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Volume 13

Number 2

# UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI)

OUR INDUSTRY  
IS SO MUCH  
**MORE**  
THAN TREE  
PRUNING

LEARN HOW TO  
**INCREASE  
DIVERSITY**  
IN UVM



AMERICAN FORESTS  
IS HELPING TO  
ADVANCE EQUITY  
IN HOW AND WHERE  
URBAN TREES  
ARE PLANTED.

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MORE ON  
PG. 16





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Amy Murray, Business Developer



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Turn to **page 28** to learn about how goats are a viable, cost-effective VM method.



Mariana Rodriguez is part of the Wright Service Corp's LEAD Program, which helps employees enhance their leadership potential. Turn to **page 36** to learn more!



Learn about recommended approaches for implementing strategic plans for DEI from True Insights Consulting. Turn to **page 46** to learn more!

**This is a list of common industry terms and acronyms frequently used in this magazine.**

Best Management Practices (BMPs)  
Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)  
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)  
Edison Electric Institute (EEI)  
Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance (ESG)

Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO)  
Geographic Information Systems (GIS)  
Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)  
Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)  
Low-Volume Foliar (LVF)  
Minority-Owned Business Enterprise (MBE)

Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QA/QC)  
Rights-of-Way (ROW)  
Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)  
Vegetation Management (VM)

President's Message



Geoff Kempter

In 1992, as a young field operative, I was invited to lunch with a new field manager and one of his customers, a vice president at a major investor-owned utility company. We were all White males. The VP was considerably older than either of us, and, of course, he controlled millions of dollars of our business. During our lunch, the man told one of the most disgusting racial jokes I have ever heard. We were expected to laugh.

I have often wondered why this man felt so comfortable making this appalling joke in our presence. Was he confident that we, as fellow White men, must surely share his racism? Was his attitude so prevalent in the culture of his own organization that he never thought twice about speaking openly in such an awful way? Neither of these possibilities spoke well of my own race or the culture of the utility industry at that time. I never saw the man again, but the experience reinforced in my mind how deeply seated racial bias is in the culture of our country and its institutions. In retrospect, I have always chided myself for not speaking out or, at least, walking away from the table to demonstrate my displeasure.

Many people can share similar experiences. What our privileged class cannot do is fully understand what it is like to live as a minority in a world where these attitudes persist. It is true that many White people do not want to be biased and believe they are not. However, it is abundantly clear that there are plenty of others who are, and this affects the lives of minorities everywhere. Furthermore, despite best intentions, implicit bias affects attitudes and decision-making processes, even of the well-intentioned. If you doubt the truth of this, ask a member of a minority about their life experience.

Of course, race is not the only basis for discrimination. People have and continue to endure unfair treatment due to their national origin, religion, age, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. For many years, a large portion of our industry workforce has consisted of Hispanics and other people of color, yet industry management remains mostly White and male. This includes the makeup of the UAA Board of Directors, which currently consists of nine White men and one White woman.

Thirty years after my uncomfortable lunch, I am invited to write these words having ridden the advantages of my White male privilege to significant personal success. I like to think that all of this has been earned, and indeed, I have worked



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“  
**Every organization needs talented people. But incorporating a multifaceted workforce into an organization requires a serious commitment.**  
 ”

hard to get to this point in my career. But I recognize that a good two-thirds of the potential competition were not present as bias, past practices, and other factors prevented most women and minorities from participating.

I also recognize that this is not my fault—I did not create this system. But I can certainly be part of a force for much-needed change. And I am not alone. The EEI and its constituent utilities—once bastions of White male privilege—increasingly emphasize the importance of DEI, and publicly boast of their accomplishments. As a result, women and minorities are increasingly present in the ranks of utility management and in the board room.

Every organization needs talented people. But incorporating a multifaceted workforce into an organization requires a serious commitment. This is what diversity, equity, and inclusion are about. Recognizing diversity is just the beginning. Equity means that everyone is truly welcome. And inclusion, over time, is the result. Exactly how these concepts are defined and their implications for our industry are discussed in this issue of the *Newsline*, but suffice it to say, the UAA is wholeheartedly seeking ways to open opportunities for all—thereby strengthening our organization and the industry we serve. †



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Executive Director Message



Dennis Fallon

Talking about DEI does not come naturally for me, and perhaps I am not alone. When I struggle to work through an assignment, I like to look at the data for some inspiration. As an organization, we do not track membership ethnicity, gender, or other demographic data, limiting my ability to go to my safe space. Maybe it is fitting that I need to get out of my comfort zone to speak on such an important topic for our industry, as well as society.

Like it or not, we all have biases. Some biases are loud and proud while others are small or even subconscious. Many of these are a result of our life experiences, and we cannot and

should not discount them. We do, however, need to be able to identify our bias and then take a critical internal look to determine if these biases are impacting desired DEI outcomes.

I grew up using the word “guys” to refer to a group of people, regardless of gender. Some folks do not identify as or relate to being a “guy” and that can make them feel less associated with the group. Feeling less associated or disconnected influences their engagement and participation with the group. Whether consciously or subconsciously, we assign groups and individuals a reputation based on our experiences and feelings associated with them. Our reputations—real or perceived—are partially rooted in external audiences’ awareness of our actions.

In the grand scheme of things, growing up and being taught to use gender-based descriptors is not my fault. It doesn't reflect poorly on me or my character. What would reflect poorly is recognizing that my language was not inclusive, yet refusing to adjust. I think where I struggle with talking about subjects like DEI is the temptation to slip into a blame-pinning exercise that is backwards looking. Controlling the past is not a skill any of us will ever have because it does not exist. Recognition of the past, however, should be woven into the future.

There is no question that the UAA needs and wants to do better today than we did yesterday, in everything we do. The next steps for DEI are not completely clear at this time. We do have a group of women who are willing to volunteer their time and tell their stories. They are working to break down barriers of entry for other women who may be interested in a UVM career. The folks involved with the Women in UVM have done a tremendous job, and the future of their work is bright. We must recognize that managing women's equity in our industry is not the responsibility of women alone. Creating equality is the responsibility of every member.

The current UAA staff is 25% male and 100% White. The Board of Directors is 91% male and 100% White. These things are simply facts that hint toward our life experience paradigms. We do not have all the answers for getting better at moving DEI in a positive direction for the organization. But we recognize that nothing will change unless effort is made to adjust. We also recognize DEI is not a stand-alone, single effort. DEI is a reality in everything we do, and moving the DEI needle in a positive direction will be an ongoing effort. Share your ideas with us to help the UAA move our DEI goals forward. †

UAA Board Nominations

We will be seeking qualified nominees for positions on the UAA Board. The Board of Directors is responsible for the sustainable operation of the UAA including finances, day-to-day operations and guiding the future direction of the association.

The Board includes a President Elect, who serves successively in the roles of Vice President, President, and ending as Past President. In addition to these four board roles, there is a Treasurer and 4-6 Directors. The tenure of the Treasurer is four years. All other members are elected to serve for three years. The immediate past president participates on the Board during his/her fourth year.

We will be soliciting nominees for board positions to be filled effective September 1st of this year. Elected positions include: Vice President,

Treasurer, and two Directors.

To nominate a candidate for the UAA Board of Directors, scan the QR code or visit [tinyurl.com/UAABoardNominations](http://tinyurl.com/UAABoardNominations) by May 20th, 2022. Prior to filling out the form, the nominee must be made aware and be willing to participate.

Board nominees who will be considered must meet the following criteria:

1. Current UAA Member in good standing
2. Individual who displays commitment to the UAA mission and goal, who thinks strategically and communicates effectively
3. Committed to serve the designated term in various capacities, ranging from committee champion, attendance at meetings, financial insights, as well as attend the UAA Annual Meeting at Trees & Utilities

Scan this QR code to fill out the form to nominate a qualified UAA Member for the Board.



The UAA Nominating Committee will review all nominations submitted, discuss job responsibilities and commitments with the potential candidate, and develop a final slate of nominations for voting by UAA Members.

Nominees will be accepted from May 2nd to May 20th, 2022. The final slate of nominations for voting by our UAA Members will be from July 15th to August 1st, 2022.

Official election results will be announced during the UAA Annual Meeting, August 31st (or a different date if deemed necessary). †



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Greetings, from  
the Events  
Committee!

It has been nearly two years since our last committee update, and between the May/June 2020 *Newsline* issue and now, a lot has changed. The UAA was not able to host any live events between March 2020 and June 2021, and we finally ended the drought with a new regional meeting in Texas that allowed us the long-anticipated and much-needed return to in-person meetings.

We can appreciate lessons learned throughout the last two years and look forward to fewer restrictions governing how we congregate for professional training and education, as well as good fellowship.

Committee  
Champion

This year also marks a change in leadership within the Events Committee. As we say goodbye to Committee Champion Brandon Hughson, we welcome Kevin Puls to fill the role. If you have been in the industry, and participated in the UAA for any period, you are likely familiar with both Hughson and Puls.

Hughson is the Director of Utility Services for Rainbow Tree Company/Growth Solutions. His industry service with the UAA includes five years on the Events Committee, three years as a director on the UAA Board of Directors, and he currently serves as the UAA Vice President.

Puls is the President of ACRT. His industry service with the UAA includes membership for more than 10 years, as well as a previous Marketing Committee

## UAA Events Committee Update

By Michael Sultan, Market Manager, Davey Resource Group and Kevin Puls, President, ACRT

member. Puls currently serves on the UAA Board of Directors and is the Champion of the Events Committee and Education Committee.

I appreciate Hughson's insight and guidance as a member of the Events Committee over the last five years, and I look forward to working with Puls in his new role.

Throughout the last 24 months, the Events Committee has worked with UAA Members and partners to provide virtual and in-person events to continue offering quality education and training across the country. There was a heavy focus on safety, environmental stewardship, and the use of technology to support and enhance UVM programs.

Below is a snapshot of the events we held or partnered with last year:

Two Years in  
Review

- July Outdoor Safety Summit (Indiana)
- July Regional Meeting (Texas)
- September Safety Summit (Pennsylvania)
- October Regional Meeting (New York)
- October Regional Meeting (Ohio)
- October Trees & Utilities (Minnesota)
- December ISA Annual Conference (virtual)





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We have several UAA and partner events planned this year. Please continue to check the UAA website for important details and updates:

<b>SUVM Summit (May)</b>	<b>Ohio Regional Meeting</b>
<b>Environmental Summit</b>	<b>Texas Regional Meeting</b>
<b>Southern Chapter ISA Conference</b>	<b>Partners In Community Forestry Conference</b>
<b>Western Regional Meeting (California)</b>	<b>Trees &amp; Utilities</b>
<b>New York Regional Meeting</b>	<b>ROW 13 Symposium</b>

### Regional Representation

Close to three years ago, the Events Committee began looking at membership distribution and how to better serve UAA Members through our regional meetings. The first step was to simply understand membership numbers by state and aim to address any geographic gaps that might exist. This evolved into developing a heat map that created better spatial awareness of UAA Member regional distribution and high-potential locations for future regional meetings.

We selected the Botanic Garden in Fort Worth, Texas, as the location for our first new regional meeting. It was a success, and we expect the 2022 Texas regional meeting to be even better. We also have several long-standing regional meetings that have been successful and will continue—New York, Ohio, and the Western Field Day.

The Events Committee will continue to consider other locations for future regional meetings where we see an opportunity to successfully meet additional member needs.

### Support for UAA Events

Support for UAA events comes in many forms: financial sponsors, exhibitors, volunteers, presenters, and more. Our events would not be possible without this assistance. Engaging sponsors and exhibitors are a key function of this committee and allow the UAA to deliver high-quality training and programs to our members at a reasonable price. We appreciate our current and previous partners and look forward to welcoming new UAA partners.

### Giving Back

Are you planning to attend any of the UAA regional meetings, safety summits, or national events this year? If so, we can always use help staffing the UAA booth! There is a lot going on behind the scenes at each event, where a few extra hands are always appreciated. If you plan to attend an event and are interested in how you can help, please contact Diona Neeser ([dneeser@gotouaa.org](mailto:dneeser@gotouaa.org)) for more information and to sign up. 🌱

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### OUR DEI APPROACH:

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Our commitment to DEI is key to the success of our business. We respect the differences among us, and we leverage those differences to create an environment where all employees feel welcome and fairly treated. We seek the best solutions possible by attracting and engaging a diverse workforce in an environment where all perspectives are sought and valued.

At Lewis, our mission is the relentless pursuit of customer and employee success through our commitment to safety, service, learning, and innovation. This people-success-based mission fits together perfectly with our DEI promise. When it comes to distributed workforces, like those in UVM, it's critical for leaders to actively ensure that our remote work groups allow for employees from all backgrounds to have an equal chance to succeed.

Our main pillars of our DEI promise at Lewis are:

- **Safety:** We need to widen our definition of safety to include the psychological safety that stems from working in an inclusive environment where all differences are respected and mutual trust abounds.
- **Service:** We must recognize that an active DEI-based culture is one that is inherently in service to others. This includes breaking down silos and communication barriers. We need to demonstrate empathy and compassion and help others reach their full potential.
- **Learning:** We need to adapt our culture of learning to listen and thoroughly understand the DEI-related challenges that any team members may be facing.
- **Innovation:** We must leverage these key learnings to innovate how we embrace and reinforce DEI in our business and model the right behaviors.

There are strategic benefits to any organization's DEI journey for the company, its workforce, and its customers: better decision making, heightened innovation, strengthened employee engagement and retention, and higher productivity, to name a few. More importantly, there is a moral obligation. It's simply the right thing to do. 🌱



“ I found where I fit. I can be who I am fully at Lewis. I don't have to fit into a certain form to be respected or be successful. ”

Beth Lay,  
Director, Safety &  
Human Performance



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“It is an honor to be recognized as pioneering Safety and Human Performance. What I love most about working at Lewis is I feel a deep sense of purpose for the work that I am doing. It is all about making a difference in the saving people from being seriously injured or killed in doing the dangerous work that we do. I believe that we are changing the industry. I believe that we are saving lives.”

Learn more about Beth's views on DEI at Lewis, and how she is pioneering Safety & Human Performance at <https://bit.ly/3n7yged> or scan the QR code.



At Lewis, our commitment to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is key to the success of our business.

## PART 2: The Components of ESG and Their Impact on the Utility Industry

Environmental, Social, and Corporate Governance



By Stephen Hilbert, General Manager—Technical Services, Asplundh Technical Services



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In part one of this two-part series, we outlined the origins of ESG to the United Nations Global Compact, and, as we found, the origins go back hundreds of years. According to the UN Global Compact website, 15,268 companies throughout 163 countries participate in the compact, to date, which has driven ESG concepts into the business and investing world. So, what does this mean for utilities and their contractors in this rapidly changing business climate? Part two of the ESG series will explore this question and the potential impacts to VM on utility ROW.

### Why ESG?

Capital markets and investors use ESG to evaluate corporate behavior. The term “ESG” is synonymous with sustainable investing, socially responsible investing, or mission-related investing. Investors use the evaluation to help gauge future financial performance of companies and to screen out companies based on ESG criteria. This subset of nonfinancial performance indicates accountability in issues such as sustainability, carbon footprint, ethical business practices, and corporate governance. Investors increasingly consider these factors as risk assessment strategies in investment decisions when considering where to place their money. Like all investments, this sustainable investing seeks a positive return. In addition to this positive return and business performance, the investors seek a long-term, positive impact on society and the environment.

### ESG Performance

Third party consultants are commonly used to perform a deep dive into a company’s ESG policies and procedures and generate a report for the stakeholders. The three main

In addition to a reduction in a utility’s **CARBON FOOTPRINT**, there is a tremendous opportunity for increased **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP** from the millions of acres of **ELECTRIC AND GAS ROW**.



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report frameworks that have received recognition and credibility are: the Carbon Disclosure Project (CDP), Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), and the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI). In addition to these main frameworks, industry-specific indices may also be evaluated, such as International Organization for Standardization (ISO). These reports not only create a grade or a rating for a business, but also provide benchmarking for continued improvement to assist stakeholders in decision-making.

Next, we will examine the three parts of ESG, starting with governance and ending with environmental—as utilities and their contractors often have the greatest impact on environmental, which are tied to governance and social.

### Governance

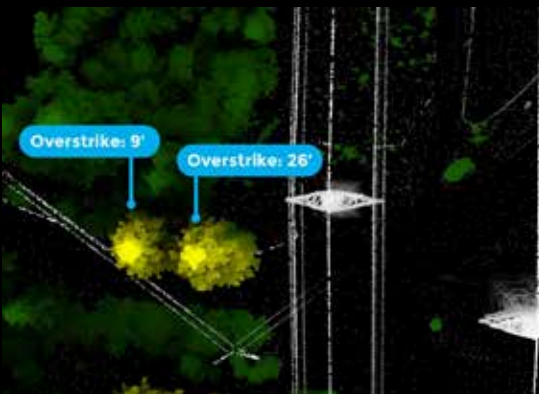
This segment encompasses corporate board, management structures, company policies, standards, information disclosures, auditing, and compliance. Governance should not be overlooked in analyzing risk factors. Some of the biggest corporate scandals—such as Volkswagen’s emission tests, costing the company \$34.69 billion U.S. dollars—have come from poor corporate governance practices. The G in ESG can also raise awareness for diversity in board of



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directors and C-suite positions, equality in pay, and oversight of top executives. A strong governance policy needs to include endorsement from company leadership.

### Social

The primary concern of the S arises from relations between a company and people or institutions outside of it. Something to keep in mind is that CSR contains some similarities to ESG evaluation, but they are not the same. CSR are the ideals and context about sustainability agendas and corporate responsibility culture, whereas ESG are the actions and measurable outcomes. Policies that drive the social leg can include DEI, fair labor, human rights, whistleblower, product quality, cybersecurity, and harassment. Recently, supply chain systems have increasingly been scrutinized in the social aspect of ESG reporting.

An example of an industry-specific governance index for the utility sector is safety performance. In an ESG evaluation, safety performance in this sector would be weighted more than in a financial institution, but cybersecurity may be weighted similarly for both utility and financial business sectors. ESG evaluations need to be industry specific to provide an accurate evaluation.

The social practices are a barometer for corporate culture. Companies with a strong and shared culture across the organization have well-defined and implemented social practices.

### Environmental

The social and governance aspects of ESG generally go hand in hand with businesses that have achieved some level of success, are compliant with laws and regulations, and make improvements for continued success. Within the utility industry, contractors and utilities alike can have a meaningful impact on the environmental part of ESG.

The major leading environmental indicating factor that utilities influence is the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHGs), also referred to as a carbon footprint. Many major utilities have made commitments to reduce their carbon footprint. The use of renewable energy, low energy-consumption appliances, and hybrid or electric vehicles for fleet operations, to name a few, can provide for meaningful reductions.

By definition, a carbon footprint is not just the GHGs that a utility produces through their own operations. By examining their supply chain, a utility can further analyze their carbon footprint and provide goals and incentives for supplier GHG reduction—but often with a catch. Many supplier GHGs are tied to fleet operations, which burn fossil fuels. Growth of these operations may increase total GHG emissions. In examining GHG emissions within a supply chain, a straight-line reduction of GHGs may not accurately capture GHG reduction efforts within the supply chain. An intensity reduction target, such as total GHG emissions per hour worked, may be a more appropriate measure. To achieve meaningful reductions in this sector, utilities may need to provide suppliers with incentives to adopt new technologies, such as electric vehicles, which may increase upfront costs but will have long-term benefits.

In addition to a reduction in a utility's carbon footprint, there is a tremendous opportunity for increased environmental stewardship from the millions of acres of electric and gas ROW. As sustainability efforts have become prominent, there has been increased focus on quantitative aspects of ESG reporting. Quantitative goals provide a measuring stick for continual improvement.



**There is opportunity for practitioners of UVM to have a positive impact on the environments where we live and work. ESG is a tool for measurement and improvement.**

An area that has received increased scrutiny is the importance of biodiversity and biodiversity disclosures. The DJSI and GRI Natural Resources Section all offer guidance on qualitatively measuring biodiversity. These organizations provide the framework for reporting; it is up to the utility and utility partners to identify which metrics should be reported. For example, a utility in the desert Southwest will have different metrics than a utility in Appalachia.

A good example of a biodiverse landscape that ROWs can provide is the relationship between the frosted elfin butterfly (*Callophrys irus*) and the yellow wild indigo plant (*Baptisia tinctoria*), also called horsefly weed. The frosted elfin





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can be found in any state east of the Mississippi river. Despite its sizable range, it is usually scarce, only found locally, and considered a vulnerable species. Its lifecycle depends on plants in the pea family, primarily wild indigo and wild lupine (*Lupinus perennis*).

According to the Fish and Wildlife Service, the butterflies (and host plants) require open woods, forest edges, fields, and scrub areas (sound familiar?) and further describe powerline and railroad ROWs as areas that provide this habitat. In areas where IVM is practiced,

encouraging the growth the wild indigo can not only aid vulnerable species, but can also create the low-growing, tree-resistant scrub/shrub cover that is desirable with an IVM program. This is just one example of how IVM programs on utility ROWs can improve biodiversity. These benefits can be quantitatively measured to enhance the environmental aspect of ESG.

There is opportunity for practitioners of UVM to have a positive impact on the environments where we live and work. ESG is a tool for measurement and

improvement. Utility ROWs should be a showcase for ESG efforts, especially for the environmental aspect. The scenario of the frosted elfin butterfly is just one example of the biodiversity that occurs on utility ROWs. Curating and encouraging these scenarios will take planning, training, and follow through—just like incorporating IVM into managing ROWs. The next step in the evolution of IVM is identifying and quantitatively examining opportunities for biodiversity and cataloging that improvement over time. 🌱

**ESG IS A TOOL FOR MEASUREMENT AND IMPROVEMENT.**



# REFLECTING THE COMMUNITIES WE SUPPORT

By Jessica Simmons, Project Lead and Dr. Phil Charlton, Principal Advisor, Atlas Field Services

**M**ore than ever, news headlines are dominated by stories of wildfires and power outages across the country. A strong demand for workers to harden our utility infrastructure and protect our environment is needed. And, there is an emphasized commitment to increase diversity and gender equality in the workforce, which is made difficult considering the tight job market, with U.S. unemployment at the lowest level in more than half a century. Reflecting on how these topics intersect, we find ourselves exploring ways to increase diversity and the overall pipeline of eligible candidates in UVM.



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As we explore the topic of diversity in VM, we discover one prevailing commonality among us: many UVM workers never envisioned ourselves pursuing a career in this field. Many of us were unaware of the profession, and those of us who knew about it most likely had stereotypes about what the work entailed, the type of people who performed the work, and what they looked like. Whatever path brought us here, we have been pleasantly surprised.

UVM needs thousands of candidates to work pruning and inspecting trees. It also needs people to develop work management systems and build GIS platforms, equipment, and more. We need individuals with environmental backgrounds, land managers, and safety professionals—even human resources and sales and marketing. Our industry includes so much more than tree pruning.

## ■ Feeding the Candidate Pipeline

Although many career paths exist within the industry, there's a definite lack of candidates. A need to increase visibility among younger generations to pursue a career in forestry is prevalent. Not only do we need to feed the pipeline, we're also best served by increasing exposure within minority groups. Whether it is via school visits, increased media visibility, or recruiting among diverse communities, as an industry, we can join forces to help promote VM as a career choice.

## ■ Women in Forestry

Katherinne Mancebo-Mota (Consulting Utility Forester IV and QV/QC Auditor, Atlas Field Services) recounted her past experience and suggested students should be exposed to the profession starting in high school:

"I never even considered going into this field until my last year of high school. My environmental class had a few women in the field come to speak to us about career options and opportunities. From my point of view, throughout my college career studying conservation biology, it felt like I've always had this 'gentle push' from everyone around me to pursue desk, office, and community outreach jobs rather than field forestry. I personally believe this is because women are generally not well represented in forest management and decision-making positions. A career in forestry is usually deemed as a dangerous profession, and because of this prejudice, many women are not hired into these fields. This is very frustrating and demeaning to those women who have demonstrated capabilities working in male-dominated roles. Having mentors and professional networks for women currently in and/or interested in working in forestry is incredibly important in supporting and encouraging women to pursue it as a career. There's strength in numbers: creating these networks of women in forestry will aid women to overcome these barriers of entering and advancing in the field. Future ideas include providing services such as career counseling, mentoring, and assertiveness training to women. I personally would have benefited since it is, at times, intimidating being the only woman surrounded by a group of men and having my voice heard on certain issues."

**"There's strength in numbers: creating these networks of women in forestry will aid women to overcome these barriers of entering and advancing in the field."**

*Atlas Field Services' Katherinne Mancebo-Mota- C.A., C.U.F. (Certified Arborist, Consulting Utility Forester). Photo courtesy of Christopher Allen.*





■ **Early Experience**

One stakeholder currently changing the landscape in more ways than one is Our City Forest, a nonprofit focused on urban forestry and environmental education. Our City Forest hosts an eleven month AmeriCorps full-time service opportunity that prepares candidates with urban forestry skills. The program pays a \$25,000 stipend and provides up to \$10,000 in education funds, applicable toward undergraduate and graduate studies as well as certifications. The 1,700-hour tenure is credited toward the three-year Certified Arborist requirement. Currently, three out of four programs offered—including tree care, lawn conversion, and nursery—boast 100% female enrollment.

Programs such as these enable individuals to get a head start in a career in VM and secure the required experience to be hired. But when it comes to equaling the playing field in forestry, the topic is broader than just hiring minorities: it's a matter of quality of life.

■ **Tree Equity**

Though not always visibly apparent, inequities in our urban landscapes include shortage of green areas among socioeconomically disadvantaged demographics. Lack of shade, clear air, and park areas is most obvious, yet higher electricity bills and health issues, such as asthma and related ailments, are more obscure consequences of “redlining”—the practice dating back to the 1930s when the federal government began marking “risky” neighborhoods for federal mortgage loans based on race. Defining the areas in which people of color could live has still left a series of negative consequences on many who live in larger cities. “Tree Equity” consists of restoring quality tree coverage in neighborhoods that have traditionally been denied access to urban forestry investments.

Senior Manager Tiffany Mrotek (Career Pathways Initiative for American Forests) explained that in our society, socioeconomically disadvantaged communities, primarily BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) are most affected by “green” inequities. For example, Black neighborhoods tend to have fewer trees, higher rates of respiratory issues, more pollution and flooding, and higher utility bills. Trees in cities provide health, employment, and climate resiliency benefits that everyone should have. Since most American cities don't have the required budget and resources, American Forests has made it its mission to advance equity in how and where urban trees are planted and cared for, while also increasing urban forestry employment opportunities for people of color and those facing barriers.

Mrotek said, “Our vision for Tree Equity at American Forests is that our urban forests will be equitably distributed across cities ensuring that the health, wealth, and climate resilience benefits of trees are experienced by everyone. In order to protect existing trees and close the 65-percent tree canopy gap between wealthy and low-income neighborhoods to achieve Tree Equity, we need the very people who stand to benefit most from more tree canopy. Our field offers a range of career opportunities and career pathways. In fact, we will see a 10-percent increase in tree care job openings for entry-level positions throughout the next decade. Many of those jobs will be for caring for trees in cities across the U.S.”

COMING SOON!



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For more information, contact Diona Neeser at [dneeser@gotouaa.org](mailto:dneeser@gotouaa.org).

### ■ The Numbers

For these entry-level roles, American Forests cites the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics average hourly wage of \$21.18 or \$44,040 a year and lists the general requirements to get started, including a high school diploma, a driver's license, a willingness to climb heights, and work-readiness skills. The projected annual demand for tree care professionals in the coming years is 8,300 openings per year.

### ■ The Tactics

American Forests recommends four tactics for widening the hiring pool:

1. Pursue untapped talent, such as in BIPOC, women, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented populations.
2. Invest in relationships that create long-term output (community groups, workforce boards, and job training programs) and engage entry-level workers in other industries without growth ladders, such as kitchen, retail, outdoor work, and roofers.
3. Revisit recruitment and hiring practices and identify unconscious bias.
4. Examine the challenges with staff and new hires to determine the essential skills for success. Connect with training programs that offer these skills and provide additional in-house training. For example, American Forests have developed the Arboriculture Pre-Apprenticeship Curriculum, approved by TCIA, UAA, and ISA.



Our City Forest Environmental Education. Photo courtesy of Our City Forest.

### ■ Cultural Shifts for Retention

Just like priming soil for a seed to grow, each organization's culture must be primed for equity. We also learned from American Forests that these steps include:

- Identifying work readiness skill gaps among staff
- Investing in training
- Using disciplinary measures as teaching opportunities
- Investing in technical and DEI and bias training
- Standardizing inclusive practices
- Partnering with wraparound service providers
- Finding funding for additional support for new hires with barriers to employment



### ■ TreeCorps

The tree care industry has suffered from not having enough skilled workers to meet the labor shortage. In response, American Forests has created a Career Pathways model (shown below) to help reduce the gap between employers and skilled workers. Through this model, people of color, individuals from low-income neighborhoods, and those without a college degree or certification are trained on the job and provided wraparound services, such as childcare and transportation for the first six months.

### ■ Ethnic Considerations

An additional consideration for attracting diverse candidates is targeting channels such as bilingual or ethnic publications (e.g., Spanish, Vietnamese, etc.), as well as African American media outlets. Also, increasing referral practices helps more candidates learn firsthand what their career possibilities look like in VM.

### ■ DEI Training

One of the positive practices mentioned above for retention and advancement of minorities in the field involves DEI training.

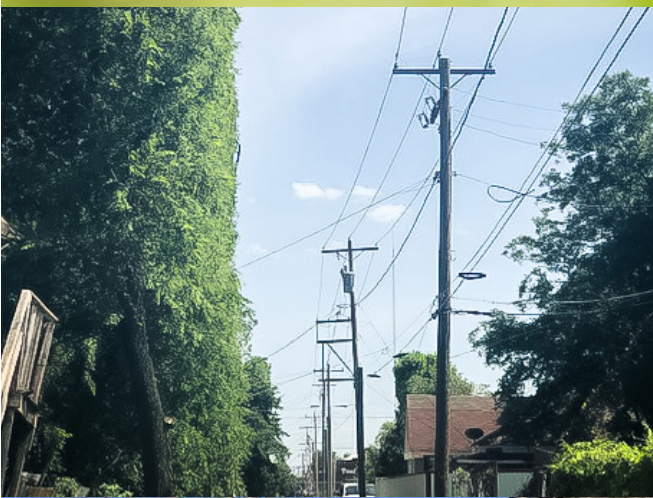
Phil Charlton, Principal Advisor for Atlas Field Services, said, "Although many women and minorities feel strongly supported in their role, formal training and reminders help build a culture of respect and inclusion by reinforcing positive behaviors and making everyone in the organization feel comfortable with speaking up. By increasing the diversity of our workforce, we reflect the demographics of the communities we support, we extend valuable job opportunities with advancement potential, and we add more viewpoints and voices to our teams, which ultimately makes our organizations stronger."

Combining our unique backgrounds makes our industry stronger. We rely on having a culture that promotes a fair and equitable work environment in forestry.

### ■ Conclusion

Everyone is a potential messenger for diversity in VM. By spreading the "gospel" of the careers in this field, you are endorsing and helping promote the next generation of foresters.

We owe it to ourselves, our people, and our environment to continue growing a trade that reflects the demographics of our nation. Join initiatives and spread the word so we can make progress on this common goal. 🌳



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# DEI

By Bob Donegan, Chief  
Human Resources Officer,  
Asplundh Tree Expert, LLC

## MORE THAN A SLOGAN



**W**e know that diverse teams make better decisions. As we continue to gather data, we gain insight into where our greatest opportunities are to make progress. Developing a plan that is backed by our DEI data and analysis gives our efforts credibility and visibility and allows translation of good intentions into concrete, tangible actions.

To be successful, DEI cannot be viewed as only an HR initiative—it is a leadership imperative owned by the leadership team, and everyone has a role to play as allies, leaders, and champions. However, it is not always clear how everyone can participate to create a diverse and inclusive organization. With field/home office leaders and entry-level employees alike—for DEI to really stick—the case for change must be clear, deeply rooted in the business, and speak to the individual benefit so employees at all levels feel the inspiration and urgency to adopt inclusive behaviors.

DEI is an ongoing process, and an inclusive organization does not happen overnight. There's still a long way to go. On this effort, we will advocate for pursuing progress above all else. Small moves can be the start of big change. If you can't measure it, you can't improve it. Boards and leadership teams should "expect and inspect" diversity data.

Corporate commitments are one thing, but equally important is how individual employees can help make a difference right now in key areas such as leadership, commitment, perseverance, and role modeling.

We also know that having a diverse employee base alone will not achieve benefits, such as higher rates of innovation and profitability, if our culture is not inclusive. "It is essential that Asplundh be both diverse and inclusive," said Robert Donegan, Chief Human Resource Officer, Asplundh. "We are addressing root causes to drive lasting change and make DEI a true lever for competitive advantage."

Looking ahead, the continued focus of management—especially executive leadership—will be critical for the success of our DEI initiatives. "We recognize that DEI represents more than just a slogan," said Matt Asplundh, CEO. "Our DEI efforts make us a stronger company and better positioned to meet the needs of our customers." Our employees, at all levels, play critical roles in addressing racism, pushing for broader equality, and creating a more inclusive workplace. Asplundh is committed to building an inclusive environment, not only because it is the right thing to do, but because diversity fosters creativity and innovation.

We will find a better way!

In 2022, Asplundh will continue to bolster its goals around DEI efforts to address racism and promote inclusion.

### Employee Attraction and Outreach

In addition to employee referrals, we use strategic sourcing options that include multiple diversity, disability, and veteran-oriented job sites.

Asplundh partners with DirectEmployers Association, a nonprofit organization that distributes our job postings to many diversity job sites, including federal and state-level workforce agencies. These sites specifically recruit women, people of color, individuals with disabilities, and protected veterans.

We continue to develop and set specific hiring goals related to diversity and inclusion based on the strategic objectives of both our company and our clients.

### Outreach and Workforce Development

Our regional offices conduct additional diversity recruiting by posting jobs directly with agencies that work with individuals with disabilities and protected veterans.

Additional local efforts include partnerships with various educational

“ WE ARE ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES TO DRIVE LASTING CHANGE AND MAKE DEI A TRUE LEVER FOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE. ”



institutions (high schools, universities, and technical schools), introducing and attracting diverse talent proactively into trade and professional development programs (particularly veterans and women).

Regional support of events introduces students to industry career paths in UVM and powerline maintenance with Asplundh. These programs are geared toward helping students in underserved communities who face significant challenges to reach economic and academic success.

Leadership provides sponsorship through development of curriculum, in-class training, and other support activities.

To help our leaders make meaningful changes, we have identified critical areas of focus for 2022 and beyond:

- Assess the current state of DEI through organizational data and focus groups and establish ways to listen to our employees from underrepresented groups.
- Define a DEI strategy to include clear roles and accountability, along with specific goals and initiatives that are customized to our DEI needs and challenges.
- Commit resources to hire and develop diverse staffs and deliberately seek vendors owned by underrepresented communities.
- Implement inclusive leadership behavior training.
- Utilize sponsorship programs and expand campus recruitment strategies to more diverse schools.
- Collect and report on basic diversity metrics and provide an annual progress update to the executive leadership team, customers and the board of directors. 📌

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## WOMEN IN SCIENCE

Audrey Bezilla

Working in the STEM field has always seemed natural for Audrey Bezilla. Our ROW Field Biologist recalls having a love for nature and animals as far as her memory reaches.

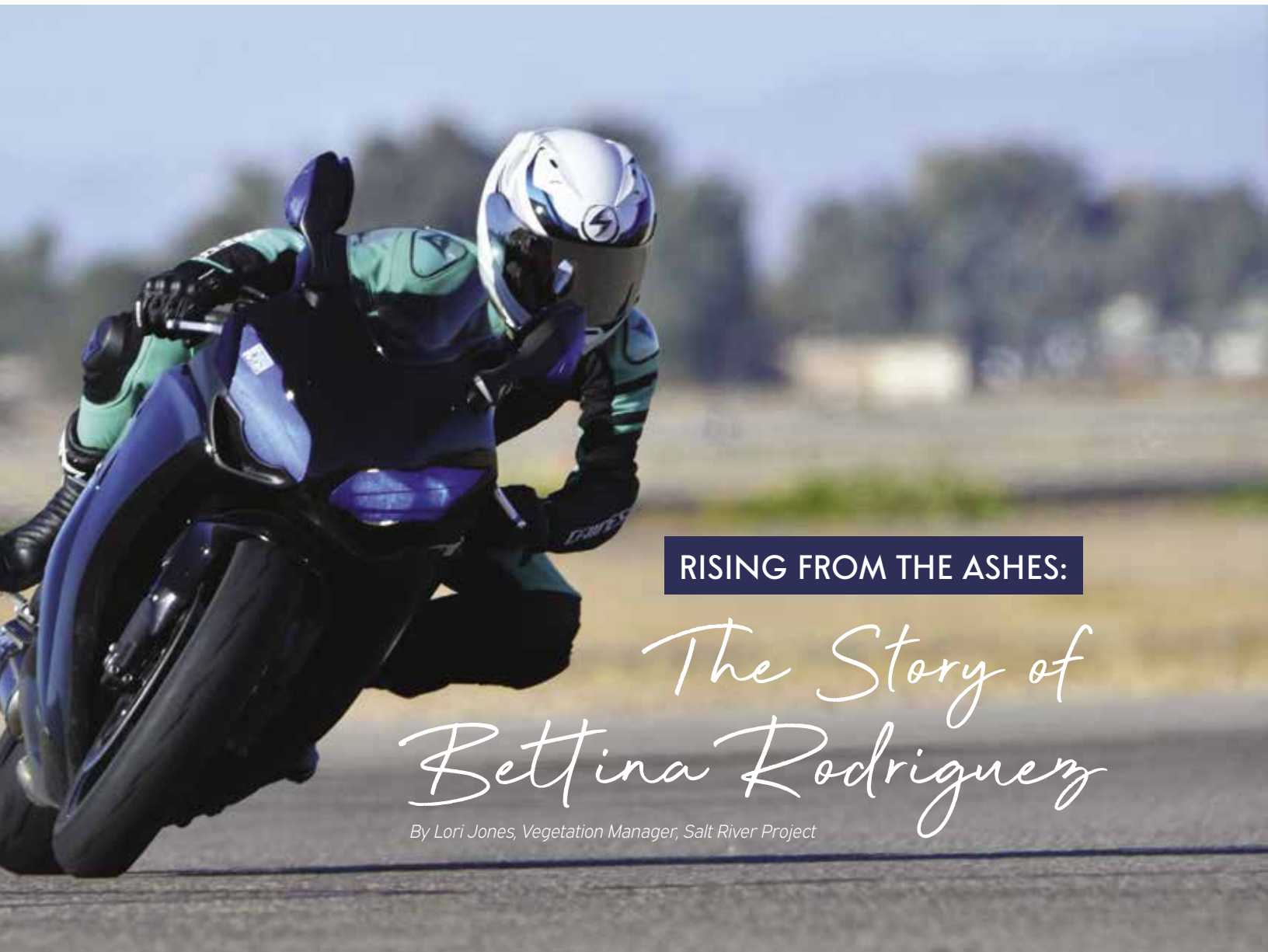
After earning a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from The Ohio State University, she joined our Research, Science, & Innovation team which collects and analyzes data in ROWs across the country, from California to Maine. Bezilla credits the women in science surrounding her for helping pave the way for her and her peers.

“Growing up, I always admired women who explored, innovated, and were the first to do something across all fields,” said Bezilla. One of the earliest female figures Bezilla admired is primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall. Throughout her education, she was mentored by several other females in science, including her AP biology teacher—a college engineering professor who researched keeping women in STEM and engineering—and her principal investigator on an undergraduate research project who served as a “good mentor and a strong example of a female researcher in the field.”

Bezilla said, “We stand on their shoulders. Because of the work they’ve done paving the way for us, we haven’t faced much adversity in the way of traditional challenges presented to women in STEM—predominately male fields. Because of their efforts, we are where we are today. I see my role as carrying the torch, continuing to advance the field, and making it easier for those who come after us.”

Her advice for up-and-coming females in STEM? Get started early. Whether it’s through industry associations, extracurricular activities, or lab research, get a head start.

Learn more about how our employees like Bezilla are working to help sustain our world by visiting [pacific.acrt.com](http://pacific.acrt.com). 📌



**RIISING FROM THE ASHES:**

# The Story of Bettina Rodriguez

By Lori Jones, Vegetation Manager, Salt River Project

The world has weathered two seasons of *blursdays*—the pandemic phenomenon where sheltering at home has blurred our days together with a lack of normal routines. This year brings exciting change and growth. I have missed each of my team members and look forward to returning to the SRP office for in-person gatherings once again.

One thing that didn't change during the pandemic was the hard work our permitters, utility foresters, and tree crews continued to do while the remainder of the VM team was working remotely.

Throughout the pandemic, I also continued my socially distanced crew visits, and in early December 2021, I was introduced—much to my delight—to one of Asplundh's newest hires on our fuels clearing crew: Bettina Rodriguez.

Rodriguez is the first female crew member on Asplundh's contract since I became manager of VM at SRP six years ago. Throughout my 28-year career with SRP, I have been a female in traditionally male roles. Asplundh has embraced DEI by hiring female crew members in Salt Lake City, Reno, and here in Phoenix—with a female general foreperson on the Arizona Public Service contract and Rodriguez as a new crew member for SRP.



When I asked what drew her to this industry, Rodriguez's response was painted with both good and bad decisions. Early in her career, Rodriguez made some poor choices that landed her in correctional care. But fatefully, that care and work duty provided her with exposure to forestry and wildland clearing—her new passion discovered.

Rodriguez was released in 2005 and joined the Granite Mountain Hotshots, a wildland firefighting crew, in Prescott, Arizona, where she became the second female on the team. The experience was the best time in her life, performing at her finest both physically and mentally. Rodriguez gained experience in hazard tree felling, chain saw use and care, tree climbing (through the AAA Tree Fallers in Flagstaff), and additional



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*An aspiring crew foreperson, Rodriguez enjoys working in transmission ROW.*

training through the fire academy. Her first taste of leadership was as a saw boss with three saw teams and a ground pounder team.

With her combined love for team camaraderie and nature's beauty, Rodriguez bravely branched out in 2010 and started her own business in support of wildland urban interface. She and 20 employees—including women—worked with the Prescott Area Wildland Urban Interface Commission (PAWUIC) bidding work to clear lands and to educate 13 surrounding communities on fire breaks and fuels reduction within and around the Prescott area. Rodriguez also initiated a 501(c)(3) nonprofit called Changing Inversions in 2012 and worked with the PAWUIC and State Forestry to

promote "firewise" changes in the vegetation.

Her world, as she knew it, came to a screeching halt in 2013 upon learning that her previous team, the Granite Mountain Hotshots, perished in a wildland fire in Yarnell, Arizona. A piece of her soul died with them, and it took Rodriguez several years of soul searching, alternate career choices, and therapy to draw her back to urban forestry, where she is today.

Rodriguez aspires to become a crew foreperson and enjoys working the transmission ROW. She believes in hard work and "pulling her own weight." She doesn't appreciate being treated "like a girl" and commands the respect of her team through her own hard work, dedication, and genuine care for her teammates. If she needs help, she will ask for it. And when asked about the biggest challenge of her past, Rodriguez said it was overcoming the extreme grief from loss and learning how to move on.

Whether an indirect influence in her career or not, Rodriguez's uncle, Tom Chacon, was the first Mexican U.S. Forest Ranger for Tusayan/Crown King. Prior to his death two years ago, Chacon had been writing a book about his

When asked about the biggest challenge of her past, Rodriguez said...

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*It was overcoming the extreme grief from loss and learning how to move on.*

life experiences and accomplishments. Rodriguez may have the opportunity to finish the book in his honor.

Bettina Rodriguez is small and mighty—a mother of two and grandmother of three—so you may be surprised to learn that one of her most comforting and useful therapies in recovery is TNT (Throttle 'N' Therapy)—a group of motorcycle racers who encouraged her to return to the Yarnell site to let go of her sorrow. For the last three months, the TNT team has returned to the Yarnell site every Sunday to ride strong, respect those who passed away, and let the grief go. 🌿

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At ARBORMETRICS, we embrace and encourage DEI. After all, *people* are our power. Our unique differences—in race, gender identity, religion, orientation, viewpoints, and human experiences—strengthen our entire workforce. They also ensure that landowners and the public see and interact with staff who reflect and reside in their own locale. This, in turn, fosters feelings of comfort and safety in the community towards the people managing vegetation prescription approvals and executing the work.

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We have gone beyond compliance to create policies and protocols that operationalize DEI into our processes and culture. We offer ongoing training for leaders and employees alike, in addition to monitoring and addressing behaviors, relationships, and outcomes. After all, both the workplace and work products benefit from varying ideas, styles, and approaches.

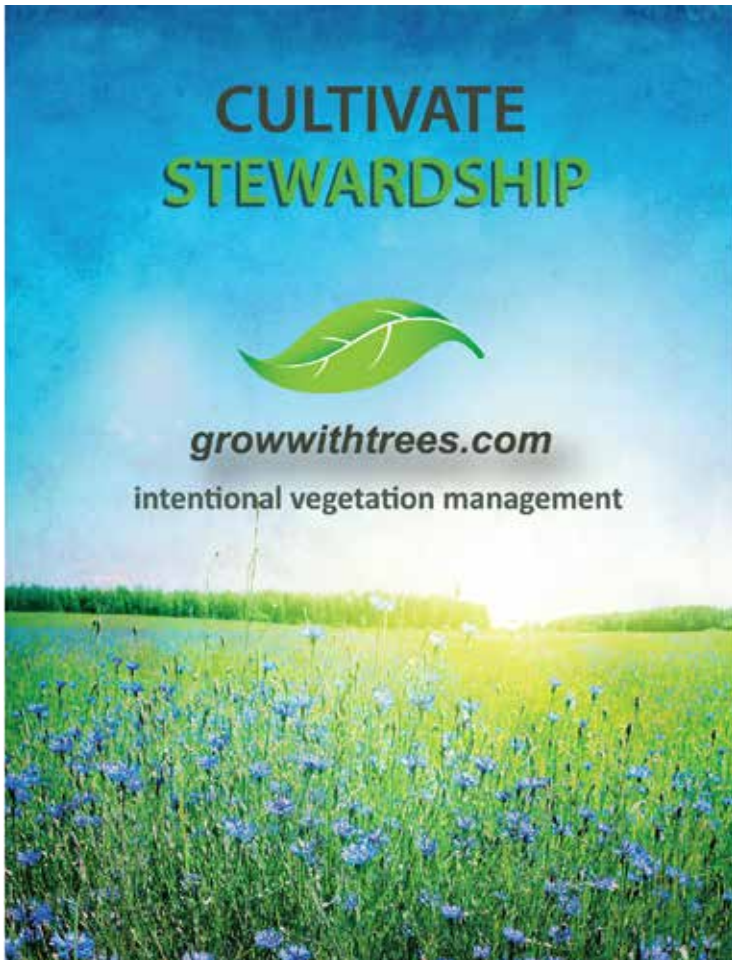
At ARBORMETRICS, our mission is to improve the effectiveness of VM through safe and efficient planning, scheduling, and reporting services. And a DEI-sensitive workforce ensures that people are our power. Learn more by contacting (866) 685-1880 or [info@arbormetrics.com](mailto:info@arbormetrics.com). 🌿

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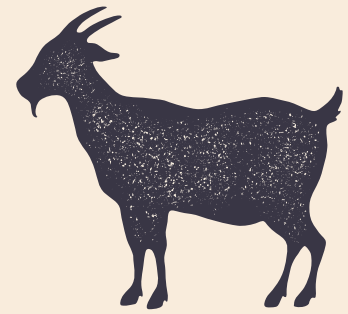
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# Why Don't You Use Goats?



By Richard A. Johnstone, President, IVM Partners, Inc.; Michael R. Haggie, Botanist, Haggie IVM; and Bryan Hall, Forester, Choptank Electric Cooperative

A VM partnership was developed between Choptank Electric Cooperative and Washington College for maintenance of an electric distribution ROW crossing Chino Farms near Chestertown, Maryland. Chino Farms is the site of long-established songbird research and efforts to restore a population of bobwhite quail (*Colinus virginianus* L.). The farm's research professor emeritus from University of Maryland suggested that goat grazing should be used instead of pesticides for vegetation control. A decision was made to establish VM case studies on the electric ROW to directly compare selective herbicide treatments with goat grazing, as well as side-by-side studies in an adjacent field comparing selective herbicide treatment with goat grazing and conventional brush hog mowing.

The quality of habitat for birds and pollinators was assessed using a Pollinator Site Value Index (PSVI) that measured the established plant community benefit for native bees (*Bombus* sp.) and compared it to the plant community derived after the vegetation controls were implemented. Photo and cost documentation were also conducted throughout the trial.

This article provides a direct comparison of varying VM methods, the pros and cons of each method, and unbiased documentation of the resulting plant communities and their respective impact on the electric reliability and access objectives of electric ROW VM, the habitat quality for pollinators and birds, and the costs incurred.



## BACKGROUND

IVM Partners, Inc.—a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation—assisted Choptank Electric Cooperative in developing an IVM partnership with Chino Farms near Chestertown, beginning with discussions about planned tree trimming and mowing in 2018. Chino Farms is part of The Washington College River and Field Campus, classified as an important bird area by the National Audubon Society, and home of the Chester River Field Research Station (CRFRS).

Choptank Electric Cooperative is a nonprofit electric utility formed in 1938 that serves more than 52,000 rural Maryland customers and more than 6,200 distribution line miles. One of these lines crosses Chino Farms where Choptank was historically restricted to only performing manual and mechanical cutting to provide reliable services. In an effort to improve habitat for pollinators along its electric line ROW, Choptank Electric's forester, Bryan Hall, asked if the latest tree trimming and mowing operations could be followed with selective herbicide treatments of interfering trees and invasive plants.

A field meeting was held at Chino Farms in the spring of 2019 to review a proposal for establishing baseline VM botanical surveys for comparative case studies following the ROW cutting operations. The studies would be established along the Choptank ROW that was cut in 2018 and within a fallow field that was last mowed in 2016 (after having a controlled burn in 2014). The field meeting was arranged with Dan Small, the Natural Lands Project (NLP) coordinator for Washington College's Center for Environment and Society, Bryan Hall (Choptank Electric), IVM Partners President Rick Johnstone, and botanist Michael R. Haggie.

IVM Partners had conducted VM case studies using the same criteria throughout the U.S. on electric, natural gas, and highway ROW to document habitat changes using various techniques. The results of these studies have been used to educate the utility industry, government agencies, tribal nations, academia, and the public on the best IVM practices as outlined in *ANSI A300 - Part 7 Integrated Vegetation Management*.

## CASE STUDIES

The Choptank-Chino partnership case studies were designed to compare the vegetation conditions maintained through routine mechanical brush hog mowing with that derived from selective backpack herbicide treatments. Dr. Doug Gill, Professor Emeritus University of Maryland—who initiated the original Chino Farms research—requested additional research with the questions, "Why do you have to use poisons? Why don't you

**“Why do you have to use poisons? Why don't you use goats?”**



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use goats?” So, we decided to include documentation of habitat changes derived from goat browsing.

The Choptank–Chino case studies documented habitat changes on areas representative of the habitat types encountered on the 40-foot-wide ROW by keying all plants along a 2 x 33 m transect. Two case study sites were chosen following the 2018 mowing and hand cutting to document results of selective herbicide treatments: one riparian study crossed by a drainage ditch and one upland study. For purposes of the comparative studies, only the upland ROW herbicide study was evaluated along with the adjacent upland ROW goat browsing study, which borders the access road.

Baseline documentation was also established along the fallow field edge on side-by-side 1/4-acre plots (40 x 300 ft.) to mimic the width of a distribution ROW and conduct direct comparisons of goat browsing, selective backpack herbicide treatment, and brush hog mowing.

IVM Partners coordinated with River Valley Forestry, LLC, to selectively backpack herbicide treat the Choptank ROW and field herbicide plots with a combination of the herbicides Milestone™ (*aminopyralid*) at 64 fl. oz./100 gal., Viewpoint® (*aminocyclopyrachlor, metsulfuron, and imazapyr*) at 52 oz./100 gal., and the surfactant MSO (methylated seed oil) at 128 oz./100 gal. in July 2019. The chemical and labor cost for treating the fallow field 1/4-acre case study was \$44 or an extrapolated cost of \$176 per acre.

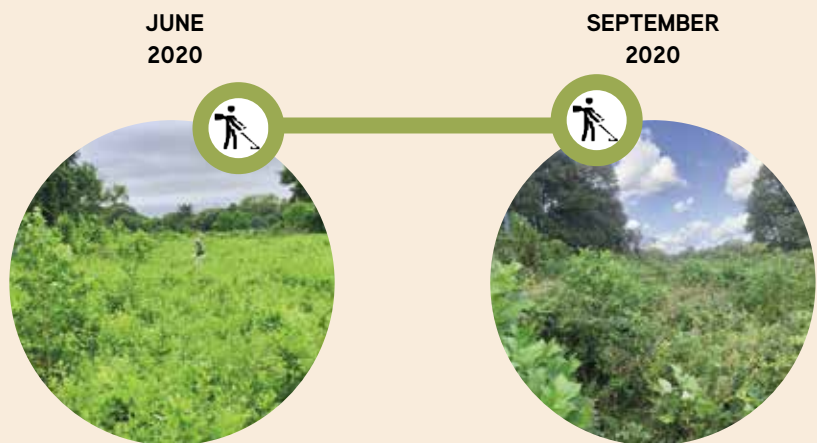
Chino Farms coordinated the brush hog mowing of the entire fallow field with their tractor in March 2019, so we estimated the cost of the mowing case study using the average cost of Choptank ROW mowing, which ranged from \$144–\$300 per acre depending on the equipment used, or a median estimate of \$222 per acre, for comparison.

Sustainable Resource Management, Inc., was hired to fence off the goat browsing case study areas (ROW and field) and bring in the goat herd for a \$1000 delivery charge plus a \$100 per diem rate for browsing. The goats browsed their ROW study for three days in July, their field study for another three days in July, and six days in August. Splitting the delivery rate evenly between the ROW and field studies—at \$500 each—the ROW cost \$800, while the 1/4-acre field study cost \$1,400 or an extrapolated cost of \$5,600 per acre.

Baseline botanical documentation was conducted at all case study sites in June 2019 to capture the first year’s growth of the mowed case study site, prior to VM interventions by herbicides or goats (Figure 1). The difference between the ROW herbicide and goat case studies and their field case studies was that the field had three growing seasons of vegetative growth since it had been last mowed in winter 2016, while the ROW had one growing season since it had been mowed in fall 2018.

Historically, growth resulting from three growing seasons after mowing produces dense growth of trees and invasive shrubs as high as 12 feet, making it difficult to

**FIGURE 1. MOW Study**



selectively herbicide treat without collateral damage to nontarget, herbaceous plants. The woody trees and shrubs are also less palatable to browsing animals, lessening the effectiveness of goat browsing. In contrast, the one year of vegetative growth in the ROW is ideal for both selective herbicide treatments and goats, since the low-growing, young growth is more accurately targeted with the herbicide spray and is more palatable to browsing animals.

The VM objectives of the ROW and the fallow field were different but compatible:

- For Choptank Electric to manage ROW vegetation for reliable electric service with safe and ready access for line maintenance workers. They wanted to discourage tall-growing trees and interfering, dense shrubs and encourage grasses and herbaceous plants. Choptank also wanted its ROW to be a pollinator greenway by allowing native wildflowers and small shrubs to provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, and birds.
- For Chino Farms to manage the fallow field, primarily for bobwhite quail and other songbirds. Therefore, tall-growing trees and non-native invasive plants were discouraged while grasses, wildflowers, and small shrubs were encouraged. Small, woody shrubs provided structural support to protect quail during high snow events, like Chino Farms experienced in 2010.



A decision was made to establish VM case studies on the electric ROW to directly compare selective herbicide treatments with goat grazing.

## ROW CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The ROW herbicide case study was in a wooded upland area and the adjacent ROW goat browsing study was due east, with one side bordering the farm road to enable easy access for shepherding (Figures 2 and 3). Thirty-five baseline plant species were documented in the herbicide study in June 2019 that reduced to 24 species in the fall of 2020. The goat browsing study started with 26 species and reduced to 17. Of these species, the target trees and shrubs that were incompatible with access and reliability goals of an electric ROW dropped substantially with the herbicide application, while the goats had little effect. This was mainly due to black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) trees, which the goats had not controlled. Black walnut produces a natural herbicide juglone—a naphthaquinone—which is probably unpalatable or even toxic to goats.

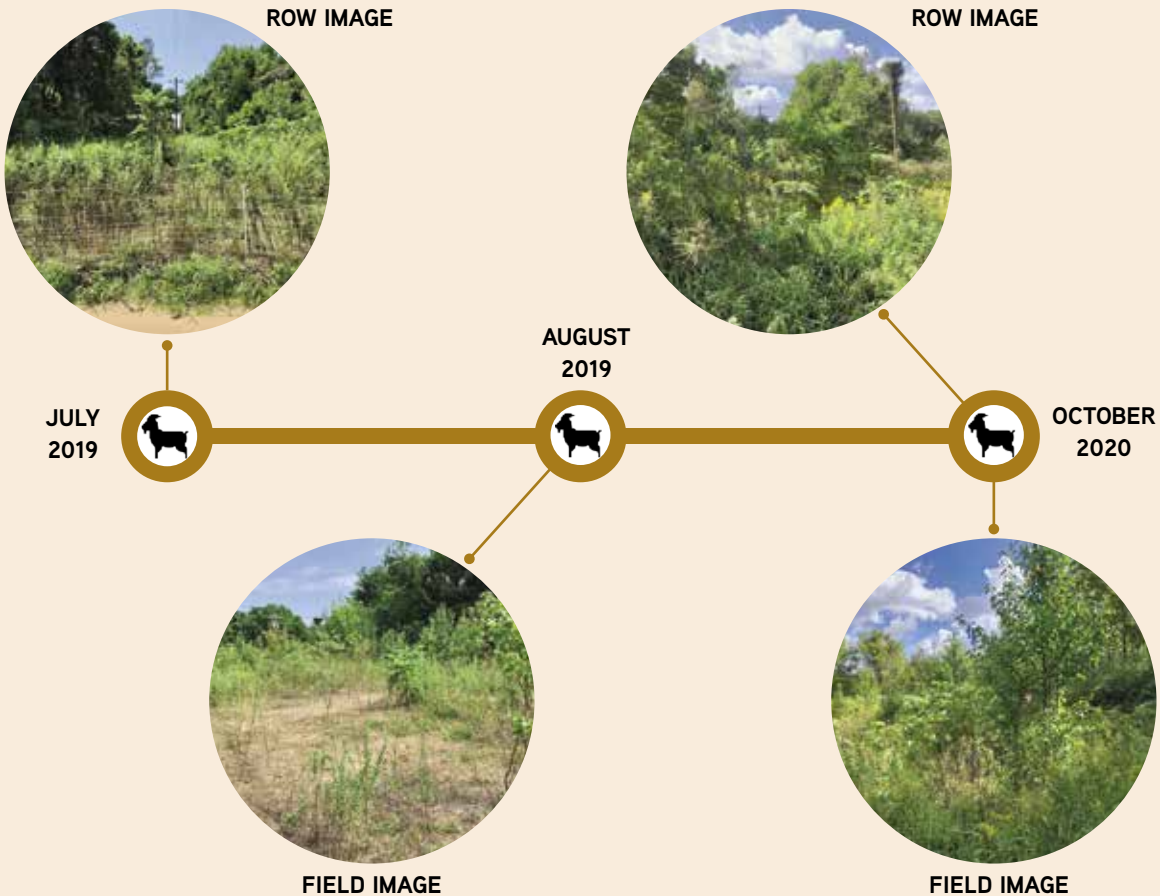
As for low-growing forbs and grass, the herbicide treatment released these while the goats, again, appeared to have little effect. On closer analysis, however, the goats concentrated their feeding on native goldenrod (*Solidago spp.*), an important pollinator plant, while ignoring non-native mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*)—a main source

of hay fever and asthma symptoms. The result was an increase in pollinator habitat for native bumblebees after spraying while goats caused a decrease.

FIGURE 2. ROW Herbicide Study



**FIGURE 3.** ROW and Field Goat Browsing Study



### FIELD CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

Each of the field case studies ran 40 ft. wide along 300 ft. of a wood edge of a fallow field to duplicate a 1/4 acre of a typical electric distribution ROW maintained by mowing with three years' growth. The preferred IVM method for tall, dense, woody growth was brush hog mowing to remove the established plants, allowing for germination of dormant seeds. After one growing season, the next IVM step would be a selective herbicide treatment to remove the incompatible woody plants and allow the forbs and grass to proliferate. These low-growing plants and the wildlife that inhabit them provided biological controls to help manage a plant community compatible with electric reliability. By relying solely on mowing, this plant community transition was short-lived and, at times, highly disruptive, allowing the incompatible woody plants to reassert their dominance.

The field mowing study clearly demonstrated this boom-and-bust cutting effect with the number of plant species doubling the first growing season following the March 2019 cutting, only to see incompatible woody plants dominate again after the second season. The percent cover of herbaceous plants went from 36% in 2019 to 73% by the fall of 2020. But, this was not necessarily beneficial due to the species composition change. Non-native mugwort, already relatively high in the 2019 understory at 25% ground cover, exploded to 61% ground cover by the fall of 2020. The competition was detrimental to quail habitat, as it kept grasses in check at only 2% cover. Beneficial cover of blackberry (*Rubus sp.*) decreased from 9% to 4%. The average cost of \$222 per acre was competitive but the rapid regrowth of woody plants

diminished biological controls, and the need to repeat the same level of cutting at regular intervals made it impossible to reduce future costs.

The field herbicide spray study showed that it is possible to control three-year-old woody plants with a selective backpack herbicide treatment. But spraying tall, dense target plants incurred collateral damage of desirable pollinator plants and a corresponding increase in grasses. Tree control was good but herbaceous plants decreased from 72% ground cover to 17% by the fall of 2020, while grasses increased from 4% to 55%—primarily giant foxtail (*Setaria faberi*). Giant foxtail was not a detriment because it produces seeds that are an important food source for many birds—including bobwhite quail—and another benefit for quail was increased woody support cover of blackberry that increased from 2% to 15%. The \$176 per acre cost was low, and subsequent herbicide treatments could provide continuous improvement while being more selective and yield a corresponding decrease in chemicals, application time, and costs.

The field goat browsing study showed that browsing goats are ineffective at controlling 3-year-old woody species, especially those that may be unpalatable due to plant chemical production, such as juglones in black walnut and glycosides that can yield cyanide in the invasive Callery pear tree (*Pyrus calleryana*). Their feeding preferences also reduced the site's pollinator benefits and native herbs that corresponded to an increase in invasive plants, woody trees, and shrubs. The fixed price of a \$1,000 delivery charge plus a \$100 per day rate equaled an average \$5,600 per acre cost-prohibitive method.



## CONCLUSIONS

The VM objectives of both Choptank Electric and Chino Farms were to control tall-growing woody trees, shrubs, and invasive plants as well as proliferation of grasses and herbaceous plants that provide nectar and pollen for bees, butterflies, and birds and habitat for bobwhite quail.

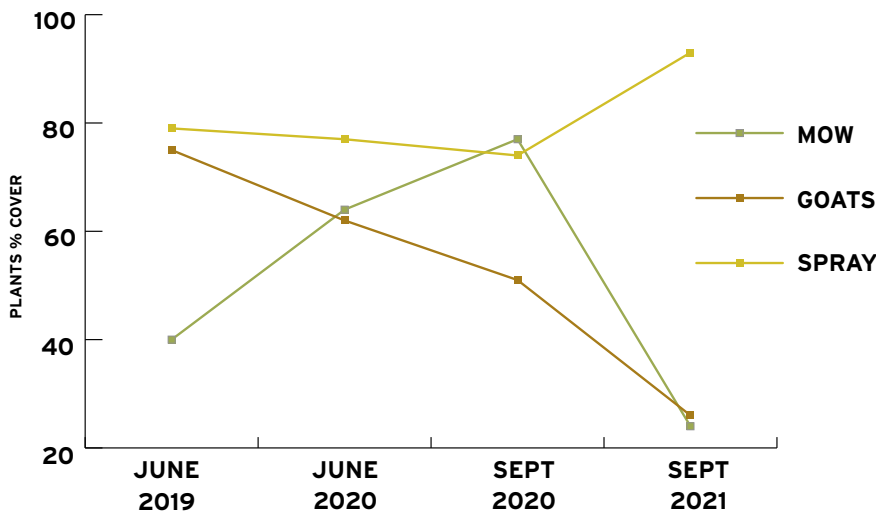
Previously, brush hog mowing was the primary method of vegetation control, but our case study showed that its benefits for ROW VM and wildlife only last for one growing season and must be continuously repeated. To effectively manage for electric reliability and access plus quail and pollinator habitat, control measures need to be performed after each growing season, elevating its relative cost (Figures 4 and 5).

Selective herbicide treatment is a better alternative for both compatible plant community development and costs. But for improved pollinator habitat, the tall, dense vegetation should first be cut and then herbicide treated after one growing season. A subsequent herbicide treatment should be performed within two growing seasons to achieve adequate plant community conversion to obtain IVM biological controls and continuous improvement.

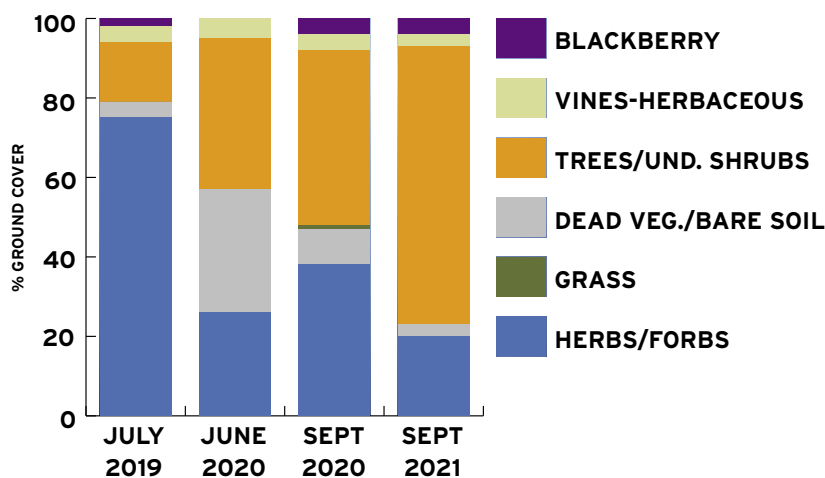
Goat browsing is advertised as an effective invasive weed control alternative and environmentally preferred over the use of herbicides, but our case studies do not defend these claims. To the contrary, invasive woody and herbaceous plants increased their dominance in both the three-year-old field study and in the more palatable one-year-old ROW study—and input costs were prohibitive. Since the target woody trees and shrubs are not initially controlled by goat browsing, there is no way to obtain a plant community transition without employing an alternative management strategy.

Our case studies provided a snapshot of plant community changes and their relative impact on pollinator and bird habitat, ROW reliability and access, invasive weed control, and costs of three very different VM methods. The results should be considered with the reality that there are millions of acres of utility and highway ROW in the U.S. where seasonally rapid growing vegetation must be managed to provide safe and reliable services to the public, as well as providing habitat for pollinators and birds. 🌿

**FIGURE 4.** All Studies (Grass/Forbs)



**FIGURE 5.** Field Goat Plant Community Change







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# BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS

## Using Technology



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By Rafael Estevez, Director of Digital Innovation, Environmental Consultants, Inc.

**M**any electric utilities are adopting DEI strategies to strengthen their culture, abate labor shortages, promote innovation, better serve a diverse customer base, and improve company performance relative to peers. However, reaching and retaining a diverse workforce can be challenging due to geographical barriers, schedule flexibility, and the physical nature of much of the work. Technology can play a critical part in breaking down these DEI barriers and promoting a more diverse workforce.

Innovation is accelerating to help solve transmission and distribution vegetation-related use cases. Technology is also changing the way we work—do Microsoft Teams or Zoom ring a bell? Regardless of whether we enjoy video conferencing, technology is here to stay and is transforming our industry. Technology can break down DEI barriers by digitizing existing work planning and auditing workflows through remote sensing, advanced analytics, and software implementation.

### ● GEOGRAPHICAL BARRIERS

Geographical barriers can be a significant hurdle when recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce. For example, rural communities may find themselves with limited job opportunities because of long commutes to urban centers where the bulk of the distribution power lines exist. These factors can inhibit an organization's ability to recruit and retain a diverse employee base.

In addition, the pandemic has many employees reconsidering where they live and redefining what they will accept as an appropriate work-life balance. Economists have observed skyrocketing demand for housing in rural areas, lower-cost regions, and tourist destinations. Many employees have relocated to these areas seeking a better quality of life, larger home sizes, and better opportunities to social distance. We are in the midst of the Great Resignation as employees make these changes to their lives. Technology is up to the challenge of meeting these new demands, without forcing potential and existing employees to limit their job choices.

### ● SCHEDULE FLEXIBILITY

Schedule flexibility is a significant obstacle for many potential and existing employees. I witnessed these struggles firsthand as employees cared for ailing parents, adjusted to remote learning for young children, and had military service commitments. For example, childcare has become extremely difficult, especially for single parents. A lack of childcare workers and an increased demand have created fewer options. Flexible work hours can make a difference in recruiting and retaining a well-qualified, diverse workforce.

### ● PHYSICAL BARRIERS

The physical nature of many available VM jobs may prevent disabled veterans and other prospective candidates with limited physical mobility from meeting the minimal qualifications required for these types of positions. Arborists, field foresters, and similar positions require the ability to patrol roadside or off-road ROWs, transverse many diverse types of terrains, and work in various weather conditions. Having a significant number of office-related options may increase the feasibility of making appropriate accommodations for these individuals to excel in their daily tasks.

### ● TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS TO PROMOTE DEI

Companies face many difficulties when implementing a DEI strategy. Now, how can we break down these barriers to promote a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforce? Remote sensing, advanced analytics, and software implementation can be deployed to create more virtual work planning and auditing workflows. These workflows encourage flexibility on how, where, and when the work is completed.

Remote sensing data can be collected all at once or throughout the year, as needed. Also, advanced analytics can provide the locations of potential vegetation encroachments and prioritize these locations to maximize efficiency and overcome budget and resource

constraints. The work management software system is the backbone. This platform allows the seamless flow of data throughout the process, allowing multiple employee resources to interact and visualize the data.

Virtual resources do not minimize the need for field personnel to perform specific tasks, such as customer notifications, marking trees, and performing tree work. Instead—from the comfort of their home offices—employees can preplan, assess vegetation encroachments, package work orders to tree contractors, and perform QA/QC inspections. This approach eliminates the requirement to be in a specific geographical area, creates more schedule flexibility, lessens physical requirements, and opens more potential career paths for existing and prospective job seekers.

### ● BRINGING NEW SKILLS AND TALENTS TO UVM

Another way technology is breaking down DEI barriers is by offering new career paths for existing and new technology professionals. GIS analysts and developers, data scientists, drone pilots, software programmers, database architects, and remote sensing experts (to name a few) are needed to help build and maintain digital workflows. These pathways help create a more diverse candidate pool to help support VM programs. Until now, many of these individuals may not have considered UVM a viable career path!

### ● CONCLUSION

Geographical constraints, schedule conflicts, and physical limitations can inhibit promoting and retaining a diverse employee base. These DEI barriers are significant and prevent existing and potential candidates from excelling in specific job opportunities. Roadblocks can be minimized and new career paths are forged by



*A virtual inspector coordinating with other team members to execute on weekly virtual inspection tasks.*

utilizing remote sensing, advanced analytics, or a robust work management software system. Virtual work planners and auditors are given greater flexibility to prevail over these obstacles. Overcoming DEI barriers is never easy, but electric utilities and their VM contractors can leverage technology to lower—if not break through—these barricades to promote a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture. 🌱

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# PAVING THE WAY:

## LATINAS in the UVM Industry

*By Mariana Rodriguez, Contract Administration Project Manager, Wright Service Corp.*

Mariana Rodriguez is part of the Wright Service Corp. Leadership, Education, and Development (LEAD) Program. The company's LEAD Program is a sponsored leadership, training, and development program where individuals are nominated and selected to join. Individuals in the program have shown dedication to their careers and growth within the company. The program gives selected employees a comprehensive perspective of the company, a platform for cross-company networking, and the tools to enhance their leadership potential. Throughout the multi-year program, participants engage in a capstone course. This article was adapted from an assignment that was produced during that capstone course.

“

**Latinas supporting each other is the best way to change the limitations put on both race and gender.**

”

**T**he UVM industry is a rapidly growing multibillion-dollar industry employing tens of thousands of people. The latest data from the U.S. Department of Labor estimates that at least 70,000 people work in UVM and other related industries. When you take a closer look at our industry, how does it stack up in terms of its diversity?

Wright Service Corp. is a family of companies operating in several

environmental services industries. It is the parent company to several companies, such as Wright Tree Service, Wright Tree Service of the West, and Wright Tree Service of Puerto Rico. The companies are among the largest VM contractors in North America. Together, they currently employ 5,100 people across 17 geographic divisions and consist of approximately <1% Latinas—women of Latin American origin or descent. If we extrapolate our company's current demographics to a

national level, the industry's total Latina workforce makes up about 700 people. This number is low, especially when you examine the number of Latino—men of Latin American origin or descent—that work at the company (about 25% of our workforce) and across the industry as a whole.

Diversity in the workforce—which can include race, gender, age, and others—brings countless advantages to a business. While many companies,



**Diversity in the workplace is more than just a buzzword.**

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including Wright Service Corp., have launched diversity and inclusion committees and panels within their organizations, diversity in the workplace is more than just a buzzword. While our committee is in its infancy, Wright is actively implementing both short- and long-term strategies that work to ensure that diversity and inclusion is central to our business. This includes introducing employees to different aspects in the workplace, like important definitions, practicable techniques to increase inclusion, training, and any applicable company action or policy. Diversity can provide tangible benefits that meet strategic priorities for a company that cultivate an adaptable, dynamic business—one that can respond to adversity and grow in the future.

When it comes to gender diversity, women play such a vital role within the organization, especially in an industry that is male dominated. More women in male-dominated industries means different perspectives and approaches to situations that arise. This makes me wonder: can we change the industry into a more diverse and inclusive one? Can Latinas pursue management positions in a male-dominated industry that is majority White? What is my role as a Latina in the industry? I don't have all the answers, but I know that I've learned a few things along the way.

## 1 Stay True to Yourself

It's important that, as a Latina, you do not let race and gender expectations dictate what you can and cannot do. For the longest time, I was self-conscious of my accent, and it has taken me a long time to overcome being uncomfortable with it.

I found a research study that examined the impact of Spanish-accented English on employment-related decisions. It concluded that in comparison to an applicant with a standard American-English accent, the applicant with a Spanish accent was at a disadvantage when applying for a job. The applicant was also rated less suitable for the job and viewed as less likely to be promoted to a managerial position (Hosoda, M., Nguyen, L.T., and Stone-Romero, E.F. 2012).

Organizations need to make a conscious effort to regard foreign accents as assets to their companies and give these employees more opportunities to stand out. The LEAD Program is a great example of this; it offers tools to improve presentation skills, the chance to communicate with people from different areas of the organization, engage in conversation, learn from each other, and grow together. At a personal level, LEAD has given me the confidence to participate, voice my ideas and opinions, and make peace with the fact that I will always have an accent; it is part of who I am, and it is no longer defining what I can or cannot do.

## 2 Show Your Talent

My first position at the company was working remotely administering a digital platform. I didn't have a lot of exposure, and most of my time was spent behind a computer. A year later, I was handling our fleet tracking system, and within a few months, I was working on ways to save our company thousands of dollars each month by reducing idling expenses, returning unused units to a vendor, and finding new ways to improve our drivers' safety.

Six years later, I've been promoted various times, included in numerous projects, and given the opportunity to participate as the first Latina in the LEAD Program. I am fortunate to be part of an organization where my voice is heard and valued, and I truly believe that our differences make us stronger. No matter your race, gender, age, or physical ability, when you are part of a team that values your skills and strengths, the sky is the limit!

## 3 Support Other Latinas in the Industry

Latinas supporting each other is the best way to change the limitations put on both race and gender. We need to empower Latinas to not let stereotypes hold them back.

I've learned a lot in my time as a Latina working in the UVM industry, and I know others who bring so much value to our organization. I hope that we can all work together to bring light to this topic. It is never easy talking about issues of inequality. In fact, prior to being in the LEAD Program, I often avoided having these difficult conversations.

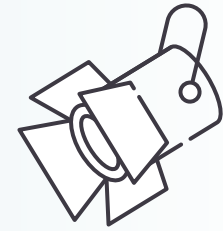
Wright Service Corp. and writing this article for my capstone gave me the perfect platform to *speak up*, not only for myself and my future in the industry, but for other Latinas who find it difficult to navigate a White male-dominated industry, for the minorities who have overcome so many adversities to get to this point, and finally, for my daughters to have a road that leads to better opportunities. My hope is that this article helps spark conversations that lead to meaningful change.

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# 2021 Women



## IN VEGETATION MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP

By Amanda Opp, Right of Way Supervisor,  
Flathead Electric Cooperative, Inc. and  
Sarah Lillie Sewell, CEO, Lillie Leaf Solutions



The 2021 Women in Vegetation Management workshop returned to an in-person event as part of the annual Trees and Utilities Conference in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Packed with stories of struggle and success, the event shone a light on women's contributions to UVM and illuminated ways employers can create more inclusive career pathways for women in the field.

The workshop kicked off with a get-to-know-you exercise of icebreaker bingo, which fostered new connections amongst attendees. Following the icebreaker, attendees witnessed the premier of a brand-new video highlighting women in UVM from diverse disciplines featuring Alicia Kroll of East Central Electric in Minnesota, Amanda Opp of Flathead Electric Cooperative in Montana, April Schneider of PG&E, Samantha Mehl of Clemson University, and Ashley Helmetag of PG&E. The film, by Julie Gaier of TRG Marketing, inspired enthusiasm from attendees who were excited to see the spotlight on these women's career journeys.

During the post-showing open discussion hosted by film subject and speaker Amanda Opp, some attendees shared their own experiences of challenge and triumph, connecting to the stories they had witnessed on screen. The unfortunate but honest truth of "You can't outwork bias" was a quote that resonated with people in the room. Participants shared how critical it was to make better resources available for women who are facing harassment at work, like employee assistance programs and hotlines. Some attendees indicated interest in fostering a community for each other and those who wish to speak out against discrimination and abuse on the job. There were many women who wanted to connect with each other for moral support, and some attendees

indicated interest in allyship training for men to advocate alongside women in the workplace. Kathryn Fernholz, CEO of Dovetail Partners, echoed these sentiments in a prerecorded presentation called Women in Natural Resource Fields and gave information about opportunities for inclusion and support.

One key session featured Sarah Lillie Sewell from Lillie Leaf Solutions speaking about how UVM companies could create more inclusive recruiting and early career training models to tap diverse talent pools and maximize retention. Through cross-sector partnerships with grassroots groups, social service agencies, and workforce development entities, UVM stakeholders can prioritize hiring from underrepresented populations—including women and people of color—resulting in a workforce that better reflects society at large. She spoke about how women and people of color have systemically been left out of opportunities to create and sustain quality forests and how creating onramps into the field for these groups could improve how UVM stakeholders do business.

Through participating in the DISC personality assessment, attendees relished the opportunity to connect with like-minded and opposite personalities to brainstorm tactics to deal with harassment in the workplace. There were broad conversations from each personality type about ways to effectively deploy disarming tactics, which can help clarify potential miscommunication amongst colleagues that could lead to harassment.

Notably, there was a shift in tone from previous Women in VM workshops. Instead of encouraging women to overcome known and unknown obstacles in the way of their success, speakers and attendees discussed how to adjust

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organizational policies and practices to remove these obstacles in the first place. Folks highlighted how critical it was for company leadership to make commitments to workplace safety and inclusion as well as codify them under ESG programs that can track progress over time. This message was echoed in a subsequent webinar from the UAA and NRECA on DEI this past February.

More than 50 attendees showed up to participate in the event, with representation from diverse disciplines in UVM, genders, ethnicities, and tenure in the field. Though not everyone who wanted to join was able due to COVID-19 restrictions and budgetary limitations. Those who did make it brought a passion for change in the industry to the workshop and left with access to a network of colleagues who can help them make it happen. The UAA and Arbor Day want to remind you that this workshop is open to everyone! If you have ideas on topics or are interested in attending future Women in Vegetation Management workshops, please contact Diona Neeser ([dneeser@gotouaa.org](mailto:dneeser@gotouaa.org)). 📧

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# ACROSS THE INDUSTRY



PG&E's Strategic Allies Leading Transparency (SALT) Taskforce (left to right) Samira Saffarzadeh, Kenneth Forward, Ali Flowers, and LaTasha Jackson.

By Renée Bissett, Director—Marketing and Communications, ACRT Services

## WHAT IS DEI?

The introduction of equal employment laws and affirmative action followed the 1960s civil rights movement, creating workplace diversity training for the first time. It has evolved with each generation, providing an opportunity to do better. What began as racial equality training and education progressed to include gender, ethnicity, religious beliefs, and sexual orientation. Valuing diversity and multiculturalism helps break down the barriers that ethnocentrism creates. By now, you've heard of the term "DEI," but what does it mean? Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a term used to ensure all people have a chance to be successful.

In VM, we're familiar with the term diversity. The more diverse an ecosystem, the healthier and more stable it is. That's not any different when we're talking about the health of an organization and its people. Diversity in the workplace includes underrepresented populations within our society. Bringing these individuals to the table strengthens our teams, provides more comprehensive experiences, and ultimately creates better solutions.

Equality, besides being the right thing to do, establishes an even playing field for all involved. Creating more positive relationships within the workplace and increasing performance and productivity with teams. In our industry, we continue to struggle with enough talent to fill the roles available. When you have an industry that provides equal opportunities, it aids in attracting and retaining better employees, creating happier customers.

More than checking a box, when organizations embrace inclusion, they ensure diverse populations feel safe and are empowered to contribute. They're at the table sharing and making decisions. They help with developing others within the organization and safeguarding differing opinions with backgrounds that matter. When employees feel valued and included, employee engagement rises and organizations thrive.

Many companies and organizations are still finding their footing with official DEI programs. Others have teams in place and professionals focused on incorporating DEI throughout their organizations. No matter where your company stands, there are steps each of us can take every day to do better. We checked in with a few companies across our industry to see what DEI means to their organization and what our industry can do to move this initiative forward. Here's what they had to say.

### SALT Taskforce, PG&E

Pacific, Gas, and Electric put together a team of Principal Change Management Consultants to form the SALT (Strategic Allies Leading Transparency) Taskforce. These are full-time roles available for an 18-month rotation with the mission to facilitate the uncomfortable conversations, help expose unfair processes and practices, create a safe space for meaningful dialogue, and set up a comprehensive framework to drive progress and lasting measures that prioritize human values. The SALT team is comprised of Samira Saffarzadeh, Ali Flowers, LaTasha Jackson, and Kenneth Forward.

DEI means prioritizing human values in all that we do. Simply put, we integrate this concept into our daily operations by facilitating the uncomfortable conversations, helping to expose unfair processes and practices, creating a safe space for meaningful dialogue, and

“DEI means prioritizing human values in all that we do.”



setting up a comprehensive framework to drive progress and lasting measures. This is at the core of our mission.

The goal for SALT is to create an inclusive culture by demonstrating the value in diversity of thought by making sure everyone is heard and their contributions are valued. We believe we will have reached our goal when our workforce reflects the communities we serve, we are empowered to be innovative in ways that address our current and future challenges, and we are industry leaders in both service and culture.

Adopt the mindset that DEI is not something we do, but who we are. We can't solve the challenges of today and tomorrow by solely relying on the tools, processes, and thinking of the past. We all are impacted and should be involved in the solution. This is critical to our industry's growth. We should collectively agree that DEI is about embracing the challenge and opportunity to be more inclusive and have a stronger network of collective ideas and thoughts from diverse contributors. We must take a stand to increase representation in all facets that are reflective of our country's statistics and the communities we serve. We should be asking ourselves "Whose input has not been heard?" Or better yet, "Who is not in the room to give it?" We need to work on making the necessary and sustainable changes in recruitment, retention, and engagement. This is our duty and responsibility.



**"DEI requires change and some level of individual, personal discomfort."**

**Leila Zaghoul-Daly,  
Manager of Culture,  
Learning, and Inclusion,  
Arizona Public Service**

Diversity and inclusion are about each one of us. Diversity crosses so many dimensions that make each of us unique—race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so much more. DEI efforts have to value the uniqueness of each employee's multiculturalism as well as ensure equity and opportunity for historically underrepresented groups.

At APS, we believe that belonging matters. Part of belonging is being welcomed and valued for the unique perspectives that come from our different cultures, backgrounds, and experiences.

DEI requires change and some level of individual, personal discomfort. It's extremely important when starting a DEI program or implementing new approaches to ensure that all stakeholders understand the value for themselves to mitigate that discomfort.

**Greg Ina, Executive Vice President of the Davey Institute and Employee Development, Davey**

Davey views our DEI strategies as rooted within our larger CSR framework. This allows us to report on DEI initiatives as they relate to Davey's overarching ESG goals. And as such, we've been exploring these topics over the past two decades. Most recently, we've formed a team to focus on DEI issues with the following mission statement of the group at Davey Tree:

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- We stand for justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion.
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- We understand that encouraging diverse ideas and perspectives is critical to achieving our vision and mission.
- We build this culture by living our values, evolving, and learning together.

As part of the work of this team, we have broken the strategies into groups focused on recruiting, training, retention, and employee resource groups. We should also point out that there's no indicator that our current culture is broken, but that this is a natural area of focus for us. We need to be welcoming, inclusive, and encouraging for a more diverse population of workforce—not just at Davey, but for the entire industry at large.

DEI is a welcome element within our broader CSR. And when taken within the known workforce challenges and industry demographics, it gives us an opportunity to better focus on different perspectives and build a stronger, broader workforce while also ensuring that we are being inclusive and accommodating to our existing workforce.

### **Aby Parsons, PhD, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Manager, Georgia Power**

At Georgia Power (GPC), we've been doing DEI work for more than 20 years. Our approach has evolved from being purely compliance driven in the beginning to a more holistic approach today that looks at improving our work culture through educating and engaging employees in DEI learning, service, and community building.

In 2021, GPC launched its Moving to Equity plan as a response to several high-profile killings of Black Americans in 2020, including George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and Rayshard Brooks. The plan included commitments relating to economic empowerment, supporting education initiatives in Black communities, educating our workforce on racial justice, mentoring diverse talent, transforming our hiring process to reduce bias, and engaging in legislative efforts to end racial injustice. The DEI team partnered with leaders across the company to collaboratively develop the plan and implement strategies.

In addition to Moving to Equity, the DEI team focuses on the following several key areas to drive our DEI strategy at Georgia Power:

- Our nine employee resource groups share their cultures, engage in community service, and provide a platform for underrepresented employees and allies to come together for shared learning and support.
- Our DEI Certificate is a structured learning pathway available to all employees, and features more than 25 workshops and facilitated conversations.
- Our DEI newsletter tells our story. Each issue features employee interviews and stories about diverse DEI topics. Past features include interviews with GPC employees who are parents of children with autism, a look at how GPC employees celebrate different holidays, a video of White men sharing their DEI journeys, and interviews with company leaders on our Moving to Equity initiatives.
- Our DEI toolbox is released each quarter. Each toolbox focuses on a timely DEI theme and contains discussion guides, videos, and one-pagers to help leaders facilitate their own DEI conversations and activities with their teams.

One challenge we encounter is finding the right messaging and approach to speak to our diverse, distributed workforce. Often our conversations look a bit different in our corporate office than they do out in the field because the needs and culture are different. One way we're addressing that is by ensuring that voices from across our workforce are included in our DEI workshops, communications, and events. That means that employees don't just hear the message from our CEO but also from a lineman in Macon, a plant manager in Savannah, or a customer service specialist in Atlanta.

So many DEI conversations and learning opportunities deal in generalities, watering down DEI messages to simply "respect one another." But many of our employees come to us with specific questions about topics that impact their day-to-day interactions with colleagues. For example, they ask things like "If I have a transgender person on my team, what bathroom should they use?" or "Am I supposed to say Black or African American?" or "Some of the White men on my team feel like DEI work doesn't include them. How can I make sure they feel engaged?"

**“Our industry needs to do a better job of addressing specific topics in accessible, approachable ways.”**



We've created workshops and resources to answer these kinds of questions. Often, I find that people avoid talking about certain DEI topics because they're afraid of using the wrong language or they'll worry they sound ignorant. Our industry needs to do a better job of addressing specific topics in accessible, approachable ways. We can support our employees by equipping them with basic language and knowledge to help them feel empowered to have these critical conversations.

Finally, we also need to incorporate targeted outreach that specifically engages White men. They often tell us they feel left out of DEI conversations or that the work doesn't apply to them. We need to help them understand that their experiences matter, that diversity is more than just race and gender, and that when White men feel engaged in DEI efforts, everyone benefits—including them!

### **In Conclusion**

As this industry moves forward—embracing the DEI movement—make sure your company doesn't get left behind. Ask yourself why DEI is important to your organization. In building an inclusive culture, assess your current situation, determine crucial key indicators to track progress, and make sure you have a variety of voices at the table. Representation is critical at each level within your organization. Solicit feedback and offer transparency. Commit to always listening and strive for a better tomorrow. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who said it best, "The time is always right to do what is right." 🌱



## MEET RACHEL MILLER

*Project Manager and Chief Supervisor of Part 107 and Part 137 Aerial Operations*

Rachel is an FAA certified Private Pilot (SEL) as well as a Remote Pilot (sUAS) and holds an ITC Level 1 (sUAS) Thermographer certification. She is responsible for direct project planning, R&D, and implementing new sUAS solutions, processes, policies for the team. Rachel is also involved in ensuring FAA compliance and maintaining Davey's internal pilot training program. She enjoys helping clients find new solutions to old problems using emerging technology.



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# Procuring an INCLUSIVE CULTURE

By Brad Schroeder, CFO, ACRT Services

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**N**o longer just a buzz term or trend, DEI—diversity, equity, and inclusion—is critical to the success of not only ACRT Services and our family of companies, but our entire industry. DEI is about more than policies, programs, and headcounts. It is about empowering people, strengthening teams, and enriching the culture of an organization. Its benefits exceed simply altruistic motives. Inclusion makes employees feel more respected and report higher job satisfaction. This increases engagement, retention, and supports the financial goals of an organization. It also improves productivity from happier employees who feel more connected to the work. A recent study exploring worker happiness and productivity has found that workers are 13% more productive when happy (Bellet, De Neve, and Ward 2019).

Having a diverse workforce is reflective of our society. Diverse team members working directly with the public are a better representation of what the real world looks like and are better connected with the communities they serve. Each unique perspective adds fresh ideas and innovation to solve problems and drive success. For more than a decade, ACRT Services and our family of companies have had a strategic initiative to create a

great working experience for our employees and customers. Now more than ever, we are laser focused on empowering our employees, our customers, and the communities our customers serve. We have infused DEI initiatives throughout our organization to strengthen our commitment to people—all people.

## HISTORY

Our customers and our industries share our vision and passion for inclusion. Over the years, the need to increase underrepresented group spending has been growing. We have always sought partners and vendors with minority-owned business enterprises (MBE). These businesses typically have majority ownership of underrepresented communities like women, people of color, LGBTQ, veterans, and proprietors with disabilities. On the heels of the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, the automotive industry took on this initiative with General Motors leading the charge. They offered one of the first supplier diversity programs. It's no surprise that some of our early MBE partnerships have been in the area of fleet.

## DIVERSIFYING RECRUITMENT

To ensure a diverse workforce, you need to start with recruiting a wide variety of people. Create a strategy that identifies your goals and expectations. Invest in the resources necessary to broaden your net, stepping outside of typical Glassdoor, Indeed, and LinkedIn platforms. Partner with resources that specialize in finding talent to diversify your pool. One tactic is looking around at your communities, reaching out to local colleges, job boards, and organizations that support your goals. Make sure to assess your hiring practices and eliminate any bias that your process may have built into it. Throughout the recruitment process, keep your communication channels open to feedback so you can adjust where needed to meet your hiring goals.

## CULTURE WORKS BOTH WAYS

Culture is a big part of why employees choose to work for a company and often why employers choose candidates. Culture fit is important; however, think more expansively about how an employee can *contribute* to the culture. This cultural contribution may be more inviting to others, strengthening your teams and your organization.

According to a recent study conducted by McKinsey & Company, organizations that focused on diversity were 33% more profitable than their direct competitors (Hunt, Yee, Prince, and Dixon-Fyle 2018). This can be attributed to the additional viewpoints, experiences, and representation that these diverse employees brought with them.

### STRATEGIZE, COMMUNICATE, AND LISTEN

The way an organization communicates internally and externally plays a big role in your DEI success. Making your DEI strategies known across your organization is imperative to achieving your goals. If your company is large enough to afford a dedicated DEI expert or team for the initiative, they can lead the efforts throughout your organization. Each department should own a piece of the strategy, prioritizing this with their own goals. When telling your story, make sure you include a variety of people, emphasizing inclusion. If you have populations within your organization where English isn't their first language, consider offering subtitles for videos or translating documents in different languages to bridge any communication gaps. Offer two-way communication to your employees to be constantly listening for ways to improve your communications and processes.

### BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE PROCUREMENT

For us, we've created a procurement team with an emphasis on DEI practices. The team is tasked with leading efforts with our other departments on sourcing diverse companies and organizations to partner with. This cross-department synergy on our shared goal will strengthen our diverse teams within and

foster support of underrepresented communities we partner with, making us a stronger organization overall. Creating a diverse supplier program ensures a variety of voices are at the table. An inclusion procurement strategy means a greater choice of suppliers. This generates competition which can improve the quality of products and services offered by driving down costs.

No matter what stage your DEI program is at—whether you are just starting or you have a well-established program—continuing the conversation is a must, followed by taking action. Creating a strategy and evaluating it regularly ensures that you are staying on course to reach your goals. You can use metrics, benchmarks, and milestones to celebrate your progress. Your DEI goals should be part of your organizational culture. Make sure your leadership team not only understands the importance of the initiatives but believes in the cause; this will strengthen your teams and your bottom line. Your organization will be stronger because of these efforts. And so will our industry.

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# Bias for Action Drives Success FOR DEI STRATEGIES

By Clay Osborne, President and  
Monica Monte, Partner, True Insights Consulting



The familiar adages (above) capture the top sentiment expressed by employees in every organization when the consulting team at True Insights Consulting (TIC) asks what concerns, hopes, or fears they have about their employer’s DEI efforts. There are good reasons behind employees’ fears that management’s lofty DEI strategies may become nothing more than platitudes and empty promises, despite the business benefits. DEI progress in corporate America has been slow. *Harvard Business Review* pointed out that among U.S. companies with 100+ employees:

- The proportion of Black men in management increased just slightly—from 3% to 3.3%—from 1985 to 2014.
- White women saw significant gains early on, rising from 22% to 29% of managers from 1985 to 2000, yet their numbers have plateaued since.
- White men dominate tech jobs in Silicon Valley, and nearly 90% of Fortune 500 CEOs are white men. Despite recognizing the need for more representation, only two are Black women.
- Globally, women occupy only one in five board seats.

This story is largely echoed for Hispanic and Asian-American populations. And utility line clearance is no exception.

With such unremarkable progress, it’s no wonder employees react with doubt when their company’s leadership posts virtue-signaling proclamations on their websites. To counter disbelief and make real advancement, we recommend a unique approach for developing and implementing strategic plans for DEI and social responsibility.

## Aim for Quick Wins

For many companies, overcoming employee skepticism has been identified as a key hurdle. To overcome this, we encourage a “quick wins” approach to implementation. Companies with a bias for action realize the business benefits more quickly. This will only take place when leadership fully recognizes the overwhelming data confirming that diverse, equitable, inclusive workplace practices positively impact an organization’s profits, productivity, customer satisfaction, problem solving, and innovation—and agrees to take action. Those actions must be visible, swift, and meaningful.

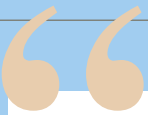
## Determine What Matters Most

At TIC, we recognize that no two companies are the same. For each of our clients, we facilitate a series of workshops, focus groups, and surveys, not only with their leadership teams but also for companies like Lewis Tree Service who have distributed workforces with team members across the country. Based on these activities, we collectively identify key actions—in the specific areas that matter most to that company—which can be taken immediately to demonstrate the company is serious about their diversity, equity, inclusion, and social responsibility imperatives.

When employees see positive changes happening in their organization—especially changes they themselves recommended—it allays their fears that the company will be all talk and no action.

## View DEI as Cultural Change (Not Training)

Even the best-intentioned companies will struggle to achieve DEI success if they implement their efforts poorly or limit DEI to a series of training modules. DEI must be a cultural shift that is actively and intentionally embedded in work practices,



When employees see positive changes happening in their organization—**ESPECIALLY CHANGES THEY THEMSELVES RECOMMENDED**—it allays their fears that the company will be all talk and no action.



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including recruiting, hiring, advancing, and retaining, coaching and mentoring, designing inclusive work environments, and beyond.

At TIC, we believe DEI and social responsibility strategies work best when they are grounded in a larger goal to be among the top-rated workplaces in an industry. As such, all of our DEI plans begin with that larger goal in mind. How each client embraces DEI will differ entirely. Initiatives may focus on broader understanding, stronger communication, increased collaboration, heightened community impact, etc. No two strategies are the same.

### Make a Long-Term Commitment

For each facet of any company's unique DEI strategy, there's a lot to consider, and the efforts require time, commitment, and resources from the entire organization, not just human resources and/or upper management. However, the payback for this investment is tremendous, especially in industries like UVM that are facing a significant labor shortage amid rapidly changing demographic, technology, and environmental shifts.

Importantly, DEI is an essential component of the social pillar of ESG. Investors and stakeholders are increasingly applying these nonfinancial factors as part of their analysis to identify material risks and growth opportunities and measure the ethical impact and sustainability of their investment in a company.

As such, continued focus on DEI—with a bias for action—will collectively enable the companies in this industry to stay ahead of these market dynamics to achieve long-term sustainability and make the world a better place.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Clayton Osborne

In addition to being President of TIC, Osborne is a Certified Corporate Executive Coach, a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, and an adjunct professor, teaching Human Capital Management for doctorates in the Executive Leadership program at St. John Fisher College. He specializes in Executive & Performance coaching and consulting, helping organizations leverage the talents of their workforce to achieve performance goals, transformational change, and improved business results. Osborne served as Corporate Vice President of Human Resources for Talent Management and Diversity at Bausch+Lomb, Inc. B+L received national recognition for many of the programs under his direction.



Monica Monte

Monte is a Partner at TIC as well as President of Monte Marketing Consulting. Having received her MBA from the William E. Simon School of Business at the University of Rochester, Monte is an experienced leader in DEI, marketing, customer experience, human resources, organizational development, and business process. She has provided DEI, marketing, and operations support and consultation to Fortune 500 and start-up organizations, including initiatives resulting in Rochester Top 100 and Inc. 500 lists of fastest-growing private companies. Monte also managed Bausch+Lomb's EEO and Diversity Program that received the Federal EEOC Exemplary Effort Award. 🌱

UVM

## IT'S NOT JUST FOR OLD WHITE GUYS ANYMORE

By Randall H. Miller, Director of Research and Development, CN Utility Consulting

I'm an old, White guy. I've been around a long time, and throughout my career, UVM has been dominated by people like me—males of European ancestry. The profession *remains* overwhelmingly comprised of males of European ancestry. The UAA realizes that such a lack of diversity brings disadvantages, so throughout the past few years, we have dedicated an issue of the *Utility Arborist Newsline* to raising awareness about the need to improve diversity. You're reading the latest contribution to that series.

Jennifer Arkett is an exemplar of my generation who bucked the male-dominated culture in UVM and contributed immeasurably to the profession along the way. In last year's *Newsline* diversity issue, her fine article on the power of diversity identified 11 different perspectives—ranging from gender, age, and race to socio-economic status—how diversity can contribute synergies to an organization. She chose age demographics to illustrate how each generational group has something unique to contribute (Arkett 2020).

Another example Arkett offered that can clarify how diversity can generate

synergies is *personality*. To understand how that is so, consider the Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). MBTI is a tool that examines personality traits (Pearman and Albritton 2010). One attribute we can use to understand an individual's unique perspectives is "attending," which focuses on people's approach to decision-making. There are two styles: "sensing" (identified as S) and "intuition" (identified as N). Sensing people make decisions based on their five senses. They are systematic and don't come to conclusions until they have command of the facts. The advantage of S-types is that they often come to decisions that are most suitable for circumstances. Their disadvantage is that they can be reluctant to reach conclusions and get mired in "paralysis by analysis." Intuition types, on the other hand, use a "sixth sense." They make quick decisions based on their gut, insight, and what could be. N-types often rise to the top of organizations because their decisiveness is valued. Their disadvantage is they can lack focus, leap from one subject to another, and make decisions that are counterproductive because they lack proper consideration of the possible negative ramifications their decisions could impose on a group.

The idea isn't that S's are right and N's wrong or vice versa. Rather, organizations need both approaches to decision making to be effective because their relative strengths balance out one another's weaknesses. S's need N's to help make timely decisions, and N's need S's to prevent them from undermining an organization. I don't mean to suggest that balancing sensing and intuition decision-making styles is the single-most important approach to establishing effective organizations; of course, it isn't. Rather, I use it to illustrate how diversity of thought can enhance a program. Diversity of age, gender, race, sexual preference, and many other factors can make similar contributions.

Aside from the synergies diversity can generate, it can broaden the candidate pool for open positions. UVM has far more jobs open than there are people to fill them. Those jobs will never all be filled by White men—who comprise a minority of the population, after all. Attracting women, people of color, and others into UVM is an obvious partial solution to the problem.

“  
By being aware,  
we can begin to  
solve the problem.  
”





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## IMPLICIT BIAS

With such obvious benefit, what is keeping us from a more diverse culture? It isn't that UVM is dominated by racists, misogynists, or other types of bigots. Far from it. Rather, it's more likely we suffer from implicit bias. Implicit bias is an aversion against or preference for a person or group of people. It is an unconscious, unintentional reflex. Yet, it can dominate our thinking and lead us to unfair and counterproductive decisions.

To illustrate how implicit bias can work, consider the experience of symphony orchestras. For years, many orchestras had been concerned that they were disproportionately male. A few major symphonies converted to "blind auditions"—having candidates play behind a screen. Some had applicants remove their shoes, because the distinctive sound of high heels was a tip off that a woman was approaching. The results were dramatic, with a 30% increase in female musicians being selected in the final rounds (Goldin and Rouse 2000). So, even though philharmonics realized they had been depriving themselves of the very best musicians, women had to be demonstrably better than men to overcome implicit bias. The overall quality of musicianship suffered until the work-around was devised.

Iowa Supreme Court Justice Ed Mansfield has been concerned about implicit bias in the criminal justice system (Mansfield 2018). He observed that one of the ways to combat implicit bias is to be aware of it. He directs us to the Implicit Association Test (Harvard Office for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Belonging 2022), which has tests for 15 different types of biases, including race, skin tone, gender, weight, and others. It's worth spending some time to see how you fare on a few of the tests. Access the website and see how you do. The important point is that like symphony orchestras, we are likely shortchanging ourselves and our profession with our biases. By being aware, we can begin to solve the problem.

## CONCLUSION

The commitment of the UAA to advance our profession extends to welcoming the best and brightest into it. That means broadening our horizons for diversity in race, gender, personality types, and a multitude of other factors. Greater diversity isn't a threat. On the contrary, there is more than enough opportunity for us all. The promise is that we can build our profession by leveraging the full measure of resources of opinions, ideas, and abilities available to us. Read the perspectives in this issue of the *Utility Arborist Newslines*. How can we help but be energized at the potential diversity offers us and our profession?

It's clear that UVM isn't just for old White guys like me anymore, and that's a good thing.

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ACRT is proud to embrace women in a traditionally male-dominated field. One individual is Rachel Bienemann, who serves as ACRT Services' Laboratory Supervisor and Diagnostician.

From a young age, Bienemann knew she had a calling in biology. She remembers garnering an initial interest in marine biology from her childhood role model Rachel Carson, a marine biologist, author, and conservationist.

Bienemann eventually redirected her interest to ecology and conservation and later specialized in plant health management. She followed her dreams and earned a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Bowling Green State University and a Master of Plant Health Management from The Ohio State University–Ohio Agricultural Research & Development Center.

Now, as a young woman in STEM, Bienemann describes her mentors in the science, technology, engineering, and math field as professors and lab personnel she's worked with at various universities.

To advance ACRT Services' Research, Science, & Innovation department, Bienemann is using the advice and skills from her mentors to conserve and preserve. Her work focuses on logging and processing plant and insect samples collected in the field, identifying whether those samples are rare, threatened, and endangered species, then providing biological data to clients.

After taking a minute to reflect, Bienemann shared, "If I was talking to my younger self, I'd tell her, 'Even if people say you can't, you can.' Ask for help and keep pushing forward."

Whether it's dealing with ecology and conservation or searching for professional advice, Bienemann also stresses the importance of young professionals, like herself, seeking out industry participation, like at the UAA and ISA.

Learn more about how our employees like Bienemann are working to help sustain our world by visiting [acrt.com](http://acrt.com). 🌐

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