

# Best of the West Summit - Proceedings

1996

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**Preface:** We conjure up images of wide-open spaces when thinking of the West. That's because 96 percent of the population live in urbanized areas. Within these cities and towns are more than 500 million trees composing our community forests (12 trees per resident on average). These are the forests in which most Westerners work and play. Community forests are critical to the well being of Westerners living in small towns and villages as well as in vast urban centers. These urban forests constitute the "green infrastructure" of a city and are as vital to community identity and health as other institutions. Community forests can serve to extend watershed and wildlife habitat benefits into our cities, conserve energy and water, clean the air, reduce flooding, increase property values, and provide opportunities for employment, recreation, and environmental education. They make our neighborhoods more attractive and livable. They are an oasis amidst acres of pavement and buildings.

The impacts of growing urbanization and development in the West are being felt from the core of our cities to the wilds of our National Forests. Declining municipal budgets for tree care threaten the health of community forests. Suburban growth reaches into agricultural and wild lands, fragmenting wildlife habitat, creating fire hazards, and reducing arable lands. Smog from our cities reduces visibility in our National Parks. Multiple recreational demands create conflicts among users and tax natural resources. Those who care about and manage greenspace from city to wilderness face common chal-

lenges related to increasing expectations for environmental quality, a changing political, economic and regulatory climate, and a growing need to effectively communicate with communities.

Over one hundred leaders in urban and community forestry met last September to discuss these issues, share success stories, and develop an agenda for the future. The *Best of the West Summit*, held at the Presidio's Golden Gate Club in San Francisco, was the first time leaders have met to discuss the common challenges and solutions shared by communities in the West. The Summit served as a successful venue for:

- Sharing success stories;
- Promoting holistic and sustainable solutions to common regional problems;
- Identifying leaders within the field;
- Developing a unified regional voice and common agenda; and
- Facilitating a stronger constituency.

Summit participants represented a diverse cross-section of our society, including foundations, corporations, nonprofit organizations, government agencies, and private citizens. The program showcased innovative and practical solutions to many of the serious challenges facing our community forests. A panel,



An example of urbanization of rural and wild lands.

poster session, and facilitated breakout session provided a wide variety of opportunities for Summit participants to exchange information.

The International Society of Arboriculture and the USDA Forest Service primarily sponsored the Summit.

**Introduction:** The Best of the West Summit was convened to identify common issues and develop a unified regional voice for urban and community forestry. During the last two days of the Summit over 100 conferees met in facilitated sessions to identify issues of regional importance and develop strategies for resolving them. Prior to the facilitated sessions a series of panelists described critical issues and opportunities facing urban and community forestry for each of these topics. Presentations by the panelists stimulated discussion that "primed the pump" for the facilitated discussions that followed. What follows describes the critical is-

sues and actions resulting from the facilitated sessions. Also, it presents the concept of a Western Community Forest Alliance as one means of advancing urban and community forestry in the West.

**Approach to Facilitated Sessions:**

Attendees participated in one of three sessions dealing with following issues:

1. Laws, funding, programs, and other public policy tools that will be critical to advancing urban forestry in the West, and how best to implement them.
2. Information, existing or required, that will most effectively enhance the visibility and management of urban forests in the West.
3. Urban forestry management issues that will play critical roles in making communities more livable.

Approximately 30 conferees participated in each breakout session, and discussions were facilitated. Each group was asked to:

- Identify and prioritize key issues;
- Describe possible solutions for each key issue;
- Determine who should take the lead pursuing each solution; and
- Specify when tasks should begin and end.

Facilitated sessions concluded with presentations by representatives from each group to the reconvened participants. Group recommendations are described below and summarized in Table 1.

**Group 1. Findings and Group Recommendations:**

• *Develop urban and community forestry programs that show integration with health, safety, welfare, and economic issues.* Urban forest management is often viewed as a non-essential service by local governments and policy-makers because trees are still viewed as ornamental “niceties” rather than “necessities” for human health and well being. One solution is for grass

roots organizations to create a Human Services Coalition that will make the connection between urban forestry, people and resources in the health, safety, and welfare arenas.

• *Increase policy makers’ awareness and education.* Policy makers need to be informed about the full range of social, environmental, and economic services that trees provide. A self-elected group of educators, government officials, and non-profit representatives will develop an outreach plan. This will require establishment of a task force trained in legislative processes. One product of this task force could be a brochure linking urban forestry with other policy issues. For example, urban forestry can be linked to health issues by illustrating the connection between tree shade and skin cancer. Lack of shade contributes to the number of skin cancer cases in cities. This connection directly relates health with urban forestry.

• *Increase and sustain funding for non-profit organizations.* Grass root organizations educate and engage residents in urban and community forestry, yet are constantly struggling for adequate program funding. Several possible solutions were identified. One possibility is direct funding from the US Forest Service to non-profit organizations. Non-profit groups and US Forest Service leaders could begin a dialogue now to explore financial options such as grant programs. A second solution is to educate non-profit organizations (NPOs) on the endowment process including what an endowment is, why an NPO would want one, and how to set one up. This could be accomplished by enlisting help from the Environmental Support Center in Washington, D.C. or another national non-profit support group. Such a group should be contacted in 1999. The third solution involves tracking legislation to identify funding opportunities. A national urban forestry

NPO should be identified in 1999 to take on this leadership role. One component of the solution is forming a task force to educate NPOs on legislative analysis and strategy (develop a database, send reminders, mailings, etc.).

• *Encourage states to be stronger financial participants in urban and community forestry programs.* Some state budgets contribute relatively little to urban and community forestry programs. This puts programs at risk if federal or other funds are cut. One solution is to encourage the adoption of urban forestry acts that provide grants, technical assistance, and other support at the state level. The Council of Western State Foresters’ Urban and Community Forestry committee (CWSF) should coordinate this by December 1999. A second solution relies on the CWSF and NPOs working with the appropriate state agencies by June 2000 to develop statewide funding strategies. For example, revenue from a one cent per gallon gasoline tax or a license plate fee could be dedicated for urban forestry programs. A final strategy is to develop marketing strategies to state assemblies that will educate public policy makers about urban forestry. The Alliance for Community Trees (ACT) or a similar regional NPO(s) should get this effort underway by June 2000.

• *Involve native cultures in urban and community forestry.* Native Americans and indigenous peoples value trees for reasons that are often historic, spiritual, and utilitarian. Their attitudes towards trees and the environment need to be better understood. By the year 2000 state coordinators in the West should initiate a regional strategy to increase participation by Native Americans and indigenous peoples in urban and community forestry. For example, State foresters and Native communities should create venues to highlight success stories of Native Cultures’ resource management and educate the urban and community forestry move-

ment about the cultural values of trees. More American Indian and indigenous group representation at conferences would contribute greatly to the education process. Collaborative efforts between tribal leaders and state officials are needed.

Although all five of these recommendations reflect the needs and aspirations of the West, they also apply nationally. Implementation of these findings in the West can serve as a model for other regions of the country to follow.

### **Group 2. Findings and Recommendations:**

Research topics that were identified as most important were:

- urban watersheds
- human health and spirituality
- urban forest benefits: identify and describe, increase public's perception and awareness of these benefits
- urban forest health: present conditions and extent of decline in urban forest stands throughout the west urbanization and urban-wildland interface issues

After discussing research topics the group decided to address the research process. Two issues were identified as top priorities.

*Increase research collaboration.* Research is sometimes done in an isolated fashion and results do not always reach the users. Hence, there is need to increase collaboration between those who use and produce research, as well as among researchers themselves. This collaboration should begin with the selection of research topics and research design. It should continue with production of progress reports that are aimed at solving problems of the users, with the understanding that preliminary results must be treated as such. One suggestion is to develop a research data-

base that contains information on all Western researchers involved in urban and community forestry. The database is a tool for tracking their studies from design to publication, and promoting interaction between researchers and users. This type of database has been developed for Southern states and could serve as a model for the West. Representatives from the US Forest Service, International Society of Arboriculture, NPOs, and universities should accomplish this during 1999. Also, during 1999 there should be a Western Urban Forestry Researchers Consortium meeting. The purpose of this meeting is to address issues such as creation of a research agenda via a research summit, sources of research funding, and pursuit of political commitment to support research in urban and community forestry. A steering committee to organize this meeting should consist of representatives from the US Forest Service's Western Center for Urban Forest Research and Education, California Polytechnic University, San Luis Obispo, UC Davis, ACRT, Council of Western State Foresters, California ReLeaf, and the California Urban Forest Council, among others.

*Improve distribution and access to research findings.* The transfer of research to users is hit-and-miss depending on local efforts by state foresters, university faculty and cooperative extension agents, NPOs, and ISA chapters. One solution is to hire a US Forest Service technology transfer specialist using funding from the Western states. That person could create a protocol for research reporting that facilitates tracking of studies. Once studies are completed, the technology transfer specialist could begin disseminating research through a website and standardized fact sheets.

### **Group 3 Findings and Recommendations**

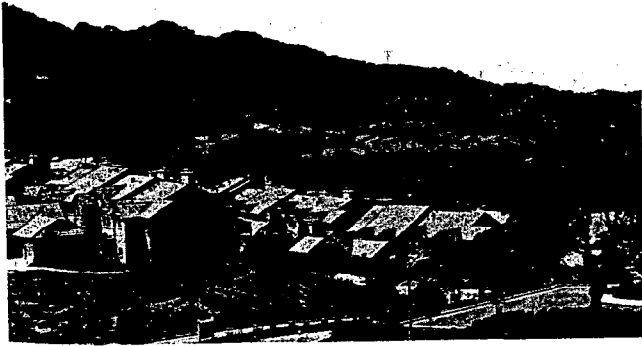
*Increase participation and support*

*for urban and community forestry at the local level.* At the heart of every successful community forestry program are the local "tree enthusiasts" whose knowledge and passion inspires others. Identifying these people and building upon their commitment is critical to the establishment of effective programs. Sustaining successful urban and community forestry programs requires coordination, collaboration, leadership, and vision. Strategies for achieving this goal include:

- Supporting sympathetic candidates for elected office;
- Encouraging involved citizens to lobby their local governments on behalf of urban forestry;
- Redefining roles of municipal/professional arborists by adding a public outreach component and articulating the necessity of valuing whole ecosystems, not only the trees; and
- Starting a local tree foundation.

*Educate the community about the value of tree care.* While it is relatively easy to interest people in tree planting; enlisting their support for long-term tree care is more of a challenge. Mature trees produce most benefits, however their declining health poses considerable cost and safety risk to the public. Although tree planting should remain an important vehicle for engaging citizens in community forestry, there is need to elevate the public's awareness of the importance of mature tree care. Strategies to promote this message include:

- Developing a succinct "sound bite" such as, "Caring for the Urban Forest: Commitment for a Lifetime." Use the analogy of the different types of care people need at different ages with that of a tree: young tree training and establishment to more intensive care of older trees aimed at extending their life span. This message should be targeted in particular to neighborhood groups, tree board members, and seniors.
- Focusing attention on the importance of long-term tree care at tree



**Properly planned urbanization can reduce environmental impacts.**

planting events. Connect people with the trees they are planting by noting that “communities grow with their trees.” Planting should be an on-going process and each planting event should renew the public’s commitment to continuing tree care.

- Writing an executive summary that is brief and to the point with the chief message being, “caring for the urban forest is a lifetime commitment.” The summary should include an analysis of the costs and benefits of trees that highlights the costs of not caring for trees.
- Developing an educational video that explains the “hows” and “whys” of mature tree care. The video should be short, polished, and powerful.
- Marketing and promoting tree care repeatedly. We must be persistent and dedicated to a continuous process of public education. Use experts in marketing, sales, and public relations to guide efforts and increase effectiveness.

Local communities need a “tool box” of public relations materials and related educational information that they can easily apply. Materials in the toolbox should be aimed at promoting local participation in urban and community forestry, as well as educating residents about the value of long term tree care.

*Promote implementation of urban*

*forestry management plans.* Many communities do not have comprehensive urban forestry management plans, yet such plans provide a clear picture of where the program is heading, and just as importantly, where it is not heading. Also, development of a plan creates community support and commitment for stewardship. The first task in developing a plan is finding a person and/or group to lead the

effort (e.g., NPO, agency). A work group should be established with an eye towards forming important partnerships with local businesses, utilities, politicians, service organizations, schools, agencies, and individuals with expertise in planning, horticulture, and community organizing. The first task for the group is to develop goals and objectives. When developing an urban forestry management plan consider the following:

Components of a management plan:

- tree care standards
- inventories
- maintenance (new/replacement planting, pruning, pest management, removal)
- ordinances: public trees (street and park), privately owned trees (tree preservation/protection, new planting, heritage/native trees, parking lot/screening).
- enforcement and compliance
- education and outreach
- research
- funding

The plan should be dynamic, compliance-based, and action-oriented.

Tracking implementation of urban and community forestry inventories and management plans is one means of evaluating the extent to which manage-

ment is not just haphazard. Compiling information on lessons learned can serve to benefit all communities that are striving to manage their urban forest on a proactive basis.

**Implementation: A Western Community Forest Alliance**

A coordinated effort will be needed to implement the action items outlined above. Formation of a regional alliance to inspire action, education, and research is one mechanism for implementation. Components of a Western Community Forest Alliance could include:

- Local leadership and action (urban forest managers, non-profits, nurseries, utilities, local elected officials, citizens, etc.);
- Planning and management for environmental and social improvement that will make our communities more livable (energy, water, air, wildlife, community building, employment, human health and well-being);
- Empowerment through volunteer participation;
- Economic development through job creation;
- Environmental education for all ages of learners, from traditional workshops to internet communication about urban ecosystem structure and function; and
- Partnerships to deliver community-based programs and services.

The primary benefit of forming such an alliance is the advancement of urban and community forestry through shared goals and commitments. There is a synergy that comes from a common agenda and there is inspiration that comes from people working for a common purpose. An alliance may attract new resources from local sources, foundations, and agencies due to its breadth and strength. Also, it may stimulate organizational realignments and collaboration that make more efficient use of existing urban and community forest resources. For these reasons, now may

be the time to form a Western Community Forest Alliance.



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Table 1. Action items resulting from the Best of the West Summit<sup>a</sup>

Action Items	By Who	By When
<b>I. Public Policy items are to enhance policy-maker awareness, increase funding to NPOs, encourage more state funding, and involve native cultures.</b>		
Develop outreach program directed to policy-makers	self-selected task force	2000
Create Human Services Coalition to promote U&CF funding	NPOs	2000
Explore direct funding of NPOs via FS	NPOs and FS	2000
Educate NPOs on endowment programs	NPOs	2000
Develop mechanism for tracking legislation	national NPO	2000
Develop and implement strategies for increasing state funding (e.g., marketing strategies, U&CF acts, fees, and assessments, etc.)	CWSF, NPOs	2001
Develop regional strategy to involve native cultures	State Coordinators and FS	2000
<b>II. Research and information transfer items are to increase collaboration and improve access to findings.</b>		
Establish a database of U&CF researchers	FS, ISA, NPOs, Universities	2000
Convene Western U&CF research consortium	FS, Universities, and others	2000
Hire FS technology transfer specialist	FS	2001
<b>III. Management items are to promote local participation in U&amp;CF, educate residents about importance of tree care, and implement management plans.</b>		
Develop public relations "toolbox" for local communities to promote participation in U&CF and support for long-term tree stewardship.	CWSF, FS, ISA, NPOs, and others	2001
Monitor implementation of inventories and management plans, and document lessons learned.	CWSF, State Coordinators, FS, NPOs	2001

<sup>a</sup> NPOs are non-profit organizations, U&CF is urban and community forestry, FS is USDA Forest Service, CWSF is Council of Western State Foresters subcommittee on urban and community forestry, ISA is International Society of Arboriculture.

**Proceedings from the Best of The West Summit are available from the Chapter for \$12.50, this includes shipping. All proceeds are to be donated to the Research Trust.**

