



USDA Forest Service

# URBANFOREST CONNECTIONS

*webinar series*

## Social Networks and Knowledge Systems for Urban Stewardship and Sustainability

*Wednesday, January 14, 2015 | 1:00 – 2:00pm ET*

### PRESENTER ABSTRACT

#### **Visualizing Civic Environmental Stewardship for Urban Planning & Development**

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Drawing upon the fields of sociology and ecology, the Stewardship Assessment and Mapping Project (STEW-MAP) uses novel methods to identify civic stewards on a citywide and neighborhood scale. STEW-MAP defines a "stewardship group" as an organization or group that works to: conserve, manage, monitor, advocate for, and/or educate the public about their local environments. This work includes efforts that involve water, forests, land, air, waste, toxics, and energy use. To date, STEW-MAP has collected information from thousands of local stewardship groups that range from neighborhood block associations and kayak clubs, to tree planting groups and regional environmental coalitions, to nonprofit educational institutions and museums. Methods include documenting the organizational data that includes demographics, geospatial positioning, and social networks. These data tell us about the presence, capacity, geographic turf, and social networks of environmental stewardship groups in a given city. For the first time, these social infrastructure data are treated as part of green infrastructure asset mapping.

At the same time, spatial and social network analysis allows land managers to understand their allies in the civic arena – highlighting existing stewardship gaps and overlaps in order to strengthen organizational capacities, enhance citizen monitoring, promote broader civic engagement with on-the-ground environmental projects, and build effective partnerships among stakeholders involved in urban sustainability. This work has been expanded through the National Science Foundation and, as a result, has led to research exploring the rise of professionalized stewardship groups, the impact of stewards on ecosystems services, and the creation of hybrid forms of governance. STEW-MAP projects are up and running in Chicago, Baltimore, Chicago, Seattle, and Philadelphia with related projects underway in San Juan and Los Angeles. The research program is deepening through the creation of a multi-city research group and, in terms of its application to managers, community organizers and decision-makers, through on-line mapping tools and searchable databases of thousands of civic stewardship groups.