate ideas.

We are encouraged by the progress and opportunities in urban and community forestry across Michigan. From the variety of partnerships that have emerged and the shining examples of urban forestry across several Michigan communities, the UCF program and MUCFC continue to strengthen Michigan's Urban and Community Forestry community.

We look forward to continued engagement with the DNR's Forest Resources Division in the year ahead.

Sincerely,



Dean Hay, Chair

Members

Joan Chadde, Marshall Baeckeroot, Bill Drews, Asia Dowtin, Ryan Edwards, Kerry Gray, Dean Hay (Chair), Geoff Kempter, Tyler Klifman, Annie Kruse, Lee Mueller, Douglas Schultz

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