

Utility Arborist Newsline

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FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Celebrating Our Retiring UAA Executive Director: Phil Charlton

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

The UAA and our entire membership would like to congratulate Phil Charlton on his retirement after a fruitful, successful career. His time with us not only left a legacy, but a roadmap for future success. It was author Peter Drucker who said, “Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.” With Phil’s leadership this past decade, we have seen tremendous growth within the industry. Our mission to drive excellence, innovation, and improvement in utility vegetation management (UVM) through professional development, outreach, and the use of best practices is seen throughout everything the UAA, the volunteers, our sponsors and—perhaps, most importantly—our membership exemplify every day.

Phil’s leadership helped us focus on our core values and build a culture of safety, environmental sustainability, education, and operational excellence. You can see this throughout all of the events we host, webinars



we offer, education we provide, and much more. In fact, during the last 10 years, we have seen an increase in our membership by nearly 40%, hosted four safety summits per year and as many as eight regional meetings, and brought back our beloved Trees & Utilities Conference and Trade Show. Through Phil’s guidance, we have also made alliances and partnerships throughout the industry including ISA, Arbor



With Phil’s leadership this past decade, we have seen tremendous growth within the industry.

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Day Foundation, and Wildlife Habitat Council, to name a few.

John Goodfellow (Expert Consultant, BioCompliance Consulting, Inc.) has known Phil for more than 40 years. Their relationship began with incidental interactions but grew into friendship as time passed. John recounted his friendship and admiration for Phil:



"In the late 1980s, Phil was a principal in ECI's vegetation management (VM) consulting business. Ultimately, he was responsible for nearly 100 distribution line clearance (DLC) plans and several Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI) research projects. One of the DLC plans was for Puget Sound Power & Light (PSP&L, now PSE). PSP&L accepted his recommendation to create a formal VM program and brought me in as System Forester. That is when the two of us forged what has become a durable professional and personal friendship.

At one point, Phil expressed interest in joining the PSP&L VM program. It was clear that Phil was destined for bigger things, which is exactly what happened. He rose through the executive ranks of ECI, becoming president of a large and successful consulting firm. Many of my early foundational projects exploring the electrical characteristics of trees were completed on his watch, with his active guidance. When I left PSE to become vice president at ECI, Phil was my boss.

When Phil retired from ECI, he and his wife, Linda, wanted to do missionary work. So, he became the executive pastor to a congregation that included several families on the Forbes 400 list; in effect, he and Linda became missionaries to wealthy Americans. While there, he successfully oversaw the construction of a new church building and also established a mission supporting education in a small community in Honduras—a cause that he and Linda continue to support.

PHIL'S LEADERSHIP HELPED US FOCUS ON OUR CORE VALUES AND BUILD A CULTURE OF SAFETY, ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY, EDUCATION, AND OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE.



(Continued on page 6.)



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

By Paul Hurysz

MY PLAN FOR MY FUTURE, IN THE LAST DECADE OF MY CAREER, IS TO GIVE BACK MORE THAN I HAVE RECEIVED.

GREETINGS FELLOW UAA MEMBERS!

I hope this final note of mine as your president finds all of you doing well. My hope is, by the time this article reaches you, that we will all be looking forward to a renewed sense of normalcy—maybe even seeing each other face to face at the Trees & Utility Conference, beginning October 26.

THANK YOU!

I want to thank all of the staff members of the UAA for a very productive year—full of what we could all describe as *trying* circumstances. First and foremost, I'd like to personally thank our retiring executive director (ED), Phil Charlton, for the last 10 years of dedicated service to the UAA in that capacity, and more than 40 years of unselfish service to our industry. Phil is going to be missed in so many ways. Even though he has been contemplating retirement for some time now, his efforts for our organization seemed to have doubled this year—a true sign of a dedicated professional who loves what he does. There is no doubt in my mind that Phil has put our organization in an excellent spot to succeed for many years to come!

I'd also like to send out praise and thanks to Diona Neeser and Renée Phillips for their countless efforts and willingness to flex with the Board of Directors and executive team. With their help, we plotted a new course to grow the organization across North America and to develop into a resource of choice for the utility industry. Change is always difficult—and not always asked for—but these two fine professionals of ours have taken the revitalized vision, that current and past leaders of the organization modified, and accepted that vision for the betterment of the organization. I have no doubt that as the UAA staff grows with a new full-time ED and an Outreach and Marketing Manager, we will achieve that organizational, reputational,

educational, and service level success in ways we have only dreamed of!

Additionally, please take the time to send well wishes to your new volunteer executive leadership team and new directors, who traditionally shift in and out of roles every year. As we welcome the new ED and Outreach and Marketing Manager, feel free to send words of encouragement and offer to assist with initiatives—these are always well received, I promise you! The utility vegetation management (UVM) industry and the UAA are linked together, so please take the time to engage and forge lasting relationships that will strengthen our industry for the future.

ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Whether we realize it or not, we have been responsible for promoting a sustainable environment in rural and urban environments for *decades*! What we haven't done a particularly good job of is taking credit for our integrated vegetation management (IVM) practices from an environmental sustainability standpoint. Some members may be surprised to learn that not *all* social media and news about our industry has to be negative. By mitigating undesirable vegetation on right-of-ways (ROWs), we have been promoting ROWs that are made up of grasses, forbs, and wildflowers. By creating successional diversity in our ROWs, we promote wildlife and insect populations—including pollinators—that bring numerous benefits to our natural, agricultural, and wildlife communities.

In today's world, we have a number

of brilliant people working to improve what we do by increasing yields of beneficial plants and flora, while still preventing undesirable vegetation that creates reliability and safety issues as we manage our nation's electrical infrastructure. Please take the time to read through this issue of the *Newsline* to learn how innovation and diversity are positively changing the narrative perspective that is sometimes associated with the work we do.

STRENGTHENING OUR LEGACY

I have a deep, heartfelt appreciation for what the UAA has done for me and this amazing industry. There is a plethora of thought leaders who have given all of us so much shared knowledge and experiences to learn from. These leaders come from various roles like foresters, engineers, environmental scientists, wildlife biologists, and many other hard-working individuals—with or without a formal education—who have a sincere passion for UVM.

My plan for my future, in the last decade of my career, is to give back more than I have received throughout the years. I was so fortunate to receive—from those who came before me—knowledge to advance and promote safety as a value, educational opportunities that promote diversity, and relationships with organizations (such as the UAA) that give us all the platform for doing the right thing and creating an everlasting legacy. My plan is to nurture this continuous legacy of gift giving for the future. I have been blessed to have learned so much from so many of you. Thank you! It has truly been my honor serving you.

Wishing you all the best. Take care and stay well! ■



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(Continued from page 3.)

The second time he retired was when the UAA needed an executive director. Phil was the obvious choice and agreed to come out of retirement. The successful growth of the UAA provides further evidence of Phil's management acumen. The UAA gig was not full time, which provided the opportunity for Phil and I to collaborate on several consulting projects.

Now, Phil has announced he is retiring for a third time. Do I think Phil is done with work, moving on to a life of leisure, filling his days with golf and backgammon? Not a chance! It will be fun to see what comes next. Whatever it is, there is no doubt that it will be interesting, meaningful work, because that is who my friend, Phil Charlton, is."



When Phil came aboard the UAA as executive director, Rich Hendler (Integrated Vegetation Management Specialist, ACRT Services) was president of the UAA. Rich said, "As Phil appeared, interviewed, and was ultimately selected, it was like he was sent from Heaven to save me—seriously! Phil has been the steadying and guiding rudder for all of us presidents, officers, volunteers, and leaders throughout the years. He has steered the ship into the future and put us on a course that is destined for continued greatness. I can't thank him enough for his dedication, passion, and leadership."



"HE HAS STEERED THE SHIP INTO THE FUTURE AND PUT US ON A COURSE THAT IS DESTINED FOR CONTINUED GREATNESS."

– RICH HENDLER, IVM SPECIALIST AT ACRT SERVICES



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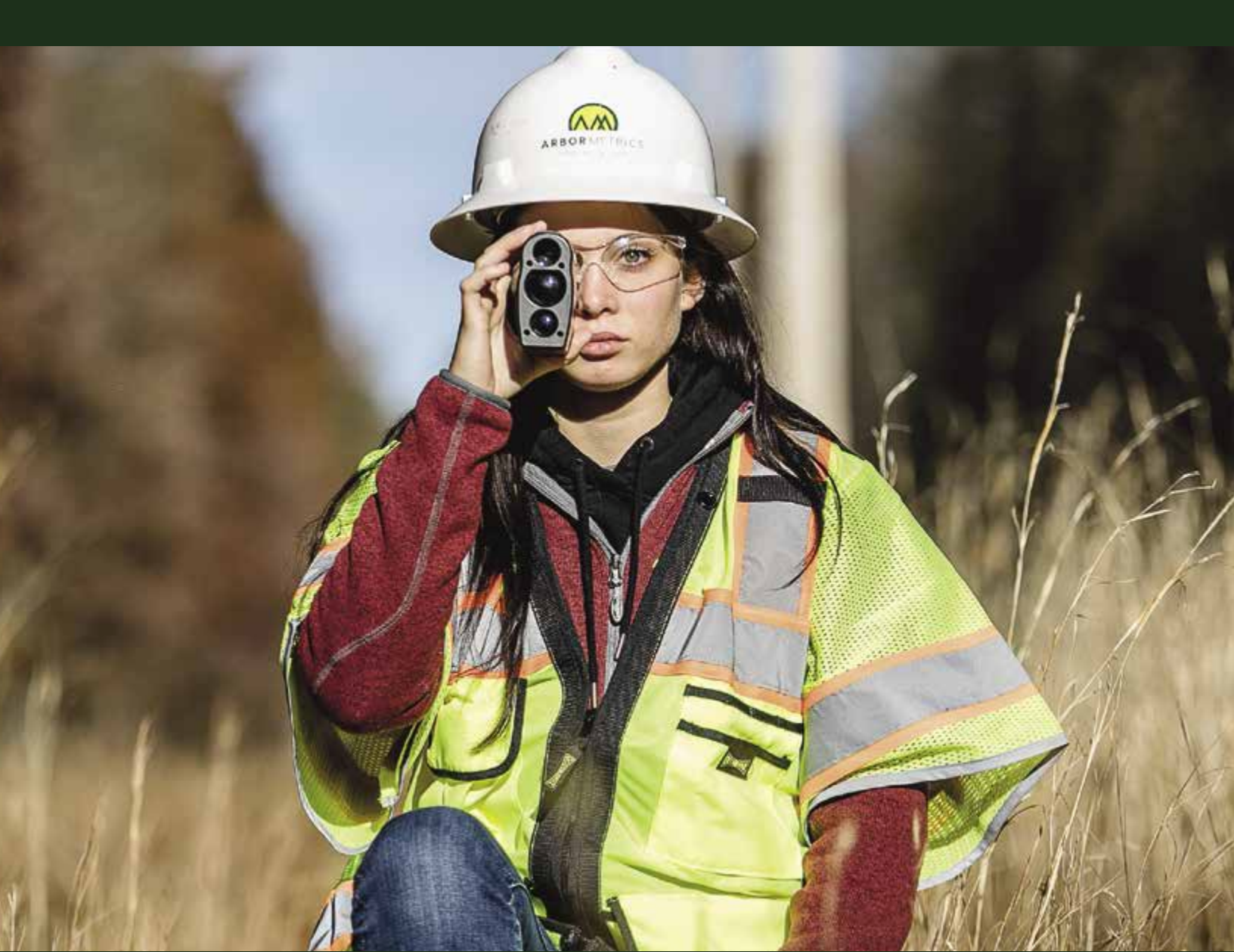
You need to translate vision into practice. That means securing and maintaining funding, balancing budgets, and turning expectations into repeatable outcomes. It's as invigorating and necessary as it is daunting and challenging—but also achievable and rewarding. You just need the right partner.

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Perhaps, no one understands Phil's role at the UAA better than Derek Vannice (President and COO, CNUC). Derek went to work at CNUC as Phil took over the role of executive director. Derek explained his experiences working with Phil:

"I have known Phil for a long time. We have shared some really good stories about the people in our profession throughout the last 30+ years. I consider him a friend and colleague, and I believe we have a unique shared set of experiences.

Phil served as president of a consulting company and became the UAA Executive Director, and I did the same in reverse order. I always enjoyed our phone conversations discussing the challenges we faced. We always kept it professional and ethical. The time we spent in Washington, DC, working on issues that challenged our industry were especially rewarding.

I consider it an honor and privilege to have worked with someone like Phil—still so passionate about our profession. I am pretty sure there have only been three executive directors or editors in the history of the UAA, so Phil and I are part of an exclusive club!"

Phil's former colleague, Dennis Holewinski (former CEO, Environmental Consultants, Inc.), described Phil as the "statistical wizard and a genius." He also knew of Phil's dedicated commitment to managing the construction of a large community church in Cincinnati, Ohio. He said, "Phil



had many interests, was a great storyteller of events and of normal life, and even was a gentlemen farmer—raising a heard of llamas near Madison, Wisconsin. Most of all, he was very generous with his time for charity and the church. Phil could always find a way to fix things when consulting projects hit snags. He was—and still is—a gentleman."

Phil has promised that he will be around, even as he enters this next chapter of his life. We wish him all the success he deserves. For those of us lucky enough to have worked with him, we know he will continue to find ways to make a difference in the world. Best of luck to him as he enjoys time with Linda, his two children (Amanda Lee and Nathan), his five grandkids, and all that brings him joy. You will be missed, Phil! ■

Dennis Fallon Named UAA Executive Director

The UAA is pleased to welcome Dennis Fallon of Ham Lake, Minnesota, as its Executive Director.

"This is an exciting time to take on the UAA leadership role and I can't wait to get started," said Fallon. "With education and research becoming more formalized, the UAA is well-positioned to lead and be considered an archive for educational resources. I believe this

will drive the industry toward sustainable practices that are socially and environmentally responsible."

Fallon is a Master Forester, Utility Arborist, and was most recently responsible for leading vegetation management (VM) programs across several upper Midwest states on behalf of Xcel Energy. He's also an adjunct professor at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, where he facilitates the Utility Vegetation Management Certificate Program—a combined effort of the UAA and the Utility Vegetation Management Association (UVMA). Fallon has an undergraduate degree in Urban and Community Forestry and a Master's degree in Forestry both from the University of Minnesota-St. Paul. He's an Eagle Scout who has also been honored with several additional prestigious awards from The Boy Scouts of America.

"We are excited to work with Dennis on growing the UAA Member services, developing relationships both within and outside of our immediate industry, and raising general awareness of the UAA and the importance of our organization," said Paul Hurysz, UAA President. "His experience is key to the plans we have in place to integrate and expand our offerings."

Fallon succeeds outgoing Executive Director Phil Charlton after serving 10 years at the UAA. With support from its parent organization, the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), Charlton oversaw the transition of the UAA to an independent governance structure. Since that time, the UAA has more than doubled its membership numbers and tripled in financial resources. Charlton plans to remain active with the industry through his consulting practice and volunteering. ■





#salutingbranches



SALUTING BRANCHES

Arborists United for Veteran Remembrance

SEPTEMBER 22

2021

What is Saluting Branches?

Saluting Branches:

Arborists United for Veteran Remembrance is a national day of service charity for tree care professionals to give back to our military veterans and their families.



In partnership with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Saluting Branches has brought together thousands of volunteers from the tree care industry. Since 2015, we have been helping make our veterans' final resting places safer and more beautiful for their friends and families to visit.

In 2021, join us for the 7TH ANNUAL SALUTING BRANCHES for a meaningful day of volunteer tree care at our veterans cemeteries and give back to those who have given us so much.

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www.SalutingBranches.org

Selecting herbicides that both control growth of tall-growing trees while allowing low-growing grasses can reduce the threat to overhead powerlines. Photo courtesy of Melanie Stewart.

Land Management and Environmental Stewardship Start with

By Rich Hendler, Integrated Vegetation Management Specialist, ACRT Services

BEST PRACTICES

The ways in which arboriculture professionals approach vegetation management (VM) can vary widely. For utility rights-of-way (ROW), continuous attention, planning, and targeted work are necessary to counteract potential hazards and interfering overgrowth.

One of the most effective tools that can be used to reduce manual workloads and foster more positive ecosystems in these targeted areas is selective herbicide use as part of an overall integrated vegetation management (IVM) program. But developing an effective herbicide program takes preparation and planning. And—more than anything—it simply requires following a handful of best management practices (BMPs) to reap the benefits.

SHIFTING PERCEPTION AND IMPROVING BIOLOGICAL COMMUNITIES

First, when it comes to the general public, herbicides are not always thought of positively. Whether it is the imagined theoretical harm that some of these materials can cause, or the volume of products used in a given application, there are some pervasive misconceptions about herbicides that tree care professionals must manage and mitigate.

In truth, today's herbicidal products undergo rigorous testing and approvals to ensure overall environmental safety. We used to measure the amount of materials used in gallons per acre, but today we use ounces per acre. The level of knowledge and skill pertaining

to responsible, selective herbicide use has evolved and matured throughout the years. Today, we are using it for the betterment of our environment.

Under IVM protocols, arborists have continued to shift how we think about undesirable target vegetation areas. ROW, for example, may no longer be seen as areas for repeat reclamation or mowing when it comes to vegetation growth. When the right control measures are taken—assisted by selective herbicide use—we can help transform ROW into desirable, thriving biological communities and a habitat in their own right.

When properly managed, herbicide use can help foster diverse communities of plant life by inhibiting invasive and undesirable growth,

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Utilities have thousands or even tens of thousands of line miles to manage. Identifying encroachments and other issues requires people to assess them one mile at a time — not only requiring significant time and resources but also putting field workers at risk. That's why ACRT Services and Satelytics have

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allowing beneficial plants to flourish. For example, tall-growing trees can pose an ongoing threat to overhead powerlines for an electric utility. Selecting herbicides to control the growth of these hazard trees can allow low-growing grasses—desirable to pollinators species—and shrubbery to flourish instead.

The benefits from this type of strategy are numerous. The need for manual control of problematic tree species is greatly reduced. Non-targeted desirable plant species become important pollinators, bringing new wild-life species, such as hummingbirds, butterflies, and bees into new areas, while dead stumps and stems left by the targeted tree species can become new habitats.

IVM AND HERBICIDE USE IN PRACTICE

Like any job in arboriculture, deploying effective herbicide use depends on following established BMPs. The golden rule? Successful application is careful, selective, and targeted.

Advancements in herbicide and carrier technology enable users to distribute herbicides at much lower volumes than in the past while remaining equally—if not, more—effective. Low-volume carrier products allow users to treat larger areas with less total herbicide, making for a minimized environmental impact and efficient treatment of targeted growth. This is seen in the widespread adoption and use of individual stem, or plant, applications. Low-volume basal bark treatment may be applied year-round while low-volume foliar (LVF) applications should be used during the growing season. Be sure to read and follow appropriate product labels to ensure proper application.

Following a closed chain-of-custody protocol when handling herbicide is also recommended. The UAA established a BMP—published by the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA)—which provides detailed guidelines on how this can be accomplished through the use of returnable, reusable (R/R) supply containers and close tracking of how, where, and when herbicides are being used. A closed system eliminates the need for handling concentrates and

mixing of herbicide-to-carrier ratios in the field. Instead, custom blends are created in a controlled environment, allowing your operation to ensure consistent and exact application. R/R containers also help eliminate the disposal of plastic jugs, cardboard, and pallets that are used if mixed in the field. Once R/R containers are no longer usable, they are recycled.

The closed chain-of-custody approach also reduces the chances that a worker and/or unintended parts of the environment are accidentally exposed to the herbicides being applied. By eliminating the need for in-field mixing, chances of spillage and exposure are minimized. Remember: safety first.

Overall, there are several identified selective applications and options for herbicide use in the arboriculture industry. Do your research, follow BMPs, and operate with safety at the forefront. You will be sure to find success.

Some BMPs to reference frequently include *Best Management Practices: Integrated Vegetation Management* by Randall Miller, *Best Management Practices (BMP) - Utility Pruning of Trees* by Geoff Kempter, and the *UAA BMP Closed Chain of Custody for Herbicide* by John Goodfellow and Harvey Holt.

AUTHOR BIO

Richard Hendler is the IVM specialist for ACRT Services. With his wide-ranging ROW knowledge, IVM expertise, and his deep industry involvement and leadership, he has helped bring new opportunities and successes to utilities throughout the country. He is a past president of the UAA and past president of the Oklahoma and Louisiana Vegetation Management Associations. Hendler served as the inaugural president of the Texas Vegetation Management Association, receiving their Lifetime Achievement Award. He was recently honored with the UAA President’s Award in the summer of 2016. Richard is an ISA Certified Arborist and utility specialist. Additionally, he holds a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Tulane University and a Master of Science in Agronomy and Crop Science from Texas A&M University. ■

Non-targeted desirable plant species are important for pollinators, such as bees. Photo courtesy of Josue Gonzalez.





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MENTORSHIP PROGRAM



The late
Nelson
Money and
his wife Pam

By Derek Vannice, President and Chief Operating Officer, CNUC

One of the items approved by the UAA Board of Directors—as recommended by an ad hoc committee to pay tribute to the late Nelson Money—is a mentoring program. The purpose of this program is to honor Money's legacy of mentoring young professionals in the industry. This would be accomplished by providing opportunities for students in the Utility Vegetation Management Association (UVMA) program and/or other utility vegetation management (UVM) educational programs to develop a one-on-one relationship with an experienced professional of the UVM industry.

The goal for the mentor–mentee relationship is to develop the students' skills in leadership and UVM. The mentor can provide a wealth of knowledge and expertise in these areas. By fostering a professional relationship outside their usual network, students will gain valuable insight into the UVM industry.

Some key components of the program include:

- A volunteer group of mentors—made up of UAA past presidents and key UVM volunteers with a minimum of 20 years in the profession
- Submitted applications that better pair mentor and mentees, in terms of interest and where students want to go in their career
- A newly launched pilot program—utilizing candidates in the UVMA program as the mentee paired with a mentor
- Evaluations by ad hoc UAA committee measuring the success of the program through surveys from candidates and mentors
- Flexible ways for participants in the program to meet with their mentors—in person for coffee or lunch, at industry events, by phone, or virtually
- Conversations should take place at a minimum goal of once per quarter
- Participants are encouraged to write a brief summary of their experience for the *UAA Newslines*

If successful, additional opportunities for mentors could be developed through other UVM programs at colleges and universities by the ad hoc committee.

To honor Nelson Money's legacy, the ad hoc committee will create an annual face-to-face networking session for mentors and mentees at the Trees & Utilities Conference. This session includes the option of wearing Hawaiian or fishing shirts and alcoholic beverages for participants who are 21 and older.

Committee members Derek Vannice, Craig Kelly, and Mike Neal have worked with Diona Neeser, Operations Manager for the UAA, to develop a mentorship program to provide utility arborists a place to interact with leaders in the industry. The mentors will provide insight into the UVM industry along with career paths with utility, vegetation management (VM), and consulting companies.

The UAA Utility Vegetation Management Professional Development Program, administered by the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point, is in need of more mentors to help up-and-coming utility arborists to gain knowledge and manage an integrated vegetation management (IVM) program. This program gives utility arborists

the ability to work with mentors who have established themselves as leaders within the IVM industry.

If anyone has an interest in becoming a mentor, visit form.jotform.com/210945339798168 to apply.

The ad hoc committee feels strongly that the relationships developed through this program could improve retention in our profession. Participants will gain a better understanding of the opportunities that are available to them. The program will provide a strong foundation in developing the future leaders of our industry. ■

THE FOLLOWING PEOPLE ARE CURRENT MENTORS:

Derek Vannice, President and
Chief Operating Officer
(CNUC)

Will Nutter, President and
Chief Operating Officer
(Wright Tree Service)

Jim Downie, Principal,
Utility Services (EDM
International, Inc.)

Erin Creekmur, Northeast
Service Planning
Supervisor
(Arizona Public Service)

Adam Warf, Director of New
Business Development
(Environmental
Consultant, Inc.)

Matt Goff, Vegetation
Manager
(Georgia Power Company)

To honor
Nelson Money's
legacy, the ad
hoc committee
will create an
annual face-to-
face networking
session for
mentors and
mentees at the
Trees & Utilities
Conference.

Nelsen Money SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

▶
Connor N. of Forest
Lake High School
was awarded the
Utility Arborist Nelsen
Money Scholarship.

By Mike Neal, President, Michael Neal
Consulting, LLC

The UAA Nelsen Money Memorial Scholarship committee is pleased to award the Utility Arborist Nelsen Money Scholarship to Connor N. from Forest Lake High School, Minnesota.

Connor was awarded a \$2,500 scholarship. He plans to study natural resources and environmental science and will play football at Central Lakes College in Brainerd, Minnesota, this fall.

"I am excited for this next chapter in my life, and this scholarship will assist me in reaching my goals," said Connor. "This will open doors for me, whether I pursue environmental engineering, arboriculture, or urban forestry."

This announcement—the first scholarship awarded—was published in the May 2021 UAA Member Update.

"I was able to meet Nelsen Money on

several occasions," said Connor. "I enjoyed spending time with him—whether talking about fishing, enjoying ice cream, or surprising him by being one of the few kids he knew who would eat a whole platter of seafood."

"My husband, Nelsen Richie Money, was many things to many people. But at his core, he was a mentor," said his wife, Pam Money. "He made a difference in many lives and touched so many people. He was a leader in utility vegetation management (UVM) and was deeply involved in the UAA."

Whether he was president, a member of the UAA, or championing the integrated and utility vegetation management causes, Money knew how to motivate and encourage people to action. Take a few minutes to learn more about him, and consider the student qualifications to apply



to—or donate to—the scholarship fund by visiting www.gotouaa.org/project/scholarship-program.

The Nelsen Money Memorial Scholarship Fund can be used for the UVM Professional Development Program or for college students enrolled in a major or minor program related to arboriculture, classical forestry, urban forestry and/or UVM at an accredited university.

For utility arborists interested in the UVM Professional Development Program, visit the UAA website at gotouaa.org for more information. ■

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MAKING THE CASE FOR GRASS-FRIENDLY BRUSH CONTROL

By Travis W. Rogers, Eastern U.S. Marketing Development Specialist, Corteva Agriscience

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Utility vegetation managers are responsible for safeguarding the integrity of utility infrastructure, but the impact of their work has the potential to reach far beyond the boundaries of electrical transmission rights-of-way (ROW). As many trees and brush species have the potential to interfere with electrical transmission lines when left unchecked, eliminating these common threats provides multiple benefits to utility companies as well as the environment and surrounding communities. However, as different methods of control provide varying results, research has suggested that grass-friendly brush control programs provide the most benefits.

Incompatible vegetation poses some of the most significant threats to utility infrastructure and electrical transmission reliability. Most vegetation management (VM) programs are set up to ensure there's a game plan in place to prevent issues, but there are clear trade-offs between commonly used control methods.

In the past, many vegetation managers relied on mechanized mowing and trimming to control problematic brush species. However, these nonselective methods of control are as effective on incompatible vegetation as they are on native plant communities. That's why selective herbicide applications and grass-friendly brush mixes are gaining popularity among utility companies looking to balance electric reliability and environmental sustainability.

► SUPPORTING RESEARCH

Unlike mechanical mowing and other nonselective control methods that stimulate regrowth and lead to costly re-treatment requirements, selective herbicide applications and grass-friendly brush mixes enhance the development of native plant communities. In fact, long-term studies—like the State Game Lands 33 (SGL 33) research project—have shown that these benefits work together to lower viable woody brush seed germination by as much as 88%, which reduces incompatible stem populations over time.

As a partner of SGL 33 research and manufacturer of solutions supporting

the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry, Corteva Agriscience launched a new product in 2020—TerraVue® herbicide—which is safe on grass. Powered by Rinskor® active—a reduced-risk herbicide that won the American Chemical Society's Green Chemistry Challenge Award—TerraVue was tested as a tank-mix partner with Vastlan® herbicide for applications throughout utility ROW in Georgia last year. Results showed the selective brush mix provided significant results just 90 days after treatment, positioning it as the preeminent mix for selective brush management.

In addition to SGL 33 research and results achieved through selective brush mix applications, *The Cost-efficiency of IVM* report by John W. Goodfellow is another industry resource that supports the use of selective herbicide treatments throughout utility ROW corridors. The report shows that by adding herbicide applications to mechanized practices throughout a 20-year period, integrated vegetation management (IVM) strategies that emphasize selectivity can yield significantly lower incompatible stem densities within utility ROW.

Having fewer incompatible species

525DEPS

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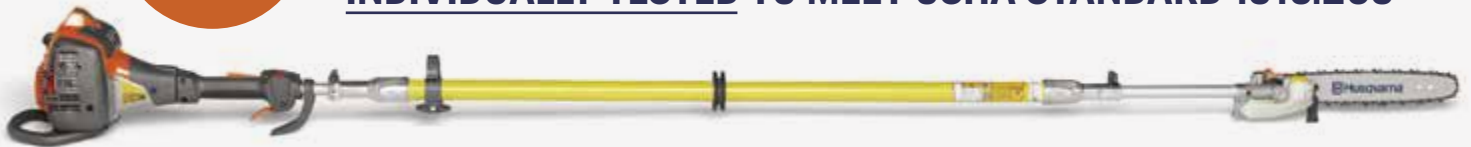


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▲ *Nonselective herbicide applications often cause collateral damage to native plant communities. Photo courtesy of Travis Rogers.*

to control long term doesn't just benefit a utility's land and bottom line, it also supports the development of biodiverse habitat and wildfire mitigation programs.

► **ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF GRASS-FRIENDLY BRUSH CONTROL**

According to the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), 75% of the world's flowering plants and about 35% of the world's food crops depend on animal pollinators to reproduce. As essential components of our habitats and ecosystems, pollinators rely heavily on native flowering plants, host plants, and nesting sites to survive throughout the growing season. However, there has been an alarming

reduction in pollinator populations in recent years, with a loss of habitat noted as a primary factor. With millions of acres of utility ROW weaving through the U.S., grass-friendly brush control programs can be used to manage problematic vegetation throughout these sites to conserve habitat for pollinators and a variety of other wildlife species.

Supporting the development of low-growing plant communities consisting of grasses, forbs, and

small shrubs also helps VM programs establish fuel breaks throughout utility ROW corridors. Since many perennial grasses or forbs do not significantly contribute to a fire's intensity, their presence provides a landscape of fire-resistant plant species that help to disrupt the spread of wildfires. According to a recent five-year study conducted by the California Department of Forestry and Fire Prevention (CAL FIRE), one in every 10 wildfires is caused by electrical

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THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE REPLANNING



When studying our close calls and incidents over the past year, a noticeable pattern began to emerge:

- The plan is made, with the team sharing common ground or mutual understanding.
- An event challenges the plan (i.e., something goes wrong).
- A new plan is developed.
- At least one team member is unaware of the change in plan, leaving someone cognitively behind, losing the common ground.
- An incident occurs while we attempt to recover.

Picture a team piecing down a tree but a saw gets stuck. What needs to go right in order to safely remove the saw? What measures would help to ensure safety? Imagine that the team did not explore the risks together and the replan was incomplete. Instead, the new plan was discussed in a native language, unintentionally leaving behind a team member with a language barrier. Then, when driving a wedge into the tree to remove the saw, the vibrations and force cause a limb to break loose and fall—narrowly missing the saw operator.

Depending on the event—perhaps occurring along a busy roadside—pressure to rectify the situation quickly may add an additional, unintended layer of risk and uncertainty.

When replanning, communication among all team members is critical, not only to keep everyone informed but also to seek diverse perspectives. When we bring people together to solve problems, we arrive at better decisions and lower our risk tolerance.

As a leader, your role is to ask good questions—not to have all the answers. Ask the team questions about how we could be surprised and how we could potentially fail. Probe for ways to work safely. Lastly, ask each person, by name, to share their concerns. Collectively, we will create a safer solution. ■

► **Utility vegetation managers shouldn't have to choose between safeguarding utility infrastructure and protecting the land for a sustainable future.**

LEWIS

“What I love most about working at Lewis is the fact that we are creating and maintaining special habitats. It’s really cool and underrated.”

- Colleen Byrnes



POWERED BY PEOPLE

Colleen is a Utility IVM Supervisor at Lewis and has been with the team for 18 years. She is ISA certified and currently works on our invasive species and hazardous programs as well as our restoration programs. Most recently, she has been working in the Berkshires handling threatened sedge.

At Lewis, we are responsible. It’s one of our operating principles we live by and how we measure success. We work hand-in-hand with utility biologists and botanists to identify areas that are home to endangered species and create habitats that protect them.

Learn more about Colleen’s story at <https://bit.ly/3h7ewVx> or scan the QR code.





Results 30 days (top) and 90 days (bottom) after treatment with TerraVue® herbicide. Photos courtesy of Darrell Russell.



power, making fuel break establishment an impactful strategy that helps to not only reduce ignition threats but also provide an area in which firefighters can safely and effectively suppress wildfires from spreading to nearby communities.

► **CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE**

Utility vegetation managers shouldn't have to choose between safeguarding utility infrastructure and protecting the land for a sustainable future. What's good for the land can also be good for business; grass-friendly brush-control programs are a shining example of that. To learn more about selective herbicides and the environmental benefits

they provide, visit HabitatWithHerbicides.com or connect with Corteva staff at this year's Trees & Utilities Conference in Minneapolis.

► **AUTHOR BIO**

Travis W. Rogers is a market development specialist for Corteva Agriscience within the Eastern U.S. Pasture & Land Management district. In his role, he supports 11 territory managers and serves as the interface between the commercial sales and R&D units. He has 15 years of experience working with energy companies, federal and state agencies, conservation groups, channel partners, and service contractors within the ROW and forestry industries. He is based in Charleston, South Carolina.

► **LEGALS**

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What's good for the land can also be good for business; grass-friendly brush-control programs are a shining example of that.

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THE UTILITY OF TREES

By Joe Anderson, Utility Forester, JEA

Utility: the state of being useful, profitable, or beneficial. By definition, trees are a valued utility built into the framework of a city's working infrastructure. The term "green infrastructure" applies to landscapes and natural systems that complement and enhance the built gray infrastructure of concrete, steel, block, pipes, and wire. The term can be traced back to a 1994 report to Florida Governor Lawton Chiles by the Florida Greenways Commission. Communities, neighborhoods, and urban centers can find the utility of the urban forests useful, profitable, and beneficial from the contributions and solutions they provide, including—but not limited to—air and water filtration, heat island abatement, storm water control, soil stabilization, aesthetics, and enhanced recreational experiences.

Utility foresters and arborist contribute to the safe and reliable utility services of electrical, water, wastewater, and trees. Most notably, they provide solutions to conflicts between trees and overhead electrical lines. In the mind of the utility arborist, the power of any community can be found in the canopy of trees. Regarding the laws of physics, one must consider that electricity will do what it is supposed to do—always. Wood may not be a good conductor of electricity, but the live vascular system of a tree, and/or the burnt carbon path etched into a tree trunk, can be a great conductor. We know that lightning strikes trees, is contained, and travels unseen through overhead electrical lines. It will strike trees if given a chance. With regards to electricity, *distance* is our friend. Though trees and utility lines share the same right-of-way (ROW) corridors, each has its own personal space—a distance and threshold that is enforced and respected.

The gray and green infrastructure will share the same space because a city and a tree are very much the same; they both start off small—like an acorn for the tree and a small town for the city. Neither the acorn nor the small town are going to be small forever. The acorn and the city need the same things. They need a little sun, water, and space to grow. Both are designed to grow, get big, and build. The tree builds girth to roots, trunks, and stems—building branches, twigs, buds, fruits, and flowers. The city builds infrastructure—building roads, sidewalks, buildings, parking lots, amenities, and utilities. The parts and pieces of trees and cities need to be maintained, and sometimes replaced. Both the tree and the city will need the proper people, positions, policies, and budgets in place to properly build, maintain, and prosper.

Take a closer look at the chemical distribution system flowing through a tree. It's similar to the electrical distribution system that serves the city. Both distribution systems have trunk lines, branches, laterals, switches, transformers, and are both grounded.

A tree will tap into the energy of the sun, convert it to chemical energy, and distribute the energy throughout its trunk, branches, twigs, buds, fruits, flowers, and leaves. There are established vascular pathways used to distribute the chemical energy: the xylem and phloem. If these pathways become blocked or broken, bad things will happen to parts of or the entire tree.

In a similar way, a city will tap into a source of electricity and distribute the energy throughout its trunk lines, branches, twigs, buds, fruits, flowers, and leaves. The buds, fruits, flowers, and leaves of the city are the businesses, essential services, public facilities, and residential homes. There are established pathways used to distribute the electrical energy. City ROWs are the xylem and phloem of the city. If the ROWs become blocked or broken, bad things will happen to parts of the city, or perhaps the entire city. Utility arboriculture is a discipline that secures the open pathways for both the gray infrastructure that we build and the green infrastructure that nature provides.

Inside the walls of a city, the individual tree is not alone. It stands as part of a larger narrative of an urban tree canopy, which is useful, profitable, and

beneficial. Cities, communities, and neighborhoods need to recognize that we need a sustainable and resilient tree canopy and the benefits it provides. We need oxygen, shade, soil stabilization, wood, pollution control, water infiltration, carbon sinks, inspiration, recreation, and fruits and flowers. We need natural pumps that can reach into the capillary space in soils and, through transpiration, pull recycled water from saturated soils up through the trunk, out through the leaves, and back into the air. We need sight buffers, sound barriers, wildlife habitat, natural areas, and tree-related jobs.

If a city is to incorporate the goods and services of trees among the social services and utilities that the city provides, it will need more than trees. It will need a sustainable and resilient forest canopy. This canopy will require a strong and responsive tree industry. A strong and responsive tree industry will include:

- Utility arborists
- Municipal foresters
- Private tree-care professionals
- Tree-minded nonprofit organizations
- Informed civic groups
- State and federal agencies
- Landscape architects
- Engineers
- Planners
- Educators
- Tree advocates, on many levels

We need a strong tree industry that can provide the solutions needed to enhance the benefits of trees and mitigate the risks and hazards. United in our efforts, trees will remain a useful, profitable, and beneficial utility built into the framework of a city's working infrastructure.

To the utility arborist, I very much appreciate who you are and what you do. Thank you for coming to work today!

AUTHOR BIO: *Joe Anderson is an ISA Certified Arborist and a member of the Florida Urban Forestry Council and the Utility Arborist Association. ■*

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This comprehensive training program is designed and facilitated by industry professionals, who will provide you with the knowledge and skills needed to plan and manage sustainable UVM programs.

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Our mission is to serve the utility vegetation management industry by providing an elite professional development program, offering current and future industry leaders with opportunities for professional certification through higher education and advanced training.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Utility Arborist Association (UAA) in cooperation with Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) is proud to offer full-tuition scholarships for the Utility Vegetation Management Certificate Program. These scholarships, which cover tuition for all 6 UVM courses, are available to residents of California and its bordering states. To apply for a scholarship visit the program page at www.pro-uvvm.org and look for this logo.



UAA SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAMS

MENTORSHIP

UAA Mentoring Program now accepting applications from students enrolled in the UVM Program. To apply go to: <https://form.jotform.com/210945721189157>

Questions regarding the scholarship and eligibility can be directed to info@uvmscholarships.org.

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NARROWING THE GAP: Advancing into Your Management Role

By Josiane Bonneau, Chief Operating Officer, Wildlife Habitat Council

This fourth and final article in the “Narrowing the Gap” series explores the uphill battle facing women seeking to advance into their first management role or leadership position. As of 2020, women only occupied 25% of C-suite jobs within the top 1,000 companies in the U.S. Given the disproportionate impact that the pandemic had on working women, this percentage is likely even lower in 2021.

The advancement gap captured the utility sector’s attention decades ago but has recently gained momentum. Stakeholders—especially investors—have come to expect meaningful diversity commitments and equitable representation in executive positions and on boards. Supply organizations are prioritizing vendors with diverse leadership. If you work with request for proposals (RFPs) and bids, you have likely seen this firsthand with diversity-oriented requirements. Given the correlation between diverse, inclusive teams and better performance, these objectives are becoming an industry standard. Many supply-chain initiatives are following suit, integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) considerations into their scorecard criteria to broadly influence inclusive practices.

Given these external pressures, companies in the utility sector and beyond are swiftly working to adopt equitable advancement practices. This type of transformation, however, is



Mentorships can help move women into management and leadership roles but are beneficial to all employees.

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not instantaneous and requires strategic effort—mirroring the actions needed to attract, recruit, and retain gender-balanced talent (as explored in previous “Narrowing the Gap” installments). Companies must embrace a holistic and forward-looking approach to advancement in order to position themselves ahead of the curve in the constantly evolving realm of DEI. While this corporate commitment is important, individuals also have the power to cultivate a culture of equity. Each of us can—and should—use our individual actions and realms of influence to champion women and become change agents.

The good news is, best practices that address roadblocks to equitable advancement are well-documented. Many companies and organizations in utilities, arboriculture, and vegetation management (VM) have already embraced gender diversity through internal advancement practices and participation in external initiatives, such as the United Nations’ HeforShe campaign.

Given the need to respond quickly to external pressures, however, many companies and individuals wish to take further action. The following strategies are proven methods of attaining equity and inclusion within management and leadership. These tactics can be used concurrently, resulting in a truly integrated approach to diversity in leadership.

Each of us can—and should—use our individual actions and realms of influence to champion women and become change agents.

ADOPT A TEAM-BASED APPROACH TO WORK

In this approach, as a team (e.g., a project, development, quality assurance, production, client, or research and development team) cycles through tasks, different team members assume the role of leader. This rotation gives each employee an equal opportunity to develop and showcase the skills critical to leading high-performance teams—particularly prized conscientiousness

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and agreeableness. This approach can be instrumental in advancing women into their first leadership roles, which is a commonly identified, early career barrier to advancement.

OFFER A RANGE OF DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

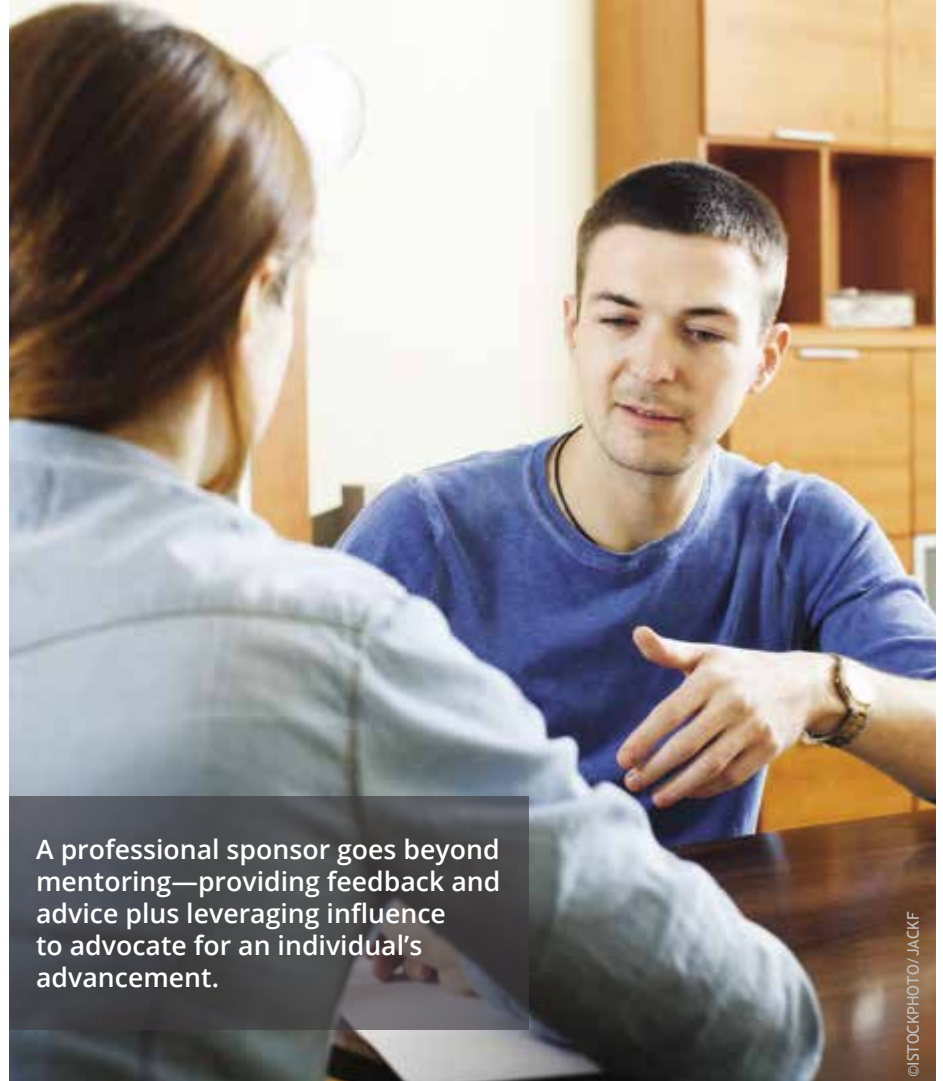
Continued professional development and skills training should be readily offered. Internal development opportunities can take many forms, from shadowing to standardized training. Consider external resources, too. They bring in new ideas and are a good option for smaller organizations that lack the bandwidth for comprehensive options internally. Regional leadership development programs are offered across the U.S. Participation tends to be sponsored by employers and typically lasts several months. Participants build individual skill sets while establishing a valuable network of colleagues—addressing a known barrier in the fewer professional connections that women tend to have.

BREAK BARRIERS THROUGH MENTORSHIPS

The popularity of formal and informal mentoring in U.S. companies has wavered over time. These relationships focus on the future development and career path of the mentee, supplementing the coaching provided by managers that often focuses on an employee's current responsibilities. Mentorships can help move women into management and leadership roles but are beneficial to all employees. For instance, recent findings from the University of Michigan show that female executives mentoring men can help remedy gender inequality. Rather than focusing on opportunities for women, encourage mentor-mentee relationships that make significant transitions in knowledge, work, and thinking across gender.

TRANSFORM THE WORKFORCE THROUGH SPONSORSHIP

When asked if mentoring was enough, a sample of U.S. leaders responded with a resounding “no!” They emphasized the need for sponsorship. A professional sponsor goes beyond mentoring—providing feedback and advice plus leveraging influence to advocate



A professional sponsor goes beyond mentoring—providing feedback and advice plus leveraging influence to advocate for an individual's advancement.

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for an individual's advancement. Sponsors are often senior managers who can get their protégés involved in key assignments and can selectively connect them to other prominent executives, while steering them away from leaders who may be less helpful. Sponsorship initiatives address the visibility roadblock experienced by women.

REFLECT GENDER EQUITY IN SUCCESSION PLANS

Efforts like mentoring and training can provide quick results, but employers must also work equitable practices into long-term strategies. Integrating DEI conventions into succession planning can ensure gender diversity in top jobs. Despite the proven value of such plans, it is common practice to begin searching only after an executive has announced their departure. The urgency of filling the position can drive hiring managers to make decisions out of convenience, often resulting in the promotion of a traditional candidate from a manager's immediate network. Use succession planning to identify good female leaders. Leverage any mentorship, sponsorship, or training initiatives to provide them with a clear career pathway and the knowledge, skills, and abilities they need now and in future positions.

While the reasons and context to support gender-balanced leadership have evolved, the tactics remain mostly the same. Many of these methods can build off existing employee development initiatives. Our industry sector has proven more than once that it can transform and be innovative in not only meeting but exceeding expectations. The post-blackout era is a testament to that ability, as well as the UAA Members' track record in safety—and the evolution of stewardship is headed in that direction. There is no doubt that the individuals and businesses operating in VM can lead the successful transition and cultural shift toward a gender-balanced workplace. ■

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Companies that go above and beyond to support our mission will be recognized annually through our Partners in Excellence (PinE) Program.

Membership, sponsorship, advertising, active committee volunteerism, and many other means have been quantified and assigned a value, all adding up to equal a PinE Score.

All applications and supporting material of qualifying companies are reviewed and selected by the PinE Committee.

We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2020 PinE Award Recipients.

Your continued support of the Utility Arborist Association is greatly appreciated on many levels.



2020 PinE Award Recipients

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SILVER AWARD



BRONZE AWARD



SPOTLIGHT



ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Clearing the Way for the Environment

By John McPherson, Consultant, FirstEnergy

©ISTOCKPHOTO/SURASAK SUWANMAKE

Met-Ed's vegetation management (VM) efforts are creating an oasis for threatened species.

Nestled at the base of forested mountains, the city of Reading, Pennsylvania, has become a destination for hikers and cyclists who are drawn to more than 125 miles of trails in five major preserves. One of these, Neversink Mountain, is the site of a unique, ongoing FirstEnergy partnership that has transformed a transmission line right-of-way (ROW) into a specialized habitat that nurtures plants and wildlife.

The Neversink Mountain Preserve and Community Forest encompasses 1,065 acres of woods, shrublands, and headwater creeks, managed by the Berks Nature conservation organization.

While it's a preserve today, nature at Neversink had a rough couple of centuries. After the Reading Railroad was built in the 1830s, Neversink became a tourist destination, with miles of rail and trolley lines, large hotels, and amusement parks.

Much of that was gone by the end of World War I. But in 1927, Met-Ed built a transmission line across the mountain. Newer lines were built in the 1950s and 1970s, and today, a broad ROW corridor runs across Neversink's otherwise-wooded ridge.

The corridor, up to 100 feet wide in places, contains two parallel 69 kV lines, and is actively managed by Met-Ed to keep it free of vegetation that might interfere with reliable transmission. By working together, Met-Ed and Berks Nature have transformed the ROW into a valuable habitat.

"We take pride in our relationships with our community and organizations," said Manager Katrina Schnobrich, Transmission Vegetation Management. "Two years ago, we rebuilt one of the lines, which provided an opportunity. While we need to ensure reliable service and the safety of our lines and the land, we also recognize that our communities have needs as well. The goal was to come together and agree upon best practices that are beneficial for all parties."

Coordinating with Berks Nature, Met-Ed performed significant VM work within the easement, and, in the process, turned a transmission ROW into a sanctuary. "We worked with ecologists and biologists to ensure that native and beneficial species remained and would thrive," Schnobrich said.

"Environmental scientists flagged specific plants either for removal or preservation," said Associate Transmission Forestry Tech Nathan Reed. "During the initial line construction, we removed vegetation in large areas where it was called for. However, in specialized areas and around sensitive vegetation, we used backpacks to apply herbicides with more precision."

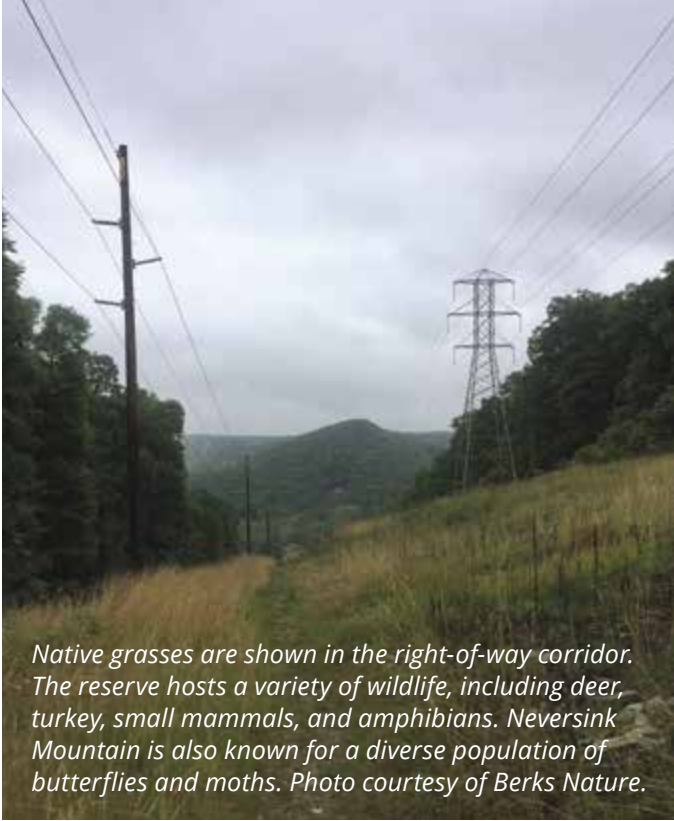
Met-Ed turned the wide ROW corridor into acreage that acts like a natural forest clearing, providing a home for sensitive species that, today, are losing habitat.

"In the old days, there were more niche habitats available for species to thrive in. But increased commercialization and suburbanization have decreased the amount of land available to these species," said Senior Scientist Kelly Grube, Transmission Permitting. "We worked to encourage a number of ecologically important species on Neversink. These included eastern gamma grass (*Tripsacum dactyloides*), which is endangered in Pennsylvania, wild bleeding hearts (*Dicentra eximia*)—locally important and found mostly along the spine of the Appalachian Mountains—and yellow wild indigo (*Baptisia sphaerocarpa*), which is a host plant for the critically imperiled frosted elfin butterfly caterpillar (*Callophrys irus*)."

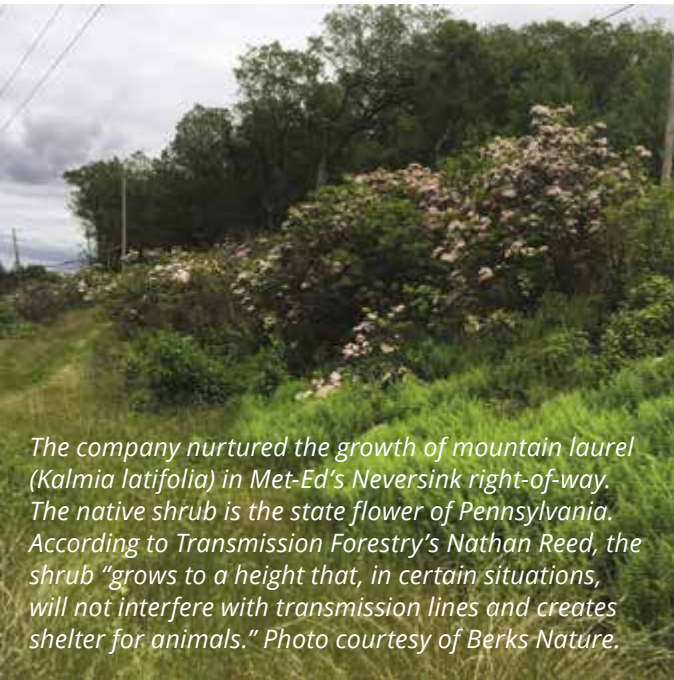
Wildlife supported by the cultivated environment includes a species of turtle native to the area.

"I think there is increasing recognition in the environmental community that our ROW can be beneficial for species that otherwise may find themselves increasingly threatened by habitat loss," said Grube.

The work on Neversink Mountain isn't finished. Met-Ed



Native grasses are shown in the right-of-way corridor. The reserve hosts a variety of wildlife, including deer, turkey, small mammals, and amphibians. Neversink Mountain is also known for a diverse population of butterflies and moths. Photo courtesy of Berks Nature.




*The company nurtured the growth of mountain laurel (*Kalmia latifolia*) in Met-Ed's Neversink right-of-way. The native shrub is the state flower of Pennsylvania. According to Transmission Forestry's Nathan Reed, the shrub "grows to a height that, in certain situations, will not interfere with transmission lines and creates shelter for animals." Photo courtesy of Berks Nature.*

is scheduled to rebuild the second transmission line in the ROW, and planning is underway to further enhance the ecological corridor.

"It takes an extreme amount of planning," said Schnobrich. "We have to coordinate work with groups across the company, including VM, Environmental Services, Lines, Construction and Engineering. This really is an across-the-board commitment within Met-Ed."

"It's a nice opportunity to show the public that we care, and we want to be a positive force in the community," said Supervisor Layne Miller, Transmission Vegetation Management. ■


BOOTS TO THE BOARDROOM



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New Tools for Compatible Species Management in IVM

By Derek Vannice, President and Chief Operator Officer, CNUC and Stan Vera-Art, Creative Catalyst, Grow With Trees Company

Vannice and Vera-Art are both co-chairs of the UAA Working Group.

The new Working Group was created by the UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee this past fall. The focus was to create the next level of tools for utility vegetation and land managers to incorporate compatible species management practices easily into their integrated vegetation management (IVM) programs.

In addition to the strategic removal of targeted incompatible vegetation, IVM provides opportunities to protect, enhance, and help propagate *compatible* species that benefit pollinators and other wildlife. Proactively managing for compatible vegetation not only provides you with free biological control against incompatible woody species but also to integrate secondary benefits that are reportable on your company's annual sustainability indices. Providing a biodiverse and compatible habitat on the lands we manage is not only a path we vegetation managers need to walk, but communities around the world are striving towards as well.

The tasks at hand for the working group were clear: create a series of concrete tools that provide an accessible framework for utilities to build buy-in and increase adoption of IVM practices that promote compatible species and biodiversity. One such tool is the business case for IVM, which includes information on economic, regulatory, environmental, and stakeholder-engagement topics. It provides guidance for getting executive-level buy-in, building support from regulatory agencies, securing long-term funding, and workforce considerations when managing for compatible species and biodiversity.

Another tool under development is

an addendum to the *Best Management Practices: Integrated Vegetation Management*—the third edition arriving this year. The addendum follows the updated IVM flowchart from the perspective of proactively managing for species and diversity of compatible vegetation. Detailed descriptions of recommended BMPs to protect, enhance, and propagate compatible vegetation are provided, as well as two case studies illustrating these BMPs.

The third tool is a compatible species scope template. Most vegetation management (VM) scopes of work are geared around the management of incompatible species only. Few examples of specifications that promote the management of compatible species

exist. For instance, utilities in wildfire-prone areas may specifically instruct crews to not damage fire-resistant plants during line clearing activities. The template will provide guidance and assistance to vegetation managers who want to formally integrate compatible species management activities into their programs.

The tools will be made available to download

or print on the UAA website, likely this fall. Stay tuned for an in-person update during the Trees & Utilities Conference in October. In the interim, the working group is seeking volunteers to test and refine these tools. If you are interested, contact Derek Vannice (dvannice@cnuutility.com) or Stan Vera-Art (branchout@growwithtrees.com).

The future of IVM is not only advancing our specialized approaches for targeting incompatible species, but also taking advantage of the many benefits that compatible species can provide to the landscapes we manage. ■

Incorporating compatible species management practices provides land managers with free biological control against incompatible species, creating a biodiverse and compatible habitat.

THE WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

Sarah Ball, Director Environmental Affairs (Edison Electric Institute)

Bob Bell, Manager Transmission Vegetation Management (Pacific Gas & Electric)

Phil Charlton, Executive Director (UAA)

Caroline Hernandez, Program Coordinator Sustainable Landscapes (University of Illinois Chicago)

Nikki Hill, Compatible Species Specialist (Grow With Trees Company)

Gabriel Karns, Visiting Assistant Professor (Ohio State University)

Joshua Legg, Environmental Specialist II (U.S. Environmental Protection Agency)

Jack McCabe, Vice President and General Manager Utility VM Solutions (Davey Resource Group)

Megan Provost, President (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)

Andrew Rable, Manager Forestry, Fire and Resource Management (Arizona Public Service)

Dan Salas, Senior Ecologist (Cardno)

Rebecca Spach, Director Vegetation Management (FirstEnergy)

Derek Vannice (Co-chair), President and Chief Operator Officer (CNUC)

Stan Vera-Art (Co-chair), Creative Catalyst (Grow With Trees Company)

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Vegetation Management Specialists

The Evolution and Direction of

BIODIVERSITY DISCLOSURES

By John Steelman, Program Analyst, Grow With Trees

Sustainability analytics for the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) are collected annually via S&P Global's—formerly RebecoSAM's—Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA). In the past four years, biodiversity metrics have changed significantly, reflecting the importance of this topic to the global investment community. Prior to 2017, RebecoSAM's CSA collected qualitative descriptions of direct and indirect impacts of business operations on biodiversity. Reporting companies had the freedom to embellish descriptions of operational impacts on biodiversity—read integrated vegetation management (IVM)—virtually unchecked.

That changed in 2018. RebecoSAM modified their biodiversity metrics to include a requisite biodiversity exposure assessment of biologically sensitive areas and species on owned and leased lands—rights-of-way (ROW) included. Additional requisite elements also included the development of biodiversity management plans for identified sensitive locations and publication of a biodiversity commitment. This year, a couple of years after S&P Global acquired RebecoSAM, S&P Global upped the ante. Today, disclosures include the aforementioned elements plus the addition of supporting documentation, requiring a company to submit proof that they have developed biodiversity management plans for biologically sensitive areas.

What can we infer from the evolution of biodiversity disclosures from the past four years, and how should investor-owned utilities interpret

these changes? As environmental, social, and governance (ESG) biodiversity disclosures become increasingly specific, investor-owned utilities should recognize that, very soon, they won't be able to hide thousands of minimally managed acres (for biodiversity) in their corporate sustainability reports by exhibiting 10 acres of manicured pollinator plots.

Globally, the rate of biodiversity loss is increasing annually, as is the forecast of biodiversity-related risks that threaten to interfere with sustainable economic growth. Some utilities may view the biodiversity requirements of S&P Global as overly technical and complex, but realistically, they are a best minimum practice in the 21st century. Utilities that adopt

and adapt will better maintain operational flexibility and capture sustainable long-term investment, all while decreasing rates for customers.

Full disclosure, it's currently possible to disclose biodiversity metrics without managing for biodiversity on the ground. It's possible to undertake a network-wide biodiversity exposure assessment and provide a publicly available biodiversity commitment—which will increase a company's biodiversity scores—all without changing a single practice on the ground. However, given the increasingly specific reporting requirements that RebecoSAM and S&P Global demand for biodiversity disclosures, utilities won't be able to embellish their scores much longer. Currently, there is no



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third-party verification for biodiversity metrics as there are for other S&P Global metrics, which would be the logical next step.

In a previous article, “Boots to the Boardroom: Leveraging ESG Biodiversity Sections for IVM Programming,” *Newsline* Vol. 11, No. 5, we examined fulfilling the requirements of S&P Global’s biodiversity section and using the results to double-dip with the Global Reporting Initiative. In this article, I’d like to outline how a utility can phase up an approach to disclosing biodiversity, because it doesn’t have to be done all at once. Sustained scoring gains can be accomplished by phasing in the requirements of S&P Global and can be maintained by continually updating supporting documentation. The following strategy has proven to increase biodiversity scores and keep them high.

The first task is to perform a biodiversity exposure assessment, CSA Section 2.4.2. This provides the basis from which to build a biodiversity commitment to fulfill CSA Section 2.4.1. Before a company can commit to managing for biodiversity, it must first identify and understand the biologically important areas and species contained within its service territory, and, ideally, understand the direct and indirect effects that operations have on relevant sensitive species. If a utility is composed of multiple operating companies, biodiversity exposure assessments can be completed piecemeal, gradually contributing to the parent company’s annual disclosures. In some cases, it can take years to develop the GIS resources to perform a

biodiversity exposure assessment, and that is okay. Displaying targets and a commitment to completing the process will garner partial scores from S&P Global.

Second, results of the biodiversity exposure assessment should be used to understand the direct and indirect impacts of business operations on sensitive species and to develop targets for the creation of biodiversity management plans for biologically important areas (minimum submission criteria include International Conservation of Nature Protected Area Categories I-IV, World Heritage Sites, and Key Biodiversity Areas). Currently, S&P Global provides no guidance for the shape or size of a biodiversity management plan. Using multiple available publications, *Grow With Trees* developed a biodiversity management plan template for ROW within protected areas. If you’re interested, email me, John Steelman, at scion@growwithtrees.com to request a blank biodiversity management plan template.

As with a phased approach to the biodiversity exposure assessment, S&P Global allows for development of biodiversity management plans through time. Once protected areas are identified, the utility should outline a strategy for its biodiversity management plan development and disclosure. Work planning cycles are a great way to complete these plans without being overly burdensome. Utilities on a four-year cycle will have management plans completed in four years. After four years, they will be ready to evaluate any changes on the ground that contribute to No Net Loss (NNL) or Net Positive

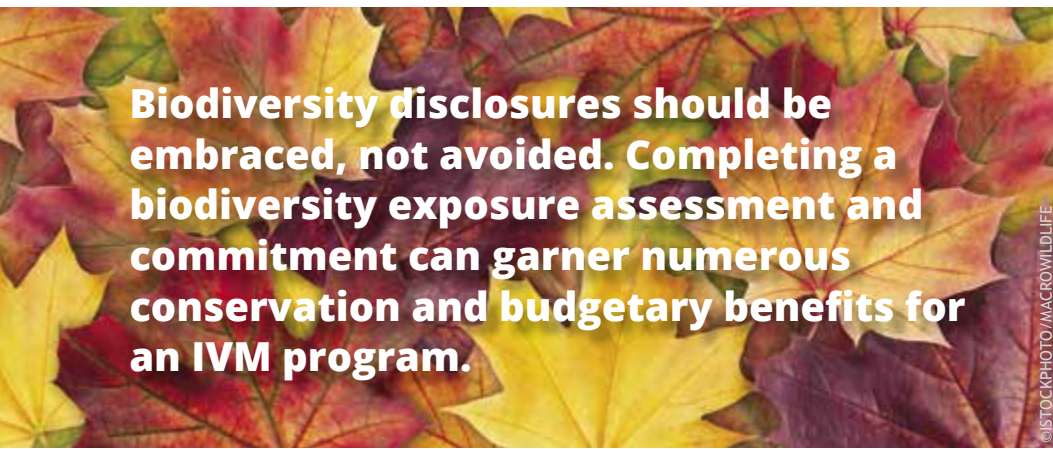
Impact (NPI) within protected areas and for sensitive species.

For anyone worried that disclosure of sensitive species will be made public, inviting increased regulation from federal or state agencies, that is not the case. Supporting documentation is only shared with S&P Global as proof of completion and maintenance. A utility may choose to share as little or as much information with regulatory and coordinating managing agencies as they choose.

The final step to completing S&P Global’s biodiversity section is to develop a publicly available biodiversity commitment. When developing a biodiversity commitment, my recommendation is to begin as early as possible. Company commitments often need to be reviewed by various departments, including legal and corporate responsibility, so start this process early. Requirements of S&P Global’s biodiversity commitment rarely exceed regulatory requirements and utility-specific environmental policies. This requirement is not a particularly heavy lift, and it can strengthen a vegetation management (VM) department’s justification for IVM and stable budgets.

Vegetation on owned lands and ROW is not a depreciating asset. Therefore, establishment and maintenance of native, low-growing, early-successional, biologically diverse vegetation communities contribute to reduced long-term maintenance costs and align with biodiversity management goals and ESG reporting. Additionally, if your utility has an advanced IVM program, pollinator projects, or initiatives, then research and development as well as external partnerships are excellent additions to a biodiversity commitment. This is a great avenue for highlighting the conservation work that many utilities are doing.

Biodiversity disclosures should be embraced, not avoided. Completing a biodiversity exposure assessment and commitment can garner numerous conservation and budgetary benefits for an IVM program. And your efforts to support biodiversity management on owned lands and ROW contribute directly to the long-term sustainable business practices at your utility. ■



Biodiversity disclosures should be embraced, not avoided. Completing a biodiversity exposure assessment and commitment can garner numerous conservation and budgetary benefits for an IVM program.

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2021 ACRT Area Safety Representatives



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The ACRT Area Safety Representatives (ASR) program began as a pilot in 2010. Based on the success of the program and its contribution to our culture of safety, it became an annual program. ASR members assist in safety communications, safety auditing, identifying at-risk behaviors, near-miss reviews, and incident investigations. Members are safety champions and serve as a conduit between safety management and field employees. They aid in the training and tracking of safety-related items throughout their region and mentor those who need extra help.

Meet the leadership and newly appointed members of the ASR team:

Anna Davis, (Chair) Operations Manager
Brian Elam, (Co-chair) Assistant Operations Manager
Brian Anisimov, Senior Consulting Utility Forester
Cody Brammer, Consulting Utility Forester
Amy Brown, Notifier Team Lead
Mark Coffman, Consulting Utility Forester
Joshua Coppen, Utility Design Arborist
Hunter Davis, Contract Forester
Edward Farris, Consulting Utility Forester
Joel Favor, Notifier Team Lead
Myron Green, Consulting Utility Forester 2
Jeff Gwozdz, Roving Utility Forester

George Hanke, Consulting Utility Forester
Rene Hernandez, Consulting Utility Forester
Brian Higgins, Intermediate Work Planner
Charles Holley, Consulting Utility Forester
Lorraine Konopka, Consulting Utility Forester
Jeremiah Lawhorn, Consulting Utility Forester
John McMillin, Consulting Utility Forester
Jordyn McNeil, Lead Arborist
Preston Millsaps, Safety Coordinator
Matthew Mitchell, Consulting Utility Forester 2
Bailey Reitz, Notifier 3
Brennan Silecchia, Vegetation Management Arborist A
Marion Smith, Work Planner
Ryan Smith, Consulting Utility Forester
Richard Vanness, Consulting Utility Forester
Zach Wilder, Consulting Utility Forester

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GIS Technology for Community Engagement

By Chris Kelly, President and CEO, Clearion

When you read the annual reports of today's utilities, you cannot miss the heightened focus on environmental sustainability and community engagement. Contributing to society and promoting goodwill is as important to the C-suite as meeting regulations, maintaining the infrastructure, and ensuring grid reliability. Yet, when it comes to solving

complex operational challenges, the answer may be one casual conversation away.

Enter a series of serendipitous events. Last spring, my son got extra credit to meet his biology teacher at an urban farm where they spent the day planting perennials and placing mulch on plant beds and walking paths. This working farm is staffed by volunteers and not only serves as an educational

site but also as a community support program for women transitioning from prison to civilian life. That day, while the students were learning about how mycelium (i.e., the underground part of fungi) support healthy crops and other vegetation, I discovered from talking with a volunteer that it was difficult for the farm to find and coordinate wood chip deliveries. I had a light bulb moment.

“Zoo Atlanta is fortunate because our climate allows for the growth of a wide variety of bamboo species. Our local community is very supportive, and we count on bamboo donations to help us feed our pandas.”

– Dr. Sam Rivera, Doctor of Veterinary Medicine, Zoo Atlanta



▲ *The GIS system allows the community to submit their bamboo donation to the zoo to harvest for the pandas. Photo courtesy of Zoo Atlanta.*



▲ *GIS technology helped tree-trimming contractors get rid of their wood chips, save time, and get mulch to organizations that need it. Photo courtesy of Kate Byars Photography.*

The next week, I reached out to Georgia Power and asked if they would be willing to map wood chip dump sites in their vegetation work management system. They were excited to do so. Now, when large community gardens or urban farms need wood chips, they toggle the chip dump site green on the Clearion map and await their delivery. Before driving outside of the sprawling city of Atlanta to dump their wood chips, tree-trimming contractors can check their maps for any green pins nearby. It’s a win-win situation where wood chips are delivered to organizations in need and tree-trimming crews save windshield time and minimize their carbon footprint.

Around the same time, while I was serving on the board for the Olmstead Linear Park Alliance—a nonprofit organization that maintains a 45-acre greenspace in metro Atlanta—we recognized a significant need for mulch along our 6,000 linear feet of paths and thousands of native trees and shrubs. We added eight more wood chip sites throughout the park.

During a subsequent meeting with Georgia Power, where we were reviewing the Clearion software configuration and discussing how wood chip sites were organically popping up on their maps, we started pondering if a similar solution could better enable Georgia Power’s partnership with Zoo Atlanta to provide vegetation to feed the animals. One of the zoo’s largest responsibilities is being able to provide a constant and reliable supply of food to meet the dietary requirements of their animals.

At the time, Georgia Power was sending an employee ahead of trimming crews to identify tree and brush species. If they were the right match for the zoo’s browsers (e.g., elephants, zebras, and giraffes that feed on leaves, bark, shoots, and shrubs), the contractors would leave the fresh vegetation for the zoo to pick up in a timely fashion. While well intended, this became a difficult and costly error-prone process, using phone- or text-based



◀ Students volunteered at an urban farm planting perennials and mulching plant beds and walking paths. Photo courtesy of Kate Byars Photography.

communication and coordination which led to homeowner complaints if the pickups were delayed.

At Clearion, we simply added a workflow to the existing system to automate the innovative animal food program. Georgia Power can now identify the right vegetation for tree crews to retain, and contractors can mark the site as “ready for pickup.” The zoo can access this information via their web portal or mobile app, update the disposition, and indicate if the vegetation is fully or partially picked up. Both the zoo and Georgia Power have access to a live dashboard for real-time visibility, and the zoo has access to an abundance of fresh vegetation. Getting vegetation from local sources not only enriches the lives and diets of zoo animals, but it simplifies the workload for animal caretakers and horticulturists.

When a Clearion friend at Zoo Atlanta learned of the Georgia Power program, she inquired if a similar

solution could work for panda food sources. The head nutritionist at the zoo wanted to expand and improve their program for harvesting bamboo—the staple diet for giant pandas (*Ailuropoda melanoleuca*), which grows abundantly across the metropolitan area. However, she was facing similar difficulties locating and tracking the different species. To bolster their public relations outreach, the zoo needed an efficient and effective way to get homeowners into the program while facilitating accurate and timely communication with the zoo.

We worked with Zoo Atlanta to build an online form where homeowners can enter the location and details of their bamboo donation and attach a picture. The system places a pin at the location of the bamboo and routes the request to the zoo, where it is inspected and put on a harvesting schedule. Public support for the zoo is now easy and provides the zoo with greater

DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ It costs nearly \$11,000 **PER WEEK** just to buy food for the animals at Zoo Atlanta. That is a huge grocery list!
- ▶ Zoo Atlanta currently has **FOUR GIANT PANDAS**. The two adults, Lun Lun and Yang Yang, have been a focal point at the Zoo ever since their arrival in 1999.
- ▶ Pandas can spend up to **14 HOURS A DAY EATING!**

availability of critical food sources.

As utilities are increasingly looking outward for opportunities to do more for the communities they serve and enhance the environment around their assets, it’s important to keep in mind that existing GIS-based maintenance management software can help automate these programs. Geospatial technology is creating opportunities for organizations to connect with each other more easily, and, with the public, yielding the promise of better outcomes for everyone. ■



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Image courtesy of Zoo Atlanta



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FEEDING TWO BIRDS WITH ONE HAND:

Managing Compatible Vegetation During Line Clearance Work

By Stan Vera-Art, Creative Catalyst, Grow With Trees



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When asking vegetation managers about incorporating compatible vegetation management (VM) objectives into their programs, I frequently hear the same reasons why this effort is neglected. Some managers assert needing to get their line clearance program under control in order to have the time and resources to focus on managing compatible vegetation. Others claim that it is too labor intensive—already struggling to complete their line clearance work with the available resources—and too expensive. And some managers insist that their job is to perform line clearance work, not ecosystem management services.

But when I speak with utilities that *did* get their line clearance program under control, I hear a different story. They regret having removed the compatible species during line clearance work. They first spent time and resources removing vegetation, and afterwards had to spend time and resources trying to get some of the removed vegetation back. In hindsight, the utilities would have preferred managing both incompatible *and* compatible vegetation simultaneously.

Feeding two birds with one hand may do just that. The hands that actively remove incompatible vegetation can be the same hands that simultaneously protect, enhance, and even propagate compatible vegetation. Managing incompatible and

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MANAGING INCOMPATIBLE AND COMPATIBLE VEGETATION SIMULTANEOUSLY LOWERS THE PERCENT COVER OF INCOMPATIBLE SPECIES REQUIRING TREATMENT AND INCREASES THE PERCENT COVER OF COMPATIBLE SPECIES MORE QUICKLY.

compatible vegetation simultaneously lowers the percent cover of incompatible species requiring treatment and increases the percent cover of compatible species more quickly. And the higher the percent cover of compatible species, the less money and resources need to be spent on removing or treating incompatible vegetation.

Is extra training on compatible plant identification and compatible plant management strategies required? Yes. Without a proper understanding of both incompatible and compatible

vegetation, it is nearly impossible to manage both simultaneously. In addition, it is necessary to have effective communication about why the protection, enhancement, and propagation of compatible species is important.

The years where compatible species management is considered a "premium" practice—only reserved for high-value, high-visibility sites—may soon be behind us. With increasing biodiversity loss, climate change, and public demand for environmental protection and sustainability, now is the

time to begin proactively incorporating VM approaches across your system that protect and enhance beneficial plant species and ecosystem functions.

The public, as well as major asset investors like BlackRock, may also be focusing their lens on your company's operations—asking questions about your biodiversity management practices and your exposed risks if you do not manage for biodiversity and climate resilience. In addition, if you incorporate compatible species management while executing line clearance practices, you can avoid costs associated with re-establishing beneficial vegetation.

I challenge you to rethink the old adage "kill two birds with one stone" and, instead, transition your focus and attention to feeding two birds with one hand. Utilize the power of compatible, beneficial species to help meet your compliance and operational requirements while positively contributing to our common future and enhancing a system-wide, biodiverse-rich ecosystem where countless birds can thrive—supporting wildlife well beyond the right-of-way. ■

SUSTAINABILITY INITIATIVE IN UVM: Green Waste Repurposing

By Colleen Spakowski, Business Analyst Senior and Lori Jones, Manager Maintenance Services, Salt River Project

Contending with debris generated by utility vegetation management (UVM) is a common challenge faced by utilities. Green waste options for utility consideration include—but are not limited to—lop and scatter in place, chip and haul for disposal, or leave on site for the property owner.

At Salt River Project (SRP), our choices, based upon agency direction and cost considerations, have been lop and scatter—primarily on transmission rights-of-way (ROW)—and chip and haul, for disposal in most other areas. Chip drops for customers have been provided upon request and when we are working in a nearby area. Landfill disposal has historically been SRP’s selected method for green waste disposal due to exorbitant costs quoted to recycle chipped debris; however, landfill disposal does not satisfy our long-term goals for sustainability.

Ensuring sustainable water and power resources are key to SRP’s mission and core of values. We recognize that it is critical to balance the needs of our customers while protecting and promoting our environment. Eight years ago, we began seeking a sustainable solution in our green waste bid process. At that time, haul and recycle costs were three times the cost to haul and dispose at a landfill. With additional providers offering greener solutions, SRP’s current green waste contract, awarded in June of 2020, affords the opportunity to recycle our chipped debris instead of sending it to landfill.

In the past year, SRP has recycled 100% of our green waste. Our hauling vendor takes it to a recycling facility where it is refined into mulch and sold to the public. The mulch is also used in SRP’s Energy Saving Shade Tree Program where we provide our customers with a bag of mulch and two trees—free of charge—for planting to shade their homes.

Asplundh also participated as our tree care partner and wrapped the tailgates of their general foreperson pickup



▲ Salt River Project and their partner, Asplundh, are working together to spread the news about recycling green waste, refining it into mulch for the public. Photo courtesy of Asplundh General Foreperson Hector Benitez.

trucks with information about free wood chips. Collectively, our team is sharing the news about recycling green waste and supporting our sustainable future.

SRP estimates the short tonnage of chipped debris given to property owners and our vendor provides monthly statistics regarding the short tonnage taken to the recycling facility. SRP researched and discovered it best to calculate the indirect emissions—upstream or downstream—of the corporate greenhouse gas (GHG) reporting protocol. On average, 23% of our chipped debris is from leaves and 77% from branches. With the percentage of debris mix and the short tonnage data, the metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO₂E) of landfill and recycling/composting is calculated. The delta between the two is a negative value, indicating a reduction in MTCO₂E by recycling vs. landfill disposal (**Figure 1**).

Since June 2020, SRP has recycled approximately 2,700 short tons of debris and realized a sustainability savings of roughly -1,230 MTCO₂E versus landfill disposal. Monthly reporting is made by SRP Vegetation Management and Maintenance to SRP Sustainability to contribute our metrics towards corporate environmental and sustainability goals. We continue to recycle chipped tree debris and look for innovative ways to provide a sustainable solution for UVM. ■

FIGURE 1.
Greenhouse Gas Emissions Saved June 2020 to May 2021

GREENHOUSE GAS FACTORS (MTCO₂E / SHORT TON MATERIAL)

| Chipped Debris | Landfill | Compost | Waste Generated Tons |
|----------------|----------|---------|----------------------|
| Leaves | 0.3 | 0.09 | 619.95 |
| Branches | 0.62 | 0.09 | 2,075.49 |
| | | | 2,695.44 |

GREENHOUSE GAS (MTCO₂E)

| Landfill | Compost | Reduction |
|-----------------|---------------|------------------|
| 185.99 | 55.80 | -130.19 |
| 1,286.80 | 186.79 | -1,100.01 |
| 1,472.79 | 242.59 | -1,230.20 |



2021 ACRT Pacific Area Safety Representatives

SILVER LEVEL

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Safety is ingrained in our DNA at all levels of ACRT Pacific. It comes first in everything we do. That doesn't just mean we start meetings by talking about safety (although we do that, too). Our safety philosophy includes having our dedicated Safety Team devoted to the health and safety of our employees. This infrastructure of safety training, support, and oversight gives us a true focus on what it takes to be proactive. We have safety-focused volunteers or Area Safety Representatives (ASR) throughout California, who assist in training and tracking of safety-related items and assessing the risks we face in the region.

Meet the leadership and newly appointed members of the ACRT Pacific ASR team:

- Kerry Joseph, (Lead ASR) Lead Arborist Assessor**
- Jonny Cervantes, Consulting Utility Forester 2**
- Matt Hebert, Consulting Utility Forester 4**
- Kurt Kraut, Consulting Utility Forester 2**
- Luke Martinez, Non-arborist Assessor**
- Claire Meuter, Non-arborist Assessor**

- Ben Nelson, Supervising Consulting Utility Forester**
- Sheila Noel, Consulting Utility Forester 2**
- Gregory Pieper, Consulting Utility Forester 2**
- Kenneth Stonier, Consulting Utility Forester 4**
- Erin Whitcomb, Estimating Arborist**

We take safety seriously. Every service provided through our organization is backed by an efficient, well-planned strategy for utility safety. At the end of the day, we want everyone to make it home safely. We accomplish this through constant, in-depth training and safety reminders, rewarding our employees for following safety best practices, equipping our field employees with the proper safety tools and equipment, and peer programs like our ASR.

Learn more about our safety philosophy at pacific.acrt.com. ■



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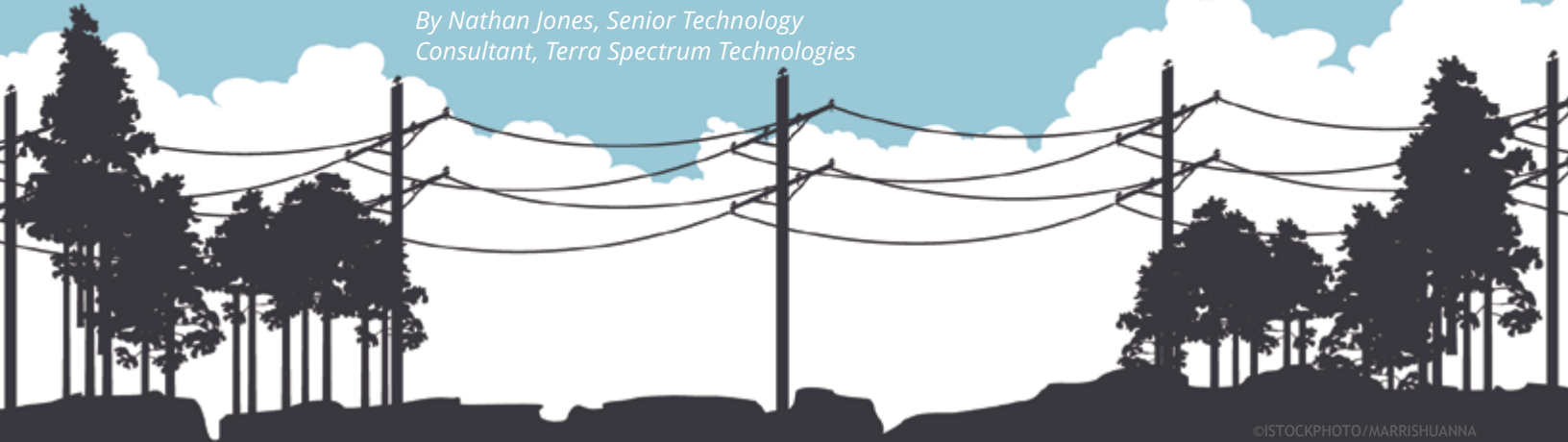
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Using Best Management Practices TO NAVIGATE THE ROAD

By Nathan Jones, Senior Technology Consultant, Terra Spectrum Technologies



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There's an old saying, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," meaning small, preventative measures taken today can result in a future with fewer complications. In the utility vegetation management (UVM) field, best management practices (BMPs) can help standardize operations and ensure reliable electricity to the most customers, while preventing potential problems in the future.

The days of cutting down everything growing in rights-of-way (ROW) every four years are long gone. They have been replaced by an integrated vegetation management (IVM) approach, which utilizes a combination of tree pruning, tree removal, herbicide usage, and compatible species considerations—providing the safest possible ROW while being mindful of environmental impact. The IVM BMP allows—and even encourages—compatible plant species with no chance of interfering with powerlines and electricity to remain in ROW. Low-growing shrubs are a favorable defense against nuisance species, and native plants can turn a ROW into a pollinator playground instead of a barren moonscape. Also, herbicide has shifted to spot applications where necessary, instead of a high-volume broadcast application.

Of course, there is no such thing as a one-size-fits-all solution to vegetation management (VM), but following a specific and defined set of BMPs can help bring a program up to speed and

save money long-term, while building public relations and goodwill with the public simultaneously.

BMPs are like a roadmap helping you get to a destination. Though a wonderful thing, BMPs aren't worth the paper they're printed on if they are loosely followed or ignored altogether. Like the proverbial dad who refuses to look at the map because he knows where he's going, a few wrong turns can leave an organization in unfamiliar territory, far from the desired destination. An

important step toward reaching goals is often overlooked: monitoring. Without monitoring the identified key factors within BMPs, there is no way to know what's working, what isn't working, how much progress is being made, and if money is being spent wisely. Like that dad, monitoring gives organizations the opportunity to stop and ask for directions if their surroundings begin to look suspicious. Too often, well-intentioned plans can give unintended results that need to be identified and corrected before too much time passes, too much money is wasted, and the opportunity for improvement disappears.

Monitoring results from the field on a utility system is easier said than done if you're only armed with prehistoric tools. There is no magic wand that allows the impact of BMPs to magically rise from a huge pile of spreadsheets on a desk. There is, however, the next best thing: software that monitors progress at any time with the click of a button. It's the equivalent of the directions-averse dad sticking a GPS to his windshield, typing in the destination address, and clicking the green "go" button. Instant feedback allows a utility to shift from making sweeping changes at irregular intervals to fine tuning whenever small tweaks are necessary. BMPs are at their best when they provide utilities a framework for realistic, actionable data and allow for adjustment based on real-world conditions. ■

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PRACTICES ARE
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HELPING YOU
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The Culture of Integrated Vegetation Management

SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT

FirstEnergy is committed to providing safe, reliable service to over six million electric utility customers with a focus on sustainability, stewardship, and betterment of the environment. With transmission utility corridors stretching more than 13,000 miles of rights-of-way (ROW) through six states, FirstEnergy understands the responsibility we have to be good stewards of the environment.

At the core of the FirstEnergy Transmission Vegetation Management (TVM) Program, integrated vegetation management (IVM) is used to maintain reliable facilities while managing plant communities through the use of action thresholds and selective vegetation treatment methods. IVM is a deliberate process in which the utility monitors and adapts its practices

over time to encourage sustainable compatible vegetation, while discouraging and preventing the growth of incompatible vegetation for each specific site.

In 2019, FirstEnergy formed the IVM Practices Team in an ongoing effort to enhance the understanding and use of IVM and to advance compatible species management along FirstEnergy ROWs. Currently, these ideals are being promoted across the TVM department, and a pilot compatible species monitoring program is being implemented on a subset of FirstEnergy ROWs. This team is focused on several objectives of one long-term plan, including:

- Continue to establish diverse, compatible plant communities
- Provide habitats that are friendly

to pollinators, wildlife, and the community

- Enhance the ecological value of lands managed by FirstEnergy
- Help enhance safety and reliability

As part of our commitment to the environment, FirstEnergy has recently attained provisional accreditation as a Right-of-Way Utility Steward through the ROW Stewardship Council IVM Accreditation program. To be fully accredited, a utility must meet or exceed standards for assessing IVM excellence for environmental stewardship, measured against a baseline of 10 principles, 30 criterion, 51 indicators, and 206 verifiers. FirstEnergy is proud to be working toward full public accreditation as we complete the associated third-party audit process. ■



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“Our foundation is based on family, character and values. These values play directly into our culture. It’s a feeling... a way of life – not something you can necessarily put into words. Being a Brother’s or Sister’s Keeper is more than a title. It’s a responsibility that everyone takes pride in. In our world, green runs deep.”

An Interview on Pollinator Health with Iris Caldwell



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Iris Caldwell is a Program Manager in the Energy Resources Center (ERC) at the University of Illinois Chicago (UIC). She works in the Bioenergy and Sustainable Landscapes research cluster where she facilitates the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group and other efforts to engage industries in pollinator habitat conservation. Chris Kelly from Clearion caught up with her recently to learn more about her work.

Kelly. Welcome, Iris. Thanks for taking the time to be with us. For those who may not know you, please share a little about how you got involved with the ERC and pollinator conservation, specifically.

Caldwell. In 2014, I came to the ERC to work on energy and climate policy. At that time, the Barack Obama administration had just created a Pollinator Health Task Force, and in mid-2015, they issued a national strategy for pollinator health. Shortly after joining the university, I had the opportunity to discuss with our research partners regarding the concern around pollinators and, in particular, the loss of pollinator habitat.

We started looking at different landscapes that might be appropriate for managing or restoring pollinator habitat. Consequently, we started reaching out to a variety of different industries to talk about what they had been doing to support pollinator

habitat. We were impressed that there was a lot of interest across the energy and transportation sectors—and quite a bit already happening near prairie and meadow restoration—and a lot of thinking about the use of landscapes by pollinators.

We needed a way to bring those stakeholders together and provide a forum to learn, share experiences, and develop strategies for managing pollinator habitats more effectively. That was the origination of the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group.

Kelly. I didn't realize you've been at this for so long! What's happening with the monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) right now?

Caldwell. Much like other pollinators or insects, we're seeing steep declines in monarch butterfly populations, particularly in the western U.S. The eastern population of the monarch butterfly—known for its massive, iconic migration from Mexico to Canada each year—has also seen declines, including a 26% drop in the last year alone. We're facing population declines due to a variety of factors. One of the primary factors is habitat loss—loss of milkweed across the landscape—as well as the loss of nectar resources that butterflies need to sustain themselves.

Kelly. The upshot is that there's consideration of listing the monarch as an endangered species.

Caldwell. In 2014, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was petitioned to consider the monarch butterfly under the Endangered Species Act. They made the determination in December 2020 that the monarch butterfly was warranted for listing, but they precluded the publication of a listing rule due to other priorities.

At this point, the USFWS is focused on continuing to promote voluntary conservation by encouraging initiatives that have driven a lot of action and support for monarchs and their habitat. We're right in line with that work through the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group. We have the Monarch Candidate Conservation Agreements with Assurances (CCAA) and other projects that are working to promote monarch habitat on energy and transportation lands.

Kelly. If the monarch is listed under the Endangered Species Act, what's the impact on right-of-way (ROW) managers?

Caldwell. The impact to ROW managers could be substantial. The unique thing about monarch butterflies, compared to some specialist pollinating insects, is that they're everywhere. You find milkweed in disturbed landscapes, and so much of the energy and transportation lands are already sustaining the milkweed and nectar plants that monarchs need without much effort. If the monarch butterfly were to become a listed species, there's potential that the restrictions that the USFWS may put in place could limit the timing of vegetation management (VM) activities and the types of tools that ROW managers can use to conduct VM. It could have a substantial effect on routine VM work, construction projects, and other ROW maintenance or modernization activities.

Kelly. Earlier you mentioned the Monarch CCAA. Could you talk a little bit about what that is and what it means for monarch butterflies?

Caldwell. The CCAA program is a voluntary, regulatory tool provided by the USFWS. The program operates by providing a regulatory incentive for non-federal landowners or land managers to proactively engage in conservation for at-risk species. In exchange for proactive conservation work, the landowner or manager gets regulatory assurances. Essentially, by doing voluntary work and meeting a minimum level of conservation activity, the landowner or manager is demonstrating that they're having a net benefit to the at-risk species. Therefore, if the species



▲ *In the Bioenergy and Sustainable Landscapes research cluster, the goal was to make it fairly simple for organizations to tweak their activities to provide a conservation benefit for the monarch butterfly.*

were to become listed, no additional restrictions, penalties, or requirements would be placed upon them. It's a win-win-win:

- Landowners and land managers, with upfront regulatory certainty, don't have to wait for the listing determination; they can put plans in place based on their CCAA participation.
- The species of concern is provided immediate conservation from the participant.
- The USFWS can potentially use this mechanism to determine if enough conservation is happening and if listing the species is unnecessary.
- We've seen instances in the past where—because of a CCAA and voluntary participation from landowners—the USFWS has been able to determine that listing a species is no longer warranted.

Kelly. How can a utility or any ROW manager get involved with the CCAA?

Caldwell. UIC is the program administrator. We hold the parent permit with the USFWS and all the associated agreements. You can enroll by applying to the UIC. It's a fairly simple application process, in which you provide information about your system, the lands that you want to enroll, and where and how you plan to implement conservation activities. We'll issue a certificate of inclusion, which is essentially an extension from our parent permit to your company. From that point on, you have to track where and how you're implementing your conservation activities and perform some basic effectiveness monitoring. On an annual basis, participating organizations must submit their report to us. We aggregate the reports and submit a program report to the USFWS.

Kelly. What are the specific activities that the USFWS wants to see?

Caldwell. The good news is that a lot of these conservation measures are

best practices which are already being used in VM across energy and transportation lands. We really tried to build alignment with existing practices and make it fairly simple for organizations to tweak their activities to provide a conservation benefit for the monarch butterfly. This could include:

- Adjusting the timing of VM activities to avoid peak periods when monarch butterflies, or their larva or caterpillars, might be present
- Planting or promoting milkweed and other nectar plants that support the monarchs
- Adopting practices like targeted herbicide applications to avoid impacts to non-target species, like milkweed and other nectar plants
- Allowing areas around facilities—or in the off-cycle of VM—to naturalize and provide habitat resources
- Using brush removal, prescribed burning, grazing, or other VM techniques to promote beneficial plants
- Importantly, organizations can choose which conservation measures they want to implement (i.e., you don't have to implement them all)

Kelly. Is this program at a national level?

Caldwell. Yes, any energy or transportation organization that operates in the lower 48 states can enroll.

Kelly. Are there any nationwide goals around the quantity of acres of habitat, specifically, for the monarch butterfly?

Caldwell. When we developed the agreement, we estimated that, at full capacity, we would be able to protect and maintain 2.3 million acres of habitat for monarch butterflies across the lower 48 states. Right now, we have 27 applicants that have submitted applications since the agreement was finalized in April 2020. Currently, those 27 applicants have committed to managing more than 780,000 habitat acres. We've made great strides!

Kelly. What does it look like for a land management organization, or utility vegetation management (UVM) group, to track and report on this information?

▶ *Planting or promoting milkweed is one of many conservation benefits for the monarch butterfly.*



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“People don’t think of ROWs as being conservation landscapes. Yet, we’re increasingly seeing that they are providing that value.”



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Caldwell. The CCAA provides flexibility for organizations to utilize existing tracking mechanisms. Some have very elaborate GIS tracking systems and are utilizing that data to track conservation measures down to individual parcels, then rolling it back up for reporting. We have other applicants who are using paper forms or Excel spreadsheets. At a minimum, the CCAA requires that you track conservation measures by state.

Kelly. Your organization developed some tools to help with monitoring and tracking.

Caldwell. We developed some optional, but helpful, tools that can be used by partners enrolled in the CCAA, including a suite of pollinator scorecards to monitor the quality of monarch and other pollinator habitats.

There’s an accompanying management module which helps users assess the impacts of their management activities on the habitat. The suite of pollinator scorecard tools aligns with CCAA requirements and can be used by an organization if they want a turnkey solution.

Separately, but related, we have a geospatial habitat database that seamlessly integrates the pollinator scorecard with a general tracking tool for identifying specific sites or management areas where you are implementing conservation measures.

You can generate a report within the geospatial database that will provide all the data you need to submit as part of your annual CCAA report.

“All organizations, public or private, are increasingly seeing the value of highlighting their environmental or social sustainability efforts.”

Kelly. At Clearion, one of the things we’ve been involved with is providing a way to communicate the locations of these conservation areas with contractors or personnel carrying out ROW or VM work. It sounds like the pollinator database could be a way to share this information with stakeholders who could inadvertently have a negative impact on conservation efforts.

Caldwell. There’s a big opportunity to improve communications for these initiatives—internally and with crews and contractors carrying out work on the ground, for neighboring landowners, and for other stakeholders in your communities.

Through the geospatial habitat database, we have a public dashboard that aggregates all the data that’s reported at a county scale, and it’s anonymized. That information is available to provide to public or general stakeholders about the conservation value that energy and transportation lands are providing—an area that’s often underestimated. People don’t think of ROWs as being conservation landscapes. Yet, we’re increasingly seeing that they are providing that value.

Kelly. As you said, there’s a great opportunity to communicate to the public that entities, like transportation agencies or investor-owned utilities, are promoting sustainability. The Esri ArcGIS platform, which you’re using and is widely used across multiple industries, seems like a great tool for corporate communication departments, individuals at the board level, or in the C-suite, who would want to communicate to the public and investors that they’re being proactive with these sustainability initiatives.

Caldwell. All organizations, public or private, are increasingly seeing the value of highlighting their environmental or social sustainability efforts. VM departments are often not given enough credit for the work they do to enhance or create much-needed habitat. Anything we can do to communicate that message to decision makers—and local, state, and federal agencies, conservation groups, investors, and the broader community—is really important.

Kelly. In closing, how can readers find out more about what you’re doing at ERC and the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group?

Caldwell. We have a dedicated website for the Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group at rightofway.erc.uic.edu. We also have an active community with some engaging and open discussions about managing and creating habitat. With a free user account on the website, you gain access to our discussion board and other ways to connect with each other online. It can be helpful to hear what your peers are doing and ask questions if you are facing a challenge.

We welcome you to join the conversation. ■



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Stepping Forward in SUSTAINABILITY

By Wright Service Corp.

As a family of companies who are in the environmental services industry, one main initiative of Wright Service Corp. (WSC) is to strive to protect and preserve all ecosystems. We continue to reduce our footprint and promote carbon positive practices at our offices and in the communities we serve. In the summer of 2020, WSC began the remodel process of our corporate office in West Des Moines, Iowa. Throughout the process, we kept our sustainability and environmental impact at the forefront of all our discussions—during the deconstruction phase, construction phase, and now into the finishing touches phase.



One main initiative of Wright Service Corp. is to strive to protect and preserve all ecosystems.

CONSTRUCTION PHASE

According to the EPA, 600 million tons of construction and demolition waste were generated in the U.S. in 2018, which is more than twice the amount of generated municipal solid waste. That's why the most important part of our deconstruction phase was to reduce and reuse as many materials as possible and recycle everything we could. We worked together with our project partners on our mission to reduce the amount of construction waste that would enter the landfill stream.

Materials were inventoried and decisions were made on how to deconstruct and reuse items such as ceiling tiles, fixtures, and metal beams. Other items were sorted during demolition such as scrap metal and drywall, to be recycled. Large appliances, fixtures, cabinets, and other items were donated to the Habitat for Humanity Restore facility.

The company also worked with the Iowa Waste Exchange to find people in the community who could repurpose certain items.

More than 90% of our office furniture, including workstations, chairs, file cabinets, countertops, etc., were donated locally. We recycled 7.2 tons of scrap metal and 1,900 square yards of carpet and we were able to save and reuse 3,250 ceiling tiles. Another 600 feet of fluorescent light tubes and fixtures were also recycled by crushing them and using them in construction concrete material. In total, an estimated 27,450 pounds of plastic, metal, wood, and fabric materials were saved from the landfill.

ONGOING SUSTAINABILITY

After the majority of the remodel was complete in 2021, we began a three-stream waste collection system to include a compost program along with current recycling efforts.

The three-stream bins were custom made for WSC by Max-R out of recycled plastic milk jugs. A three-stream system requires employees to sort their waste into either landfill, recycle, or compost, causing them to think beyond the bin to where the waste will end up. A local Iowa company, GreenRU, will repurpose our organic wastes to

create nutrient-rich soil compost materials and keep a portion of our waste out of the landfill, reducing our environmental footprint.

To reduce energy waste, about 50% of the lighting in our office was on a motion-activated setting before the remodel. After the remodel, we have 100% LED lights, and 95% of the lighting is motion activated with a vacancy switch.

We have also partnered with the Bee & Butterfly Habitat Fund to create a native habitat space along our new walking trail, benefiting pollinators, wildlife, and our employees. With the assistance of Wright Tree Service, Wright Outdoor Solutions, CN Utility Consulting, and Sustainable Environmental Consultants, the land has been prepped and cover crop seeding is complete as part of phases one and two. We will begin phase three planting native flora and fauna this fall.

CONCLUSION

Sustainability is not a one-and-done initiative. Whether you're looking to remodel a space, or you're just looking for ways you can help reduce waste, it's important to set goals for yourself and your organization. If you're interested in learning about our sustainability journey, we encourage you to read our inaugural sustainability report—a preliminary corporate social responsibility report at www.wrightservicecorp.com/sustainability-report. ■





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