

Urban and Community Forestry Program

2011 Accomplishment Report – Rhode Island

State Contact

Frank Mastrobuono
Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator
Rhode Island Resource Conservation &
Development Area Council, Inc.
c/o Division of Forest Environment
Rhode Island Department of
Environmental Management
2185 Putnam Pike
Chepachet, Rhode Island 02814
Phone: (401) 568–2013
E-mail: frank.mastrobuono@dem.ri.gov
Web site:
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/urbanfor.htm>

State Forester

Catherine Sparks, Chief
Division of Forest Environment
Rhode Island Department of
Environmental Management
2185 Putnam Pike
Chepachet, RI 02814
Phone: (401) 568–2013
E-mail: catherine.sparks@dem.ri.gov
Web site:
<http://www.dem.ri.gov/programs/bnatres/forest/index.htm>

Introduction

The Rhode Island Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program was established in 1991 to promote sound and sustainable urban forestry and arboriculture practices in Rhode Island cities and towns. Program activities are guided by the elements of the 1999 Rhode Island Urban and Community Forest Plan. The UCF Program works closely with the Rhode Island Tree Council and others to restore and maintain the State's green infrastructure.

Presently, the UCF Program coordinator is a contractor to the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management through Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development and works under the supervision of the Deputy State Forester. The Rhode Island Tree Council serves as the State's urban forestry advisory council; the State's volunteer coordinator requirement is fulfilled by the participation of a technical advisor and others working for the Tree Council.

Key Program Activities

The focus of the Rhode Island UCF Program is providing direct technical assistance to communities. Key program activities include the annual celebration of Arbor Day, promotion of Tree City USA certification throughout the State, and management of the *America the Beautiful – Tree Rhode Island* grant program. Additionally, the program oversees the licensing of commercial arborists and ensures that each community has a Tree Warden as required by Rhode Island law.

Key Accomplishments

Arbor Day

This year's Arbor Day celebration was held at the Cesar Chavez memorial at Davis Park in Providence. This memorial and associated landscaped area are significant and symbolic to the local constituency and represent the result of dedicated volunteer labor and community involvement. In support of a general theme of resource productivity and ecological sustainability, seven fruit- and nut-bearing trees were planted in the vicinity of the memorial statue.

This was also a major anniversary for the city of Providence—the Capitol City celebrated its 25th anniversary as a Tree City USA. Providence has a notable urban forestry program that we consider one of the best in the region. Mayor Angel Taveras and City Forester Doug Still were in attendance to receive the 25th anniversary award from State Forester Catherine Sparks. Once again, other Arbor Day plantings and planting ceremonies were held throughout the State in each Tree City USA community and other potential Tree City USA communities.



Hope Elementary School students take part in Arbor Day activities at their school.

Anniversary awards for the Tree City USA program were delivered and/or presented to 10 Rhode Island communities during this period. The State has a combined total of 134 Tree City “years” among these communities. Many Tree City USA milestones were reached during this year. They include:

- Bristol – 10 years
- Newport – 20 years
- Pawtucket – 15 years
- Providence – 25 years
- Portsmouth – 5 years
- West Warwick – 10 years

America the Beautiful – Tree RI Grants

A new round of *America the Beautiful – Tree RI* grants was announced at the State Arbor Day ceremony in Providence. The new grants will total \$144,000 and will capture an anticipated \$179,494 in matching funds or services for a total of \$323,494 spent on UCF-related plantings and programs. This year’s 13

grant recipients were comprised of five municipalities and seven nonprofit organizations, including the Rhode Island Tree Council and Rhode Island Resource Conservation and Development. Project activities will include tree planting in support of sustainable tree programs, development of municipal tree nurseries, pruning of selected large trees, development of educational and recreational programs, and tree plantings with social and cultural significance.

In addition to planting projects, a more unique America the Beautiful project was conducted by the Newport Tree Society. The society utilized grant funds and associated local match to develop a series of “Tree Walks” in the prestigious historic community. Pamphlets that lead visitors through the tree walks are available at various locations and tourist hubs throughout the city at a nominal fee of \$2.00 each, and include a map of the walk and information about the trees at each stop.

Stops on the walk feature a short narrative about the tree seen there. One stop at a very large and old Fernleaf Beech (*Fagus sylvatica* ‘*Asplenifolia*’) on the Colonial Tree Walk reads, “This Fernleaf Beech is thought to be the first in the United States. The story is told that a young girl traveling by ship from England in 1835 brought this tree with her in a bottle. A grand specimen, this beech has developed a great relationship with the iron pipe fence used to protect it.” (Photos below)



A Fernleaf Beech is one of the featured trees along a Tree Walk in Newport, RI.

PDF printouts are available for download on the Newport Arboretum’s Web site (www.newportarboretum.org) at no cost. For the more technologically minded, the Tree Walks were integrated into the EveryTrail smartphone app, an application that allows users to follow GPS-guided walks and hikes from an Android or iPhone device.



In all, this year's grants resulted in a total of 6,842 volunteer hours associated with Rhode Island's Urban and Community Forestry Program and nurtured the State's urban forest by planting 457 trees.

Urban Tree Canopy Assessment Grants

The ongoing Urban Tree Canopy Tool Development and Assessment, Goal Setting and Implementation Grant (UTC grant) given to the city of Providence is now closed and all projects completed. The development of Providence's Trees 2020 initiative emerged from the UTC grant project, and involves the community in attaining the UTC-derived goal of planting 40,000 trees in the city by the year 2020. The project's progress, as well as more information about ongoing works, can be found at www.trees2020.org, where Providence residents are encouraged to report their planting activity.

Rhode Island Tree Council

The Rhode Island UCF Program has continued to provide financial and programmatic support for the Rhode Island Tree Council. This year, the organization developed a 5-year strategic plan to guide its efforts to promote the viability of Rhode Island's urban forests. The four-part acronym theme of the plan is **Thrive, Rally, Engage, and Enlighten**. The plan will guide the organization in promoting, educating, and sustaining the State's urban forest until the year 2016.

ARRA Project

The Rhode Island Tree Council closed out its 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Grant Project named the *Forestry Sustainability Project*. This project involved both Pre-Storm Damage Assessments and 6 percent Public Viewshed Corridor (PVC) surveys using i-Tree protocol and software in six urbanized Rhode Island communities. Those communities were Cranston, Johnston, North Providence, Warren, Warwick, and Woonsocket.

The Pre-Storm Damage Assessments served to quantify the potential for storm damage to each community's urban forest, both physically and economically. In all six communities, the combined estimated cleanup costs totaled almost \$54.5 million, the bulk of which is the city of Warwick's \$34 million cleanup price tag. The total cleanup man hours in all communities studied was over 816,000. The Rhode Island UCF Program performed a Post-Storm Damage Assessment after Hurricane Irene passed over Rhode Island, and as a result obtained a new degree of confidence in the accuracy of the protocol. (See heading **Hurricane Irene** below.)

The i-Tree PVC tools were used to survey 6 percent of each community's 2000 Census street segments using a protocol that ensures 90 percent accuracy of results. The purpose of the survey was to determine the structure and function of each community's urban forest, and to provide sound and detailed economic benefit determinations. The survey results were analyzed to determine the information most pertinent to each community, and identified positive and negative trends with regard to age structure, species composition, and performance. Impressively, the surveys performed in the six participating communities demonstrated that the total combined annual economic benefit received from their urban forests is over \$30 million, with great potential to increase that figure.

The written reports from the project are presently out for final copy edit and printing. Initial presentations have been made to the Rhode Island Tree Council Advisory Board and the Fall Rhode Island Tree Stewards Course participants, and were quite well received. Presentations and public hearings will be arranged, and written reports will be distributed in each municipality upon publication of the final written reports. Information from the project will be critical to future planning and advocacy, and will be used to strategically manage the urban forest in participating communities. Already the data has demonstrated the need for diversifying planting selections and integrating a higher degree of resilience into the urban forest by selecting urban-hardy, pest-resistant species. It is expected that figures provided by the i-Tree software

detailing tree-derived economic benefits in each community will prove particularly useful in demonstrating the value of sound urban forest management to decisionmakers.

Arbor Day Celebration

The Rhode Island Tree Council held its own Arbor Day Celebration at Ninigret Park, a recreational jewel of the town of Charlestown. Ninigret Park was formerly a military airfield that was decommissioned after World War II; its entranceway was completely devoid of any tree canopy. At this celebration, 84 trees were planted, most of which were northern red oak, with crabapple and red maple as well. The planting put into place the makings of an entrance to the park that will grow into a grandiose interlocking canopy to shade the stretch of roadway that serves as a gateway from the town's main road artery to the large coastal recreational facility. This was also a major day in terms of volunteer recruitment—the roster for the day lists 125 individuals that donated their time to participate in the planting.



Ninigret Park before the Arbor Day planting.



Ninigret Park after the Arbor Day planting.

Rhode Island Champion Tree Program

A 5-year Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and Rhode Island Tree Council collaboration has been ongoing since 2005. The program has come quite a ways since its first year when the Champion Tree database contained between 30 and 40 trees. Today, the program has now identified 123 specimen tree “Champions,” or the largest of their species throughout the entire State. This program has been well received by the public, and nominations for Champion or specimen trees now flood into the Rhode Island Tree Council office. In fact, the total number of trees in the big tree database that have been measured with the program is now over 700. The value of this program has been so well recognized that the Rhode Island Foundation just awarded the Rhode Island Tree Council a \$33,000 grant through the Helen Walker Raleigh Fund to continue the program.

Tree Stewards Course

The Rhode Island Urban and Community Forestry Program also participates in the Rhode Island Tree Council's Tree Stewards training course, which is held every spring and fall. Each year, the Rhode Island Tree Council graduates approximately 60 students after a 6-week course on arboriculture that includes tree biology, tree identification, soils, pruning, tree health care, and tree planting. Each of the course graduates is required to provide at least 30 hours of volunteer time in the realm of urban and community forestry. As mentioned, the results of the Forestry Sustainability Project (ARRA) were presented to the Fall 2011 Tree Stewards Course, and were very well received.

Hurricane Irene

In the first week of the appointment of a new Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator, Rhode Island was faced with the prospect of a major hurricane. Although Hurricane Irene was downgraded to a Tropical Storm before making landfall in Rhode Island, the storm still had power significant enough to knock out electricity in many areas for up to a week, and cause a considerable amount of damage to tree resources throughout the State, particularly in coastal areas.

The Rhode Island UCF Program coordinated a series of press releases before the storm through the Department of Environmental Management's Media Relations office. Adapted from the National Arbor Day Foundation's Storm Media Kit, the releases sought to educate the public on matters of safety and proper post-storm tree care, and stressed the importance of hiring an arborist who can provide documentation of certification and insurance.

After the storm cleared, the UCF Program collaborated with the Rhode Island Tree Council to create a comprehensive press release educating citizens on the tree failure that occurred during the storm and how to best address storm-related tree issues. The release also discussed the Post-Storm Survey performed in Warwick and the ensuing results, which showed a 14 percent rate of damage to the city's Public Viewshed Corridor tree resources and cleanup costs of approximately \$4.8 million. This figure was confirmed to be an accurate estimate of expected cleanup costs in a Warwick Beacon newspaper article by Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian (see following paragraph). The news release is available for viewing on the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management Web site at <http://www.dem.ri.gov/news/2011/pr/0901112.htm>.



Hurricane Irene damaged homes in its path.

This collaborative press release generated a considerable amount of attention, out of which came multiple local media articles including one in EcoRI, a green online news Web site for the State; the Rhode Island Forest Conservators Organization's newsletter; and a front-page, top-of-the-fold article in the Warwick Beacon, for which both the State Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator and the Technical Advisor for the Rhode Island Tree Council fielded interviews. The article can be found at the following URL: <http://www.warwickonline.com/stories/Pick-Up-Stick,62300>.

Educational Workshop – Introduction to Arboriculture

The Rhode Island UCF Program in conjunction held a 4-day workshop to educate members of the public and tree-related workers about sound arboriculture practices. Titled *Introduction to Arboriculture*, the workshop series featured a number of different educators from various areas of expertise, including the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management and RI Tree Council staff and a local arborist from Ocean State Tree Service. The course instructed attendees in a wide array of topics, including tree biology, tree identification, pruning, soils, site selection, risk management, construction management, safety, and even urban forestry.

Twenty-two students attended the four-part workshop. Participants included employees of various tree service companies, the 501 (c)3 Providence Neighborhood Planting Program, and even local utility company National Grid.

Statistical Highlights

Number of Communities in Rhode Island:	39
Number of Communities Assisted:	39
Number of Managing Communities:	17
Number of Trees Planted:	457
Federal Support:	\$200,000
State and Local Matching:	\$228,102
Tree City USA Communities:	10
Volunteer Assistance Generated (hours):	6,842

