

URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY: WHERE ARE WE GOING?¹

by Fred Deneke

We are on the verge of some very challenging times in urban and community forestry — challenging times but also times filled with opportunity and ripe for people with new ideas and leadership — times for progressive people in our profession across the country. Future urban expansion is going to continue to occur in the sun belt. This has been a reality for you for ten years. How we handle the changes in land use and how well we incorporate green space into the new cities that accompany urban expansion will affect the quality of living well beyond the turn of the century.

Today I want to share with you some thoughts, observations, and changes I am seeing in urban and community forestry from a national perspective.

Urban forestry is a dynamic and evolving concept. This concept of urban and community forestry is expanding from its early natural focus on street trees to natural resource management throughout urban influence zones. This new concept also involves the recognition that an urban values system affects management practices on rural forest land. We find that city people still think like city folk even after they move out into rural areas.

You are aware of the value of trees in dispersing pollutants, reducing wind velocities, glare and noise. But how many city people realize that the value of relatively fewer trees make each tree's contribution that much more critical.

The trees of the urban forest disperse the wind, intercept glare, dampen noise. They add oxygen and moisture to the air, and filter out pollutants. They protect, secure, and aerate the soil. They define our open spaces, and screen our urban wastelands. They help to conserve energy, either

by temperature modification from shading, or by providing a cool place to sit and rest our weary bones.

And we mustn't forget the wood products. Urban waste wood is no longer being wasted. High quality firewood, and even lumber, is being recovered from urban forests throughout the country. And chips from tree trimming operations are being used for power generation, sewer sludge composting, and slope stabilization.

As mentioned earlier, urban and community forestry and urban and community forest management must involve more than the street trees resource. Trees, the basic components of the urban forest, are often also accompanied by other management issues, such as municipal watersheds, urban wildlife habitat, and outdoor recreation. Sound management of natural resources in and near cities addresses national issues, such as loss of prime forest and agricultural lands, watershed and runoff considerations including soil erosion, aquifer recharge, water quality and energy conservation. Wildlife and recreational benefits are also included in the urban and community forestry concept. I believe that urban and community forestry in this country is the forerunner to intensive management of forest land in and near cities as has long been practiced in Europe.

The understanding and management of urban natural resources can provide society with the means to help solve some deeprooted problems in urban and rural areas. Urban and community forestry involvement and efforts can help to:

- enhance community stability
- screen out noise and unsightly views
- reduce air pollution
- protect watersheds
- control runoff
- replenish aquifers

¹Presented at the annual conference, Southern Chapter, ISA, in Savannah, Georgia in February 1982.

- enhance water quality
- provide recreation
- reduce climate extremes
- conserve energy
- increase property values
- provide energy and fiber
- enhance wildlife habitat
- enhance community pride and spirit
- stimulate community stewardship for urban vegetation
- enhance natural resource understanding
- promote a conservation ethic

Changes Occurring in Urban and Community Forestry Practice

As I have traveled during the past few years, I am beginning to see some rapid changes coming to urban and community forestry. For the most part, they are an outgrowth of proposition 13 movements but I do not look at these changes as negative.

The first of these changes is a shifting of emphasis from maintenance and especially response maintenance of urban trees to management. Management, not only in terms of budget (e.g., emphasis on per unit or per tree costs and projection), time, organization and personnel. But also management in terms of silviculture and ecology of the urban tree resource. For the most part, I am seeing rotational management being emphasized as well as more emphasis on mixed, uneven age management of the urban tree resource.

The second of these changes is a willingness to reach out and embrace the volunteer concept and make it work for cities rather than working against them and in the process changing lives as well as achieving program goals such as pruning and planting.

You will notice that I have been using urban and community forestry rather than urban forestry. Why?

Urban forestry, as a term, has caused some problems as it gives the impression of only big cities. We are now going back to the original term which is urban and community forestry. Besides, when you come right down to it, things that get done in urban and community forestry that make a difference, happen at the local level.

We have also attempted to take a critical look at the urban forestry assistance program. A recent policy analysis study encouraged the following areas of emphasis for the USDA Forest Service Program:

1. Efforts to expand knowledge of urban forest and urban forestry benefits and opportunities.

2. Group contacts rather than less cost-effective individual contacts.

3. Significant efforts to increase public awareness of benefits, opportunities, and problems associated with urban forests.

4. Efforts to help communities identify their urban forest resources and to develop a plan for maintaining and improving them.

5. Methods to encourage landowners and businesses to provide, maintain, and protect more of our urban forests.

6. Efforts to provide more efficient community urban forestry programs; e.g., training workshops and methods of communicating new knowledge.

7. Efforts to educate urban residents about natural resource management in general.

We are now encouraging our people to become more active and to incorporate these recommendations into the program thrusts in the Regions and Areas.

I have long believed that one of our problems in urban and community forestry nationally has been the lack of a united voice and action arm to support the many fine individual efforts by practitioners across the country. For the most part, we are too busy with the details of our daily work to devote time to public relations to add or garner our own political support base.

For that main reason, we have reached out to develop a National Urban and Community Forestry Leaders Council. We have deliberately worked to develop a coalition of individuals from communities, government, industry, and professional organizations with a dedicated interest in urban and community forestry. It serves as an advisory group within the American Forestry Association.

The Council works to: 1) foster understanding and to promote the concepts of urban and community forestry; 2) provide a unified national support base for urban and community forestry; 3) create a climate that fosters urban and community forestry among urban and natural resources organizations; 4) communicate the benefits of urban and community forestry to local, state, and national leaders; and, 5) recognize those making outstanding contributions to the field of urban and community forestry.

This effort is to insure continued urban and community forestry leadership in bringing forth the maturation of the urban and community forestry concept in the United States. Some activities of this Council are as follows:

1. Publication of a national newsletter on urban and community forestry.
2. Cooperating with AFA, the Extension Service and others on a Second National Urban Forestry Conference in 1982.
3. Reaching out to national organizations outside of the field to communicate the urban and community forestry concept, and its importance to not only our cities but also to a natural resource understanding. Examples are the National Association of Conservation Districts, National League of Cities, National Association of Counties, International City Managers Association, and others.

Conclusion

As a nation, we have moved into a new era of natural resources conservation, a time of intensive battling over legitimate competing uses. We have a fixed land base, an ever increasing population, the loss of traditional expansion frontiers, and are experiencing a realization that we can't just go somewhere else to find the "good life", but must rediscover and reclaim it where we live, in our cities and communities.

Urban and community forestry deals with two basic elements: trees and people. Both are complex and intertwined. Trees are rather predictable and slow moving when compared to people and societies. Thus the tendency on the part of businesses, governments and institutions is to address trees and people separately and unrelated. Until we learn how to place the two elements in harmony, it will be next to impossible to have effective, long term management of natural resources, whether in the city or in the country.

Working in an urban area involves working with people, trees and politics. Education of employees and the public about the needs and benefits of urban trees, and about knowledgeable urban forest management, is an essential part of urban forestry. Intensive public relations are often necessary to overcome ingrained misconceptions about tree care, public services, and even property rights. To be an urban forester means you love to communicate and share your professional knowledge with others. It means playing the political game to achieve long range goals under the constraints of fixed annual budgets. It means finding innovative ways to reach and teach the youthful but future leaders of our country about living things, natural beauty, renewable resources, and responsible management practices, all within the artificial environment of our cities.

And of course all of this must be done with increasing efficiency and cost effectiveness, in a world of competition for budget dollars with more traditionally recognized "essential services."

The effective management of local urban forests is also of national importance. Our people are this country's greatest resource, and the great majority of them live in urban areas. The urban forest enhances the physical, sociological, and psychological liveability of these areas.

And the sound management of trees, forests, and related natural resources of the urban forest will help make our cities more desirable places to live and work and will also aid public understanding of the management of all of our natural resources.

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