



MICHIGAN URBAN AND COMMUNITY FORESTRY COUNCIL

An advisory committee to the Michigan Department of Natural Resources

February 2, 2018

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

Dear Ms. Begalle:

It is with great appreciation for your commitment to Michigan's forests and related industries that I write this letter on behalf of the Michigan Urban and Community Forestry Council (MUCFC). As you are aware, the MUCFC was authorized under the Cooperative Forestry Assistance Act of 1992, which established a federal and state sponsored network of urban and community forestry programs. The role of the MUCFC is to advise the state forester and the state urban forestry program coordinator on topics related to forests located in communities throughout the state.

Today, nearly 75% of Michigan's population resides in urban areas of the state¹. This pattern mirrors national demographics and is a trend predicted to increase in the coming years. Due to the proximity to people, trees in these built environments provide out-sized public benefits. From enhancing human health^{2,3}, to strengthening local economies⁴, and simply increasing the beauty of our communities, trees are a critical component of urban infrastructure. With these well-established benefits becoming widely recognized, urban trees are understandably receiving a lot of attention. Yet, our urban forests face numerous and significant threats.

Warming climates compounded by the urban heat-island effect, have the potential to negatively impact urban trees. Some of the more sensitive tree species (e.g. sugar maple) are widely planted throughout our communities. With our urban forests already besieged by invasive species such as oak wilt and emerald ash borer, warming climates are likely to further increase pest and disease pressure.⁵ Control of these pests and diseases is further complicated by a patchwork of landownerships, and the complexity of infrastructure within the built environment.

As we recognize the myriad benefits our urban trees provide, while acknowledging the many threats they face, it becomes ever more important that resource management leaders prioritize time, and resources to sustain Michigan's urban forests.

The MUCFC works toward improving Michigan's urban and community forests by disseminating information and education through collaboration with partners and leveraging resources to support community efforts statewide. While our primary purpose is to advise and support the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and its Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program, we also seek to initiate discussions, engage stakeholders, build partnerships, and spread awareness of the enormous value provided by our urban and community forests. In 2017 alone, the Council and the State's UCF Program, worked together to:

- assist 259 communities where approximately 54% of Michiganders reside;
- facilitate and record 9,736 hours of volunteer time contributed in program related projects and events;
- see 8,622 trees planted through award of \$247,452 in UCF program grants which leveraged \$704,434 in local matching funds;
- celebrate 113 Michigan Tree City USA communities, 4 Tree Campus USA institutions, and 2 Tree Line USA utilities with a banquet and educational program;
- support professional dialogue that has become the Michigan Oak Wilt Coalition, championed by the Arboriculture Society of Michigan;
- support the partnership between DNR and MSU to recruit a new faculty member in urban and community forestry at the university;
- strengthen a private-public-non-profit partnership to provide technical services, training, and tree planting in five rural Grand Traverse Bay area communities;
- set a foundation for re-establishing the "Visiting Urban Forester" program in 2018 for emerging urban forestry programs across the state;
- share ideas, lessons-learned, and future goals with Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin councils at a combined meeting in Wisconsin; and
- clarify membership expectations, set appropriate terms, and continue active recruitment of new council members to reflect the geographic and cultural diversity of Michigan.

With a new year ahead of us, the Council members are energized to continue Michigan's urban and community forestry progress in 2018. Based on our combined experience and backgrounds, we have identified a number of priorities and opportunities over the next several years:

- regularly host the Michigan Tree City USA program and awards;
- promote Michigan, the DNR and MSU Forestry as leaders in urban and community forestry through the jointly hired faculty in Urban Forestry at MSU;
- launch a revised visiting urban forester program;
- build compelling partnerships to take advantage of competitive grants to support local and regional urban and community forestry efforts;
- 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 strategies (e.g. grant program, technical transfer, workshops) to build capacity of local communities to manage urban and community forests;
- convene partnerships and facilitate conversations around key urban and community forestry issues in Michigan;
- disseminate information on urban and community forestry emerging issues, industry-accepted best practices, and new ideas to industry stakeholders; and
- maintain a connection to regional state councils and national partners to share and generate creative ideas.

We should remember that the services provided by the Council are funded nearly exclusively by federal funds through the United States Forest Service. It appears that each year some or all of these funds are threatened with reduction. We recognize that the quality of life in Michigan is greatly enhanced by its community forests whether in our largest cities or smallest villages. Indeed, the State’s recent support of an urban and community forestry faculty member at Michigan State University demonstrates recognition of this value. With federal funding constantly under threat, the Council sees an opportunity for the State to commit to the longevity and stability of the UCF Program, and to work together to continue urban and community forestry programming in the event federal funding disappears.

Regardless of the challenges, we are supremely encouraged by the recent progress in urban and community forestry across the state. From public-nonprofit-private partnerships in rural Grand Traverse Bay communities, to large-scale partnerships in Detroit and meaningful dialogue around serious challenges like oak wilt, the Department’s UCF Program and the MUCFC continue to make great progress in building awareness and tackling issues across Michigan.

We welcome your presence at a future meeting both to celebrate recent successes and help us identify future priorities.

Sincerely,



Lee S. Mueller, Chair

¹United States Census Bureau. 2012. Michigan: 2010, Population and Housing Unit Counts. United States Census Bureau, Economics and Statistics Administration, United States Department of Commerce: pp (2).

²Donovan, G.H., Y.L. Michael, D.T. Butry, A.D. Sullivan, and J.M. Chase. 2010 Urban trees and the risk of poor birth outcomes. *Health & Place*: Vol. 17, iss. 1. November 2010

³Donovan, G.H., D.T. Butry, Y.L. Michael, J.P. Prestemon, A.M. Liebhold, D.G. Gatzliolis, and M.Y. Mao. 2013. The relationship between trees and human health: evidence from the spread of emerald ash borer. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*: Vol. 44, iss. 2. January 2013.

⁴Wolf, K.L. 1998. Trees in business districts: positive effects on consumer behavior. Fact sheet #5. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, College of Forest Resources.

⁵Safford, H., E. Larry, E.G. McPherson, D.J. Nowak, L.M. Westphal. 2013. Urban Forests and Climate Change. USDA Forest Service Climate Change Resource Center. Washington, D.C. <https://www.fs.usda.gov/ccrc/topics/urban-forests-and-climate-change>. Accessed: Jan. 10, 2018.