

Utility Arborist Newsline

SEP/OCT 2020

VOLUME 11

NUMBER 5

INSIDE

President's Message4
 Exec. Director Comments7
 Industry News8
 Environmental Stewardship
 Committee Update15
 10 Ways to Environmental
 Stewardship16
 Spotlight: Environment20
 Combat COVID-1922

FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Workplace Reintegration
 with Nature1
 Leveraging ESG Biodiversity
 Sections for IVM28
 Timber from Ashes33
 System-Wide ROW Habitat
 Program Deployed37
 The Sustainability Imperative
 for Business: Emerging
 Stronger, Greener, and
 More Equitable41
 Values of ROW Stewardship
 Accreditation44
 Conservation Mowing46
 Turning a Waste Source
 into a Resource49

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Workplace Reintegration: Nature Can Be Part of the Solution

*By Josiane Bonneau, Chief
 Operating Officer, Wildlife
 Habitat Council*

FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP

Like many of us, you are probably in the midst of returning to the workplace or strategizing on what your reintegration looks like. The obstacles to overcome are many as we prioritize the safety and wellness of our employees: utilizing existing space, rethinking the casual water cooler chats, reimagining the future of white-board brainstorm, and more. Ultimately, the key question is: how do we create environments that are safe yet engaging for employees working in a traditional office setting, or for those spending most of their time on the road?

Luckily, nature has its fair share of solutions to offer.

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres recently reminded us that biodiversity is a key part of managing global stressors, including pandemic prevention. Nature is, and will remain, a tool to support bold, visionary leadership around the world. In our vegetation management (VM) realm, nature can also play a similar role in supporting employees likely experiencing various levels of stress due to returning to the workplace.

Response to Nature

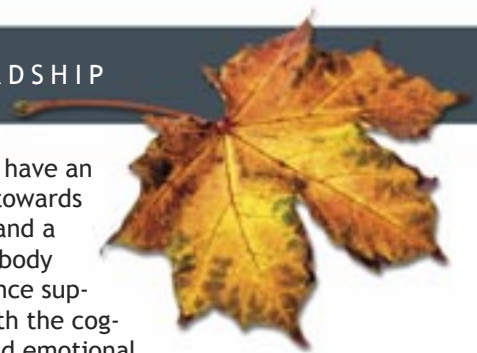
Each and every one of us is biologically

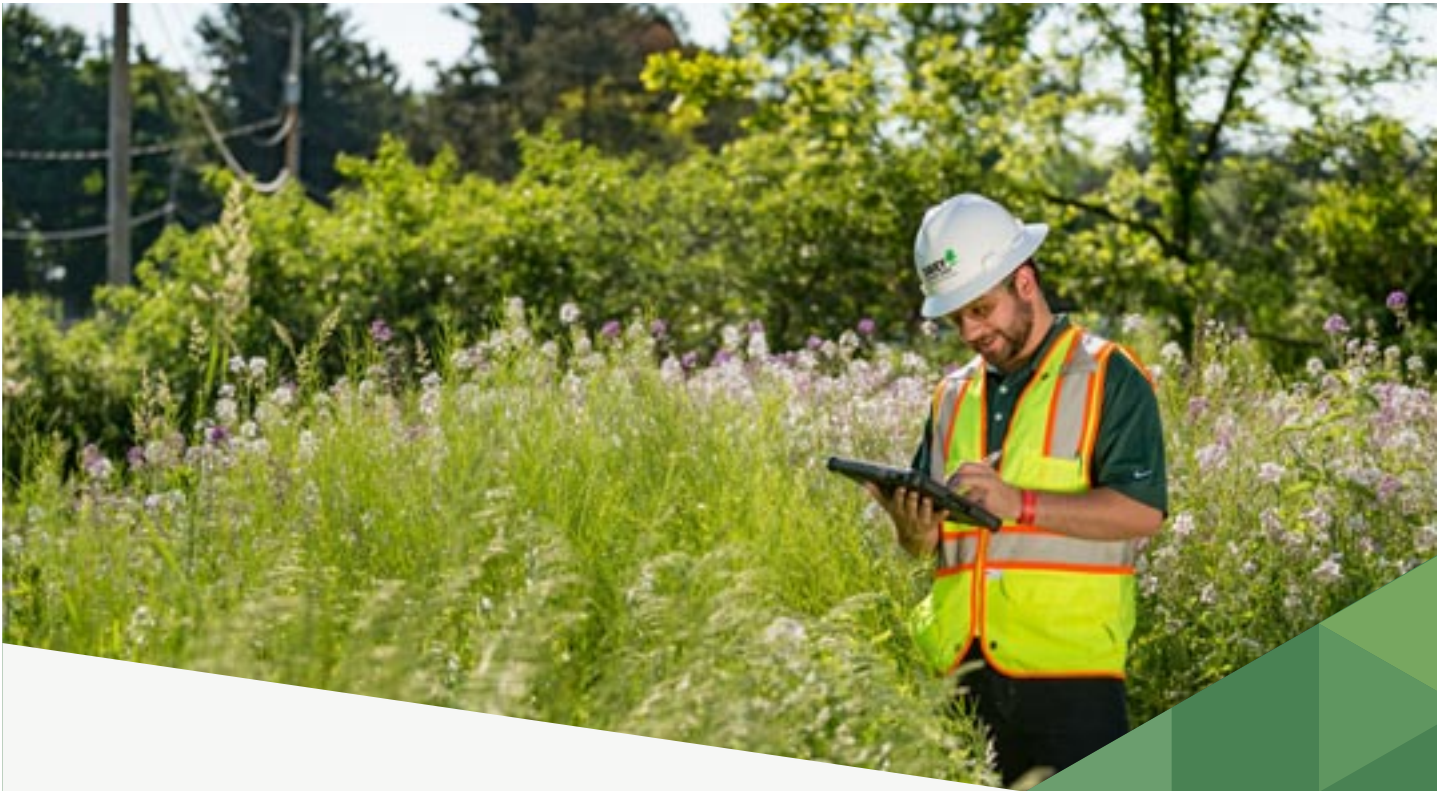
wired to have an affinity towards nature, and a growing body of evidence supports both the cognitive and emotional benefits of activities and exposure to nature. Experiencing nature changes the way our bodies and minds react. Nature reduces anxiety, restores attention, lowers blood pressure, induces feelings of calmness and comfort, and improves mood and self-esteem. What's not to like?

Last year, the highly respected journal, *Nature*, published new research revealing the suggested amount of time to spend in nature to reap maximum wellness benefits. The answer? Only 120 minutes per week of connection with natural environments is needed to yield full benefits. Even better news, the manner in which the 120 minutes of contact is achieved—whether one long promenade or many shorter periods of sitting outdoors—is immaterial to the outcome.

The Workplace Connected to Nature

Sure, connecting to nature on a forested trail over lunch or a morning birding session by a salt marsh sounds pretty ▶





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Challenge business units and departments to virtually collaborate on design of an insect hotel or bug palace. Once designed, the structures can be built in stages, with employees working on their areas at different times in a socially distant manner.

perfect. However, 32 years of experience building biodiversity programs for employee engagement has taught us at Wildlife Habitat Council (WHC) that small pockets of accessible nature are as effective as their grander counterparts in generating enjoyment. Such pride comes from taking part in creating the garden that will host beautiful pollinators, in planting the trees that will provide colleagues with shade, in digging the rain garden that will filter out pollution, and in building the bird box what will be home to nestlings in the spring.

Integrating opportunities for connecting to nature in the workplace, regardless of scale, is a meaningful step in supporting the health and wellness of workforces. Promoting 120 minutes of nature is possible in an office setting, on the road, and at home.

Tactics to Connect Nature to an Office Setting

Create formal outdoor workspaces with shaded seating and access to Wi-Fi. Add those to your list of the rooms available for booking, encouraging employees to periodically plan for an hour of outdoor work, perfect for hosting a video conference.

Kickstart a few small-scale biodiversity projects, such as pollinator gardens, native landscaping boxes, insect hotels, and bird nesting boxes. Encourage several employees to “adopt” a project, with one day a week where they are responsible for observations and light maintenance.

Research and promote pre-planned walking circuits in neighborhoods



Encouraging employees to connect to nature can be as simple as designating and labeling outdoor (or indoor) areas with posted signs.

surrounding your workplaces. Having options of different lengths and times will entice employees to pull their comfortable shoes out from under their desk and enjoy a short break.

Increase availability and promote the use of informal outdoor areas accessible to employees to recharge mentally, emotionally, and physically. “Connect to Nature” areas are popular safe spaces to decompress and recharge and can be identified by fun signs across your property. Viewing nature from an indoor location is also beneficial and found to potentially increase productivity by 20 percent. Why not add a few additional seats near windows as well?

Consider green partitions to create new spacing and separation in your office layout. Many studies have

confirmed the benefits of indoor plants to reduce stress and to improve task performance.

Tactics to Connect Nature to the Field-Based Workforce

Generate a geographic information system (GIS) layer of natural environment locations for lunch breaks so the teams on the road can easily identify potential stops to restore between jobs. Look for greenspaces with parking, seating, and facilities with running water.

Consider greening the staging yards where employees start and end their days. Small sections can be improved with landscaping, green infrastructure, and vertically vegetated panels. Potted plants can also change the look and feel of an area.

Reimagine the huddle areas as outdoor spaces—covered and safe from the elements—as a change from the small conference rooms. The space needed for social distancing can be dictated by the average number of team members. When not utilized by the project teams, the space can double as a green, shaded break area for any employees working at the nearby buildings.

Segments of your workforce may be temporarily, intermittently, or permanently assigned to work remotely. To encourage a connection to nature, organize an annual nature photo contest open to all employees, encouraging them to snap pictures at home, in the neighborhood, or on their next hike. Print, frame, and hang the top-winning photos in the office,

displayed for everyone’s return. Reformat the pictures and distribute them for use as virtual meeting background options. According to studies, viewing nature scenes can serve as a micro-restorative experience during the workday, effectively lowering stress.

Launch a month-long wellness challenge where virtual teams earn points for every 15 minutes of fitness completed or time spent in nature; extra points for those reaching the optimal target of 120 minutes! Participation prizes can be selectively chosen to further entice connection to the outdoors and promote wellness.

Consider offering a small reimbursement program for employees interested in purchasing Wi-Fi boosters or ergonomic, mobile workstations to take their work outdoors. If such a program is not possible, create a social channel for employees to share their outdoor work hacks and innovative manners in which they cleverly connect to nature while working from home.



Pictured is one of the many WHC meetings which team members are encouraged to take their laptops outdoors. From urban balconies to farms and suburban yards, nature’s sights and sounds have been enjoyed by many.

The post-pandemic work environment is uncertain, at best. None of us have a blueprint to perfectly guide each decision across multiple phases. What we have, however, is an unprecedented opportunity to lead our workforce with the support of nature. Small biodiversity projects can be designed and implemented in this resource-limited era with near immediate beneficial outcomes for employees.

Join more than 700 teams of volunteer-employees around the world already relying on biodiversity to help them through these challenging times. Learn more about these projects in the guidance documents, the on-demand webinars, and the Conservation in a Time of Crisis toolkit at wildlifehc.org.



President’s Message

By Eric Brown



This is an extraordinary time for our industry and our country as we respond to the impact of COVID-19. This pandemic is unlike anything we’ve seen—and it has re-

quired us to dramatically adjust how we operate. Like people everywhere, we’ve experienced a range of emotions—everything from frustration, concern, and anxiety to hope and pride—as we navigate this together.

Having a mission, vision, and values keeps us grounded in an uncertain time. Our purpose at the UAA has never been more important; we provide an essential service. We support the daily lives of our industry, members, and colleagues—no matter the circumstances—and stewardship is a critical piece of that puzzle.

The importance of delivering value through environmental stewardship continues to grow, reshaping how the utility



vegetation management (UVM) industry operates and delivers value to our stakeholders.

I’m proud to say we have a strong track record with environmental stewardship, including the actions we’ve taken to reduce the impact of UVM on the environment. All you need to do is look at utility, consulting, and contract companies across North America and beyond to see the broad commitment to environmental sustainability and

Clearion is proud to support the organizations that are helping to bring sustainability and environmental stewardship to the UVM industry.

In partnership with innovative utilities, these organizations are fostering pollinator habitats, supporting community farms, and preserving the urban canopy.

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stewardship, which are deeply rooted in operational practices, protocols, and company goals.

That's progress, but we've taken our commitment even further.

In Q4 2019 and early 2020, UAA's Environmental Stewardship Committee has accelerated its goals. They developed and are delivering ongoing videos that provide guidance to execute Best Management Practices (BMPs). They are also strong advocates for investments in research, technologies, and industry-leading techniques that don't exist widely across the industry at scale yet.

2019-2020 Results

Other highlights of our stewardship success in 2019-2020 include:

- Environmental Stewardship—UAA
- Educational Video Library
- ANSI Standards and BMPs
- Rights-of-Way (ROW) Habitat Working Group
- ROW Stewardship Accreditation
- Library of Environmental Messages



- Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) whitepapers
- Numerous other environmental focused articles and support tools

The importance of delivering value through environmental stewardship continues to grow, reshaping how the UVM industry operates, invests, and delivers value to our members and industry abroad.

Continuing Our Commitment

In a time when uncertainty is the only certainty, it reminds us to stay focused on the path forward.

We're embracing innovative and strategic change as we prepare the UVM industry to meet tomorrow's needs. We're becoming more efficient, consistent, and more agile, while maintaining our commitment to stewardship.



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Executive Director Comments

By Phil Charlton

ANALOGICUS - PIXABAY

September is always a time of transition at the UAA because it is when the board see changes in its ranks. This year, Bob Richens, Becky Spach, and Tim Walsh reach the end of their board terms. For me, personally, it is a sad day. I have worked with each of these leaders for the last three to four years. It has been a pleasure getting to know them better, and I will miss their participation on the board.

Bob Richens (ArborMetrics Solutions, LLC) has served on the board for four years. He started as the vice president and moved through the executive ranks to president in 2018-2019 and past president this last year. Bob not only served on the board, but also helped lead through participation on the Professional Development Committee and, perhaps his real passion, the Environmental Stewardship Committee. If you know Bob, you know he is always upbeat and supportive, which is greatly appreciated.

Becky Spach (FirstEnergy) became a director in 2017. She jumped in to champion the 12th Rights-of-Way (ROW) Symposium Steering Committee, became UAA's representative to the A300 Standards Committee, joined the System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit planning team, and championed the new Workforce Retention and Training Task Force. If that was not enough, Becky helped plan an Environmental Summit at the Gamelands 33 research site in 2019 and was asked to do the same in 2020 (although, canceled due to COVID-19).

Tim Walsh (The Davey Tree Expert Company) also joined the board as a director in 2017. As Davey's safety manager, he immediately turned his attention to the commitment to instill safety as part of the culture at UAA and throughout the industry. He has championed the safety committee for three years and helped develop a self-assessment so companies can see how they are doing with their own safety culture. I particularly appreciate Tim's willingness to deliver UAA webinars. He has helped many members understand some of the more confusing changes to Z133, the American National Standard for Arboricultural Operations safety requirements.

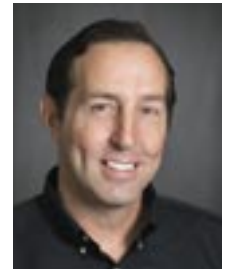
Bob, Becky, and Tim are true leaders. They are leaving the board, but they are not leaving their commitment to UAA and our industry. Becky will remain UAA's A300 representative. Tim is running for the executive track, and regardless of the outcome, he remains committed to the Safety



Bob Richens



Becky Spach



Tim Walsh

Committee. Bob will remain active on his committees as well, and since he gave me his phone number, he will continue as an unofficial advisor until he gets a new number.



Eric Brown

Finally, I want to extend my appreciation to **Eric Brown** (Sacramento Municipal Utility District). Although Eric will remain on the board as past president, he is stepping down after a year as president, and what a year it was. UAA started the year with a strategic plan that included about 66 specific tasks in mind. Under Eric's leadership, 56 of the UAA's 2019-2020 initiatives were completed with significant progress on all but four, due to COVID-19. Eric is passionate about public utilities and led the creation of the Outreach Committee, which has focused on this sector. He also played a key role in two critical industry initiatives: the Utility Vegetation Management Professional Development Program and the Utility Arborist Training Program. Eric initiated organizational changes to improve the strategic plan, foster collaboration and coordination among the committees, and make more effective and efficient use of our volunteers' time and expertise. All this and, at the time of my writing, Eric still has a month to go. I predict that by the end of his term, the UAA will announce news that will transform the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry.

Eric, you should be tired! What a productive year, and what a pleasure it has been working with you.

UAA is an association of professionals, and these four individuals demonstrate what it is to be a leading professional. Thank you, Tim, Bob, Becky, and Eric. Your service is appreciated, and your friendship is valued greatly.

Industry News



ACRT Services Promotes Renee Bissett to Director

ACRT Services, a provider of independent consulting solutions to utilities and associated organizations throughout the U.S., is pleased to announce the promotion of Renee Bissett to director of marketing and communications.

Bissett joined ACRT Services—then ACRT—in 2005 and has led its marketing and communications since. She played a lead role in the 2018 restructuring of the company to ACRT Services. Bissett is also an active industry participant and has served on the Utility Arborist Association (UAA) editorial committee for more than 10 years, recently assuming the role of committee chair, and she served the marketing committee as chair from 2006 to 2018.

In 2019, the UAA awarded Bissett with its Education Award for industry professionals who educate and train others. She was the first woman to receive the award and the second from the ACRT Services organization, the first being founder Richard Abbott in 2001.

“Renee has been a significant contributor to our success over the past 15 years,” said John Wasmer, ACRT Services’ executive vice president of revenue. “Her marketing and communications leadership was critical to our growth and in helping to increase participation in our industry.”

Her past experience includes leadership positions with Winner International and Carlton Cards. In her new role, Bissett will continue to lead ACRT Services’ marketing and communications while building upon the foundations established over the past 15 years.

“Our organization is about people. Renee has been a champion of that ever since she came aboard,” said Troy Ross, ACRT Services’ executive vice president of operations. “We’re proud of all that she’s accomplished for our organization and our industry.”



*Renee Bissett,
Director of
Marketing and
Communications*



ACRT Services Adds Dr. Anand Persad as Director of Research, Science, and Innovation

ACRT Services is pleased to announce Dr. Anand Persad as its new director of research, science, and innovation.

Dr. Persad earned his PhD in invertebrate ecology/entomology from the University of the West Indies. He continued his postdoctoral studies at the University of Florida, Gainesville, where he explored invasive species and the development of molecular tools for detecting biological control agents using high-fidelity polymerase chain reaction (PCR).

He collaborates with a multidisciplinary international team of researchers focused on industry-based research in arboriculture, tree biomechanics, pollinator health, and other innovations that improve green space health. He has additionally provided technical advice in wetland restoration, delineation projects, and avian surveys.

As the UAA research committee chair, Dr. Persad focuses on creating partnerships with organizations to build on and leverage cross-industry research and enhance funding opportunities. He maintains a connected network of municipalities, cities, and state-level personnel, as well as federal agencies to take innovation and new technology from development to implementation.

Dr. Persad is a member of the horticultural advisory board at Kent State University. He has been an avid researcher of arboriculture for more than 15 years and has spoken at numerous ISA, UAA, and international events. He is the lead author of several peer-reviewed manuscripts and is instrumental in transferring technology to the broad tree-and-turf-care industry groups through collaborative research and joint teaching with several national and international agencies.

“We’re very excited to welcome Dr. Persad to the ACRT Services team,” said John Wasmer, ACRT Services’ executive vice president of revenue. “As our industry continues to evolve, it’s critical that we respond to its technological and environmental needs. Dr. Persad’s office will be instrumental in achieving meaningful results in this area, and we look forward to his contributions.”



*Dr. Anand Persad,
Director of
Research, Science,
and Innovation*

CONTRACTOR

partner

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Ameren Illinois, Wright Tree Service, and Local Beekeeper Rescue Hive from Cottonwood Tree

What was supposed to be a routine job for Wright Tree Service to remove hazardous limbs impeding on Ameren Illinois power lines, turned into a honey of a deal for a local beekeeper.

A Wright Tree Service crew was dispatched to the 1100 block of Wise Street in Alton, Illinois, to safely remove limbs precariously hanging over Ameren Illinois lines when the crew noticed honeybees flying into an opening in a limb needing to be removed.

“We called Wright Tree Service to remove limbs from what Ameren Illinois considered a hazard tree to the electric grid in Alton,” said David Schenck, vegetation supervisor of Ameren Illinois. “One of the limbs, about 50 feet up in the air, had a beehive inside of it. We knew that the proper ecological thing to do was to call a beekeeper, who shared with us the proper way to safely remove the limb to preserve the hive.”

Once surrounding vegetation was safely removed and tree trimmers had a clear path to the honeybee-infested limb, a T-shirt was shoved into the entrance of the hive so the bees would not swarm the journeyman. The journeyman then used a chainsaw to cut away the limb and a pulley system to lower the log to the ground.

“We took extra safety precautions to make sure we didn’t disturb the bees because they are very active this time of the year,” said Chris Lorenz, safety supervisor of Wright Tree Service. “We used some advanced rigging to be able to safely lower the log that the honeybees were in without disturbing them.”

The removal process took about 90 minutes. Local Beekeeper Johnny Murdock arrived later to gather the hive with a piece of equipment he personally made to remove honeybees. Murdock relocated the hive into a honeybee box at his home.

“I have a special vacuum I created that is gentle and doesn’t hurt them,” said Murdock, who is a member of the St. Clair Beekeepers Association. “Once I had 90 percent of the bees out of the log, we split the limb in half so I could get to the honeycomb and remove the rest of the bees. I wanted to preserve the



Beekeeper, Johnny Murdock safely removes the bees for relocation.



The Wright Tree Service crew carefully remove the honeybee-infested limb.

honeycomb because it has larvae and the queen laying eggs. I will hang the honeycomb secured with rubberbands in the bee box and the honeybees will reattach the honeycomb to the frame. I will do everything I can to make sure it becomes a strong and healthy colony.”

“This was a great partnership between Ameren Illinois, Wright Tree Service, and Beekeeper Johnny Murdock to understand the importance of honeybees and the environment while safeguarding electric service reliability for our customers in Alton,” said Richard J. Mark, president and chairman of Ameren Illinois. “We are thrilled the honeybees were rescued and will continue to thrive.”



CNUC Appoints Mike Lewis to Regional Supervisor

CNUC appointed Mike Lewis to regional supervisor to the eastern coastal region in June.

Lewis started his career in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry in 2013 and has experience in many facets of the industry, including inventory management, wildfire and disaster response, sales and customer service, UVM work planning, and safety

EXTEND YOUR VEGETATION MANAGEMENT SEASON

Once the leaves have fallen and the heart of the vegetation management season comes to an end, it doesn't mean there aren't other opportunities to continue line clearance efforts. Many great options still remain, such as **basal applications** and the use of **tree growth regulators**.



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oversight. Lewis started with CNUC as a safety professional in 2019.

Lewis is a Certified Arborist of the International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), a member of the UAA, and a certified tree care safety professional of the Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA).



Mike Lewis, Regional Supervisor, Eastern Coastal Region

“I appreciate Mike’s approach and character in upholding our core values—putting people first, quickly building rapport with the CNUC team, tree crews, and clients, and holding everyone accountable for safety,” said Regional Manager Matt Searels. “We look forward to the experience and perspective Mike will bring into his new role.”



NG Gilbert Services’ Essential Utility Workers During COVID-19

By Guy Vogt

All of us in this line of work have been involved with various types of adverse weather events. Most of us, as utility foresters or tree crew members, have braved the ice, snow, heat storms, and heavy rains. However, COVID-19 has been our latest challenge. As utility folks, we know how to prepare for whatever comes our way. As first responders in our industry we had a new, adverse condition to tackle, like nothing we have ever seen before.



NG Gilbert Services workers are staying masked to protect each other and customers.



Contractor crews providing essential utility services in the field.

My area of the country, northern New Jersey, sits just across the Hudson River from another hot spot: New York City. Customers and businesses, large and small, were ordered to be on lockdown and have everyone shelter at home. We, as utility personnel, had to protect ourselves from fellow workers and our customers by staying masked and constantly using hand sanitizer.

We frequently met with our NG Gilbert Services workers in the field locations to do weekly, and sometimes daily, stand-downs on how to stay safe at work and to protect the customers. Our contractor crews had to don all the same personal protective equipment (PPE) that we, as foresters, were issued and wore in the field.

One of my biggest challenges was meeting with the crews to ease their minds that our area and the work was safe. Due to our state being a hot-zone for COVID-19, most of the contract workers coming from Pennsylvania would see the media news and were worried for their families. I, and others in our group, had to assure them that as essential workers to the utility, they are all important to our operation.

When this article is published, we are hopefully on the mend. Please all remain safe and continue to be remembered as a first responder to our companies and many customers.



Late Davey Executive Supports Scholarship at Kent State

Kent State University at Salem is offering scholarships that provide free tuition for a qualified student’s first year while seeking an associate of applied science degree in horticulture technology. The scholarships are made possible through the Eugene W. and Betty Haupt-Davey Tree Expert Company endowment.

To qualify, a student must be a freshman with a 2.0 or above grade point average (GPA), have a completed FAFSA form, and have horticulture technology as his or her declared major.



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Sustain the Habitats in Your Rights-of-Way with ArborMetrics

If you are struggling with ensuring a sustainable ecosystem in your rights-of-way (ROWs), it's probably not due to a lack of desire or vision. The sincere commitment is everywhere—and growing—in the utility industry. But commitment is simply not enough to guarantee a consistently environmentally responsible integrated vegetation management (IVM) program.

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- Coordinated and consistent resource allocations to ensure knowledge retention and transfer year-over-year
- Comprehensive data collection, storage, and reporting

At **ARBORMETRICS**, our mission is to improve the effectiveness of VM through safe, efficient planning, scheduling, and reporting services. We can help you ensure environmental stewardship with your IVM program. Learn more by contacting (866) 685-1880 or info@arbormetrics.com.

The scholarships are funded through an endowment established by the late Eugene Haupt, an executive of the Davey Tree Expert Company, who retired in 1990 after a career of 52 years. He last served as president of the Davey Tree Surgery Company in Livermore, California, and served on the Davey Tree Board of Directors for many years. Haupt started at Davey in 1939 and held several positions in the field before working his way up to general manager of the Davey Tree Surgery Company in 1969. He was later named executive vice president and general manager and eventually promoted to president of the Surgery Company in 1985.

Haupt established trust funds designated to benefit Kent State Salem “students who have an interest in horticulture to further their education and interest in the field.” The endowment was named in memory of him and his first wife, the late Bertha “Betty” Davidson Haupt.

“This is a great opportunity for area students interested in careers in the green industry, thanks to the incredible generosity of Mr. Haupt,” noted Dr. David Dees, dean and chief administrative officer of the Kent State Columbiana County campuses. “His gift and financial support will strengthen and help transform our horticulture program, which will ultimately benefit our students, area communities, and the companies that hire our graduates. We are sincerely grateful for Mr. Haupt’s vision.”

Haupt was a native of Beaver County, Pennsylvania, and served in the U.S. Army 101st Airborne Division in World War II. He participated in the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge, earning two bronze stars. Following his military service, Haupt continued a career with Davey that spanned five decades.



*Eugene Haupt
(1922-2019)*

“Davey is proud to be affiliated with these scholarships, which will be awarded in Gene and Betty’s honor. Gene was a stalwart leader at Davey who helped shape a generation of managers and executives, but beyond that, he was a committed and influential figure within the arboriculture industry, an iconic personality, and an American hero,” said Pat Covey, Davey chairman, president, and CEO. “This gift ensures his legacy of supporting the green industry endures for many years.”

The Associates of Science degree in horticulture technology includes three concentrations for students to consider, including landscape design, turfgrass management, and urban forestry. This degree is a natural pathway to the Bachelor of Applied Horticulture degree and extends a student’s education to include the development of managerial expertise in the green industry.

FirstEnergy Brings Awareness During Pollinator Week

For the third consecutive year, FirstEnergy joined other utilities across the U.S. to celebrate Pollinator Week, held June 22-28.

National Pollinator Week was initiated by the Pollinator Partnership 13 years ago to celebrate pollinators and disseminate information on how to protect them from decline. This week is set aside annually to celebrate the positive impacts of bees, birds, butterflies, bats, and beetles on the ecosystem and has grown to an international level. The initiative has been taken up by many groups, including the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), with an aim toward promoting pollinator health and well-being. Utilities and others who manage rights-of-way (ROWs) can play a key role in the conservation efforts of pollinators using integrated vegetation management (IVM) techniques. The thousands of miles of ROWs managed across the U.S. can become an integrated network for migration and habitat for many pollinator species.



FirstEnergy helped promote EPRI's "Pollinator Party" by distributing Pollinator Week information to employees and encouraging their families to join in virtual social media events at home. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, portions of planned events had to be postponed until the fall, such as an interdepartmental project to install pollinator gardens at select company offices across the FirstEnergy footprint. The project would have volunteers from each selected office building install and maintain these gardens as a habitat and food source for pollinators.

In May, more than 150 employees across FirstEnergy participated in a Gardening 101 webinar presented by the company's Corporate Responsibility Team and EPRI in anticipation for Pollinator Week. The virtual learning experience provided tips and tricks for starting pollinator gardens at home. It is part of the company's mission to make the environment better and align with a long-term initiative for creating and maintaining pollinator gardens across work locations.

FirstEnergy is also helping to sponsor the documentary *Power for Pollinators*, which is being produced by EPRI and Tree Media. This film, narrated by Carrie-Anne Moss (known for her role as Trinity in *The Matrix* trilogy), focuses on the positive impact the utility industry could have on pollinator conservation efforts and potential limitations to overcome. Donations for this project can be made at bit.ly/powerforpollinatorscharity.

One of the Pollinator Week activities FirstEnergy was able to hold was perfect for employees and their children stuck at home during the pandemic: a Pollinator Week Art Contest! Thirty-one employees submitted their children's art projects, ranging from flowers with bees and butterflies to bats and transmission



towers. More than 300 employees helped vote for the winners, in three age group categories. These winners will be FirstEnergy's three entries for EPRI's fall art competition. FirstEnergy will also be creating a calendar for 2021, available to employees, showcasing the entries of the competition.

Additionally, FirstEnergy uses social media to share information throughout Pollinator Week. Posts kick off Pollinator Week and provide fun facts and videos throughout the week to encourage engagement with customers and the community. The various likes, retweets, shares, and comments show overall positive reactions for Pollinator Week. Each year, Pollinator Week grows larger and FirstEnergy is committed to helping this effort. The importance of pollinators and the conservation efforts to protect them need to be considered, utilized, and promoted in our vegetation management (VM) activities as utilities. This is an area where our industry can be a leader in a much-needed global effort.

Visit pollinator.org/pollinator-week to learn more about Pollinator Week.

FirstEnergy[®]

UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee Update *By Philip Chen, Co-Chair*

In January 2020, the Taskforce for Thriving Ecosystems on Rights-of-Way (ROW) transitioned to its new name: the UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee. The committee was founded to identify ways in which the UAA can assist membership in realizing and embracing the core value of environmental stewardship. There are many things we have already accomplished, and we have exciting things planned that I'd like to summarize here. First, I'd like to acknowledge all the amazing people who have made our accomplishments possible:

The Environmental Stewardship Committee

- Champion (UAA), Geoff Kempter, Asplundh
- Co-Chair, Josiane Bonneau, Wildlife Habitat Council
- Co-Chair, Philip Chen, CNUC
- Past Chair, Stan Vera-Art, Grow With Trees

Committee Members:

- Heidi Asplund, Seattle City Light
- David Bayard, Seattle City Light
- Jason Grossman, Liberty Utilities-Empire District
- John Goodfellow, Biocompliance Consulting Inc., ROWSC Technical Advisory Committee Chair
- Bradley Hall, Fortis Alberta
- Dr. Anand Persad, ACRT
- Kevin Jones, ACRT
- Steve Lowe, ArborMetrics Solutions, LLC
- Orville McLean, ArborMetrics Solutions, LLC
- Bob Richens, ArborMetrics Solutions, LLC
- Peter Stoltman, Liberty Utilities

Utility Arborist Newslines

Our first major accomplishment as a committee is our contribution to the *Utility Arborist Newslines* (UAN). You may have noticed this issue focuses on environmental stewardship. We partnered with

the Editorial Committee to annually create an issue of the UAN focused on environmental stewardship in our industry. Additionally, each issue of the UAN features a spotlight on the environment. These individual stories highlight examples of environmental stewardship to keep it continually top-of-mind. As a part of future efforts, we look to leverage this recurring section to address key knowledge gaps in environmental stewardship, identified from a set of interviews conducted with industry and external stakeholders by the original taskforce.

Stewardship Video Series

One of the best deliverables from our committee thus far is the beginning of a series of videos focused on environmental stewardship in our industry: *The Stewards and Lifelines*, directed by Kurt Mann of Mankind Films and thanks, in large part, to the efforts of Stan Vera-Art. These two short films highlight our role as stewards of the land we manage and the potential power for good vegetation management (VM) professionals and our industry can contribute to declining species. Both videos are available on the UAA website and the UAA's YouTube page.

Preventing Institutional Memory Loss

One critical area identified in the taskforce's original findings is institutional memory loss. We recognized that many ROW managers who focus on the benefits outside of regulatory compliance have or are soon-to-be retired. Additionally, a post-2003 blackout industry focus on regulatory compliance has exposed new managers to an excellent working knowledge of managing ROW in agreement with regulatory requirements, but may have lacked instruction on cultivating multiple ROW utilizations.

For this reason, we are focusing on closing this knowledge gap. The Environmental Stewardship Committee, in conjunction with the Professional Development Committee, look to conduct interviews with our colleagues to collate this information for current and future VM professionals.

Credentialing

Finally, we have identified a long-term goal for our committee. We will have ongoing conversations with ISA regarding environmental stewardship and credentials. We want to ensure that environmental stewardship is recognized as a key part of our industry, a key calling in our roles as VM professionals, and is adequately reflected in the credentials that represent our profession. Whether this results in better integration of environmental stewardship concepts into our utility specialist credential or something more is yet to be discussed. Additionally, our committee will have conversations with the Utility Vegetation Management Association (UVMA) and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point to ensure that the new Utility Vegetation Management Certificate Program reflects the importance of stewardship.

The initiatives surrounding institutional memory loss and credentialing are only two of the many initiatives we have been working on in 2020. If environmental stewardship or these two initiatives resonate with you, and you would like to get involved, we are always looking for passionate, enthusiastic participants. Please reach out regarding your interests, ideas, and suggestions. I can be reached at pchen@cnutility.com. I look forward to sharing ideas and collaboratively promoting environmental stewardship within our industry and beyond!

10 Ways

Your Vegetation Department Can Embrace Environmental Stewardship

A 2019 study found that nearly 40 percent of the Earth's insect species are declining in numbers and threatened with extinction in the coming decades (Sánchez-Bayo and Wyckhuys 2019). The primary cause of these declines is habitat loss, conversion, and fragmentation. Birds, too, are seeing significant declines. BirdLife International reported that at least 40 percent of bird species worldwide have declining populations, for many of the same reasons as insects (2018). The UAA, along with many others, has recognized that our industry can have a direct positive impact on this issue. The UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee believes the problem has been clearly articulated and that many in the utility vegetation management (UVM) industry can now imagine a future in which UVM operations promote environmental stewardship, rather than negatively contributing to deepening world issues. However, the path from here to there can be challenging to discern. To help illuminate this path, our committee put together 10 ways your vegetation department can embrace environmental stewardship.



Follow ANSI A300 Part 7 standard and associated IVM best management practices.

We feel that a great place to start is adhering to all laws and regulations and adopting industry best management practices (BMP). Most applicable to this topic is the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) A300 standards, which represent industry consensus on tree care operations and is divided into seven parts. Part 7: Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM) and its associated BMP describe the creation and implementation of IVM plans for use in the management of rights-of-way (ROWs). The result of IVM is an iterative process that focuses on the control of incompatible vegetation, as well as the propagation, protection, and enhancement of compatible species. This flexible framework can be applied to electric, gas, or transportation ROW as well as on other working landscapes. To find out more, pick up a copy today at isa-arbor.com/store.



Develop and maintain a long-term vegetation management plan.

Most UVM programs have some semblance of a vegetation *maintenance* plan, but only a few departments have a vegetation *management* plan. You may ask, "What's the difference?" A

vegetation maintenance plan describes vegetation maintenance practices being performed on the ROW. On the other hand, a vegetation *management* plan provides policies, procedures, goals, specifications, and methodologies, as well as a program overview. Vegetation management plans should be based on IVM principles with a focus on compatible and non-compatible vegetation, tolerance levels, and action thresholds, and the plans should be iterative. We recommend periodically reviewing and updating vegetation management plans based on lessons learned during implementation. The end of each field season is a good time for review.



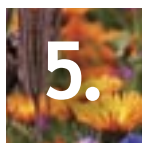
Form partnerships with local non-profits, community groups, and municipalities.

Nobody can be an expert in all areas, so don't try to go it alone. Each region of the country has non-profits, community groups, and municipalities engaged in environmental stewardship activities. Find places where your ROW runs through lands where these groups are actively engaged in conservation work and start a conversation about collaboration. Working with outside groups in your area can also provide opportunities to work on related issues, like environmental justice, which can be challenging to focus on as a UVM professional. Remember, *none of us* is as good as *all of us* together! Find resources on region-specific pollinator work at xerces.org/pollinator-resource-center.



Participate in collaborative industry groups like the ROWHWG.

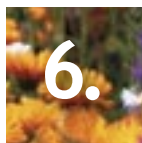
The Rights-of-Way as Habitat Working Group (ROWHWG), formed in 2015, is a unique collaboration of professionals from across multiple sectors including gas, electric, rail, and road industries. The working group represents more than 200 organizations from across the private industry, government agencies, non-profit organizations, and academia in the U.S. and Canada. Biologists, foresters, engineers, environmentalists, lawyers, educators, and other stakeholders interested in supporting habitat on ROW and other working landscapes come together to share ideas and identify BMPs. The working group is hosted and facilitated by the Energy Resources Center at the University of Illinois at Chicago. To participate in their workshops, online webinars, and access their vast online resources on habitat-related information, tools, news, and events, visit their website at erc.uic.edu/bioenergy/row.



Manage your ROW for habitat.

We know that nationwide utility ROWs represent millions of acres of land. These acres represent a unique opportunity as they represent legacy spaces that, because of ownership and use, will largely never be developed. Many species already benefit from habitats that exist on ROWs. With habitat in mind, ROW managers could benefit many more species, including imperiled species. For example, in the U.S., the monarch butterfly is one of many species in sharp decline. In December of 2020, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will make a listing decision regarding the endangered species status of the monarch. Implementing pollinator habitat activities that were recently approved in the Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), designed specifically for the monarch butterfly, can go a long way to help protect this charismatic species. Organizations that participate in the CCAA will be provided operational flexibility and regulatory assurances, should the monarch end up listed as endangered. To find out more, visit tinyurl.com/ERC-CCAA or monarchwatch.org.

Efforts to build and maintain habitat on ROWs don't just benefit monarch butterflies and other insects. Grassland birds have seen major declines throughout the U.S. due to land conversion. These bird species can utilize early successional habitats created by transmission corridors. This is only possible if mowing is adjusted not to remove cover and disturb ground nests. Additionally, when possible, leaving snags and down woody debris in forested and wetland areas can provide habitat for migratory birds. To learn more about how you can alter ROWs management to provide habitat for grassland and migratory birds, partner with your local Urban Bird Treaty City municipalities and non-profit partners. Visit bit.ly/urbanbirdtreaty and find a partner near you.



Evaluate your UVM program against the UAA's Maturity Model.

One of the deliverables from our committee, the Maturity Model, is a free, downloadable tool available through the UAA's website at gotouaa.com/take-action. Through this self-assessment, you can quickly identify which level of stewardship maturity your VM department is currently operating, as well as activities you can engage in to advance to

the next level. The model is a great way to get your organization or department to begin discussing how to implement more stewardship practices into your operations. Additionally, the Maturity Model is a great tool to get your department ready to seek recognition from outside groups (see items 8 and 9 below).



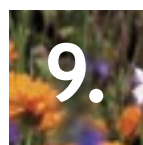
Implement a closed chain of custody.

Herbicides are an important tool in our collective IVM toolbox. Herbicide technology has evolved a lot since its inception and continues to advance each year. Considerable improvements have been made not only in the chemistry allowing for lower volume herbicides with more targeted formulations, but in application, handling, and transport. In 2010, the UAA and ISA produced a BMP for closed chain of custody for herbicides, taking it to the next level. This BMP provides an end-to-end strategy to manage the custody of herbicide from producer to applicator, as well as addressing waste stream issues with the return and reuse of herbicide containers. This document provides a demonstration of our industry's proactive self-regulation and commitment to environmental stewardship. All UVM programs are encouraged to follow this BMP. Read more about closed chain of custody at bit.ly/closedchainBMP.



Seek external ROW VM endorsement or certification.

Multiple stakeholders outside of our industry provide endorsements or certifications of good stewardship practices for UVM programs. Two examples are the National Wild Turkey Federation's Energy for Wildlife ROW Habitat Endorsement Program and the Wildlife Habitat Council's Conservation Certificate. Both of these outside organizations can provide acknowledgment of your VM program's excellent stewardship practices, which can be an asset when communicating with both internal and external stakeholders about your program. Visit nwtf.org and wildlifehc.org to learn more.

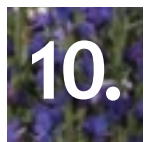


Seek accreditation from the ROW Stewardship Council.

Another avenue to gain recognition for stewardship practices is the ROW Stewardship Council's Accreditation for IVM



Excellence. This rigorous accreditation recognizes, through an independent audit of an applicant’s IVM program, vegetation managers who exemplify ROW Stewards by meeting or exceeding standards of excellence. There is currently no recognition more substantial for a ROW manager than to have their program formally recognized by this accreditation. The benefits of the accreditation reach beyond the practitioner and their system to positively impact the industry, communities, stakeholders, and agencies. Learn more about accreditation at rowstewardship.org.



Take part in your company’s sustainability reporting.

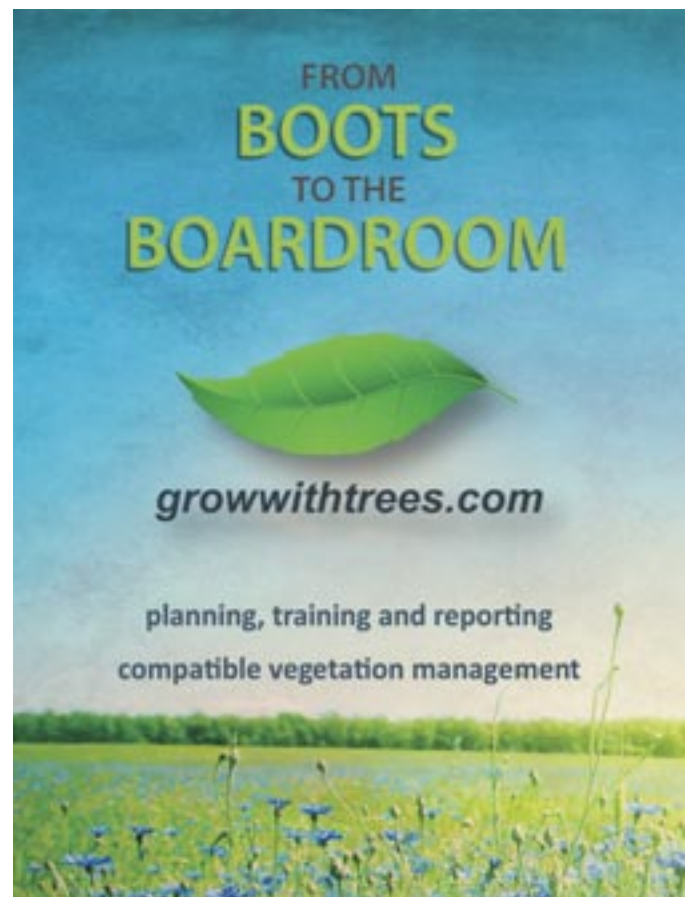
Take credit for your role as an environmental steward. We each exemplify some aspect of environmental stewardship in so much of

what we already do. As vegetation management professionals, we are land managers and more directly influence the environment than most aspects of our organizations. Many organizations publish annual sustainability reports, some in the structure of sustainability indices (Environmental Social Governance [ESG] indices). All ESG indices provide an opportunity to report on VM and ROW practices. Find out how you can contribute to biodiversity sections of your company’s reporting. If your organization doesn’t do ESG or sustainability reporting, make your organization aware of all the positive benefits vegetation management brings to your organization. Use this as an opportunity to synchronize your efforts across departments. Reach out to the communications, sustainability, construction, and permitting departments. Maybe you can form an internal stewardship taskforce. Find ways to collaborate proactively. Identify targets to enhance your IVM program and positively contribute to your company’s public relations efforts.

We hope this article helps create a path from wherever your program currently is to further align with environmental stewardship. If you would like to be involved with the latest industry environmental stewardship activities, reach out to the UAA Environmental Stewardship Committee. Finally, please recognize the many ways you already reflect environmental stewardship and the innumerable ways in which you could take one step further in that direction.

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SPOTLIGHT on the Environment



NASA IMAGE

EEI and AGA Environmental, Social, and Governance Sustainability Template: Natural Resource Metrics

By Sarah K. Ball, Director of Environmental Affairs, Edison Electric Institute

Environment, social, and governance (ESG) are the three central factors most often used to describe, measure, and disclose corporate sustainability concerns. ESG includes many business practices from the natural gas and electric power industries, including utilization, pollution prevention, natural resource management, employee relations, executive and employee compensation, management structure, and others.

Many large companies now report ESG information to investors and to other stakeholders using a variety of voluntary reporting frameworks developed to address concerns for every industry in any country. The Edison Electric Institute (EEI), the American Gas Association (AGA), and their member companies have led the way by developing the first and only industry-focused, investor-driven

reporting template for ESG and sustainability-related information.

To develop investor-driven ESG sustainability reporting practices, EEI and AGA assembled a broad, work group comprised of financial specialists and industry representatives in areas such as accounting, environment, ESG/sustainability, finance, treasury, investor relations, and legal.

The ESG sustainability template encourages voluntary reporting both in quantitative and qualitative formats based on input from the financial community. The qualitative section focuses on governance and strategies, such as a company's integrated resource plan to transition generation activities to renewable resources. The quantitative section is a framework designed for companies to provide consistent and concise metrics while addressing utilization, emissions, and resource management.

The ESG sustainability template also enables EEI and AGA member companies to present their sustainability stories in an accurate, timely, and concise manner that is favored by investors.

After a year of piloting these disclosures, EEI and AGA member companies unveiled Version 1 of the ESG sustainability template in 2018 and released Version 2 in 2019.

In 2019, a group of electric company vegetation managers collaborated with EEI to develop standardized vegetation management (VM) metrics for gas and electric companies to utilize. This industry-driven initiative is divided into two parts: mandatory and voluntary programs. Each incorporates information from industry advisory groups, including the Electric Power Research Institute's (EPRI) recommendations for disclosing VM metrics.

The mandatory program metrics report the total number of acres restored, enhanced, and protected, as well as an electric company's responsibility to manage nationally threatened and endangered species as listed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The voluntary program metrics report more extensive and flexible large-scale VM activities, particularly as they pertain to integrated vegetation management (IVM) and conservation initiatives.

Electric companies also have an opportunity to disclose the total amount of voluntary restored, enhanced, or protected acres, information about third party accreditations and certifications (e.g., ROW Stewardship Council Accreditation and Wildlife Habitat Council certifications), information about an electric company's avian protection plan (where applicable), habitat projects funded and supported, and research engagement.

EEI's natural resource metrics are optional and are an open source for EEI members and non-EEI members to guide standardized disclosure of VM activities within their corporate sustainability reports.

Ultimately, electric companies are committed to providing services to their customers. They all now have an equal opportunity to annually disclose the types and extent of the habitat and IVM work.

To continue to ensure that the ESG sustainability template remains relevant to investors, it is important to update the template according to investor and industry recommendations. EEI also recognizes that some investment firms are divesting from companies that are not sustainably positioned. For these reasons, EEI is now working with the financial community and its member companies to determine the extent to which these natural resource metrics should be incorporated into the next version of the ESG sustainability template.

Focusing on Work Zone Safety

An interesting pattern emerged when we began analyzing close-call data at Lewis Tree Service. When considering frequency, we learned that line of fire by vehicle has as much serious injury potential as struck-by-tree-related incidents. Yet, if you studied only our incident data, that picture would not emerge.



Our findings were reinforced by other industries. According to the U.S. DOT from 2007 to 2017, 39 percent of law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty were lost in traffic-related incidents. If officers have a police car with flashing lights on site, how much more vulnerable are *our* workers?

As we've spent significant time in 2020 discussing work zone protection and traffic control, our guidance to minimize the risk of being struck by passing motorists has shifted:

- When we set up work zones, we often have our backs to oncoming cars. Inattentional blindness studies show that when we are focused on one thing, like setting up the work zone, we are blind to other things, like approaching cars. Key learning—use a roadway spotter when placing cones, exiting vehicles, accessing bins, etc.
- We typically give flagger and spotter roles to new crew members in training. While these roles may require lower technical skills than using a chainsaw or operating a bucket, they are essential to safety. While flagger and spotter roles are less complicated, they are much more significant than the credit we give to them. Key learning—we are now rolling out tools to qualify spotters, emphasize the importance of the position, train how to explore risks and spot problems before they happen, and check for understanding.

The extreme criticality of close-call reporting is clear. It guides our safety and human performance strategy and helps keep our craftworkers from serious injury.

Two Northeast Ohio Companies Combat COVID-19 Together

By Troy Ross, Executive Vice President of Operations, ACRT Services

Keeping People Working While Protecting Employees in the Field

Due to the spread of COVID-19 over the past several months—followed by the shelter-in-place order implemented by the state of Ohio—Goodwill Industries had to furlough most of its employees. Meanwhile, the ACRT Services executive team needed protective masks for employees working in the field. As a previous director on the board at Goodwill, Brad Schroeder, CFO at ACRT Services, volunteered to reach out to Goodwill as he was familiar with its industrial sewing facility. He asked Nan McClenaghan, president and CEO of Goodwill Industries of Akron, if its sewers could possibly make masks for ACRT Services.

Goodwill was already a leading provider of industrial textiles such as safety vests, aprons, tool bags, etc., and had just completed a couple of orders that met Ohio's essential work requirements; however, they could no longer let the sewers come to work unless they received additional projects that qualified as "essential." Schroeder just happened to call McClenaghan on the same day they furloughed all of its sewers.

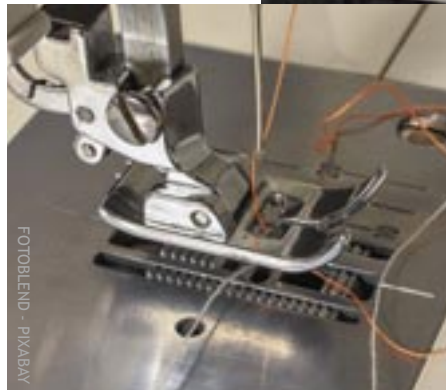
The goal at ACRT Services was to provide employees with five to six masks so they could be rotated while working. McClenaghan reached out to the sewing manager, Al Sardelle, who immediately began reviewing patterns for the masks. Sardelle and the two lead sewers, Tanya and Kathy, returned to work and by the end of that week, they delivered the first 500 masks.

"We had cotton in inventory that would normally be used for other products," McClenaghan said. "We took anything we could find and got to work on prototypes. It's a simple mask once you get the pattern down. It's made to be high-quality, but also to be produced in high volumes."

Goodwill is working on masks for Cardinal Safety Products, as well as community masks funded by GAR Foundation and United Way of Summit County. By the end of May, the sewing team created and shipped more than 25,000 masks.

Partnering Together

In gratitude for Goodwill's quick support and turnaround, and to support its mission of helping people prepare for, find, and retain employment, ACRT



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Services provided Goodwill with an operating donation of \$15,000.

"Unfortunately, at that time, we had no retail operations revenue coming in and very few people working," McClenaghan said. "While our sewing team and the assembly team had been working, we still had a large amount of our staff furloughed. The grant ACRT Services provided us has supported us during this difficult time, and we're very grateful for it."

While the state of Ohio is slowly beginning to reopen, many organizations and their employees will be required to wear face masks.

"People are going to need reusable cloth masks for a long time," McClenaghan said. "We plan to continue making those and remain available to support organizations looking for face masks and other industrial sewing products. We are very grateful that ACRT Services called us and allowed us to work out a strong base pattern. That trust in Goodwill's sewing team set the stage for all the additional orders that came after ACRT Services'."



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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 2019 PinE Award Recipients.

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



2019 PinE Award Recipients



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ASPLUNDH

GOLD AWARD



GOLD AWARD



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SILVER AWARD



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– UVM Company President



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Spotlighting Our California Employee Owners

As an organization offering an Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) and October being Employee Ownership Month, we at ACRT Pacific wanted to showcase two of our outstanding employee owners, how they've built their careers, and what they believe employee ownership means for those considering a career in this industry.



Nikki Stone is an ISA Certified Arborist that joined our organization as a consulting utility forester in 2016. In 2018, she was promoted to supervisory consulting utility forester and was promoted again just one year later to assistant operations manager. As an employee owner, she

appreciates the support she receives while contributing to the company's growth. "ACRT Pacific is unlike any company I've ever worked for. Their dedication to their employees is absolutely unmatched in the industry and anywhere else I've experienced. The industry itself is expanding rapidly, with tons of opportunity at every level. Utility vegetation management (UVM) provides an exciting, ever-changing, and challenging industry to start and grow your career. And as an employee owner, the work you do matters, and it is rewarding to see the impact that your hard work makes," said Stone.



Carly Harrower joined us in 2014 as a consulting utility forester in Northern California. She was promoted one year later to a supervisory position and again to operations manager in 2016. Earlier this year, her hard work paid off once again as she was promoted to senior operations

manager. In this new role, she is responsible for numerous projects throughout California. She is an ISA Certified Arborist and sits on the steering committee for the ROW Symposium by the UAA. "ACRT Pacific has allowed me to grow in amazing ways. I've been able to put my skills to work in the field and advance quickly while benefiting from the success of our organization. As an employee owner, I am proud to see how my individual performance benefits the long-term success of our organization. Our organization encourages industry contributions and participation, which not only helps you learn more about the industry, but also grows your career," said Harrower.

Boots to the Boardroom: Leveraging ESG Biodiversity Sections for IVM Programming

By John Steelman, Program Analyst, Grow With Trees; Stan Vera-Art, Creative Catalyst, Grow With Trees

This article introduces the main Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) biodiversity reporting options available for utilities with existing and evolving integrated vegetation management (IVM) programs. It provides recommendations for developing and strengthening quantifiable conservation frameworks based on disclosures outlined within the most stringent of ESG indices. Utilities can link their *intentional* vegetation management (VM) activities from boots-to-the-boardroom by creating a structured framework that encourages boots to manage for valuable, compatible right-of-way (ROW) vegetation through IVM, which links value-driven monitoring to quantifiable ESG reporting.

Utility vegetation management (UVM) has a long and varied history, as does IVM, but the two are not necessarily the same. The primary objective of UVM is to maintain infrastructure integrity through the elimination of incompatible vegetation. IVM shares the same primary objective but adds *intentional* management of compatible vegetation. IVM activities—regardless of whether they happen on fee-owned lands or ROW easements—may qualify for reporting within ESG biodiversity sections if the actions of the boots-on-the-ground consider no net loss or net positive impact on biodiversity. Definitions for biodiversity vary significantly across industries and disciplines. ESG indices define biodiversity very broadly. Based on the reporting requirements of the most stringent ESG indices, the definition of biodiversity for utilities is defined individually and is based on one's geographic footprint, which defines potential habitat for sensitive plant and animal species.

ESG reporting is voluntary but often strongly encouraged by investors and others. The best-known global ESG indices are the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI) and the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI). Utilities also have an industry-specific ESG template provided by the Edison Electric Institute (EEI). There are other indices, but our discussion focuses on the DJSI, GRI, and EEI's ESG template, which contain biodiversity (or natural resources) sections where IVM activities may be reported.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the biodiversity reporting sections and requirements for each of the three ESG indices. The indices have been positioned according to the level of quantitative requirements and a utility's commitment to managing biodiversity across its geographic footprint. The DJSI contains the most stringent biodiversity reporting requirements, followed by the

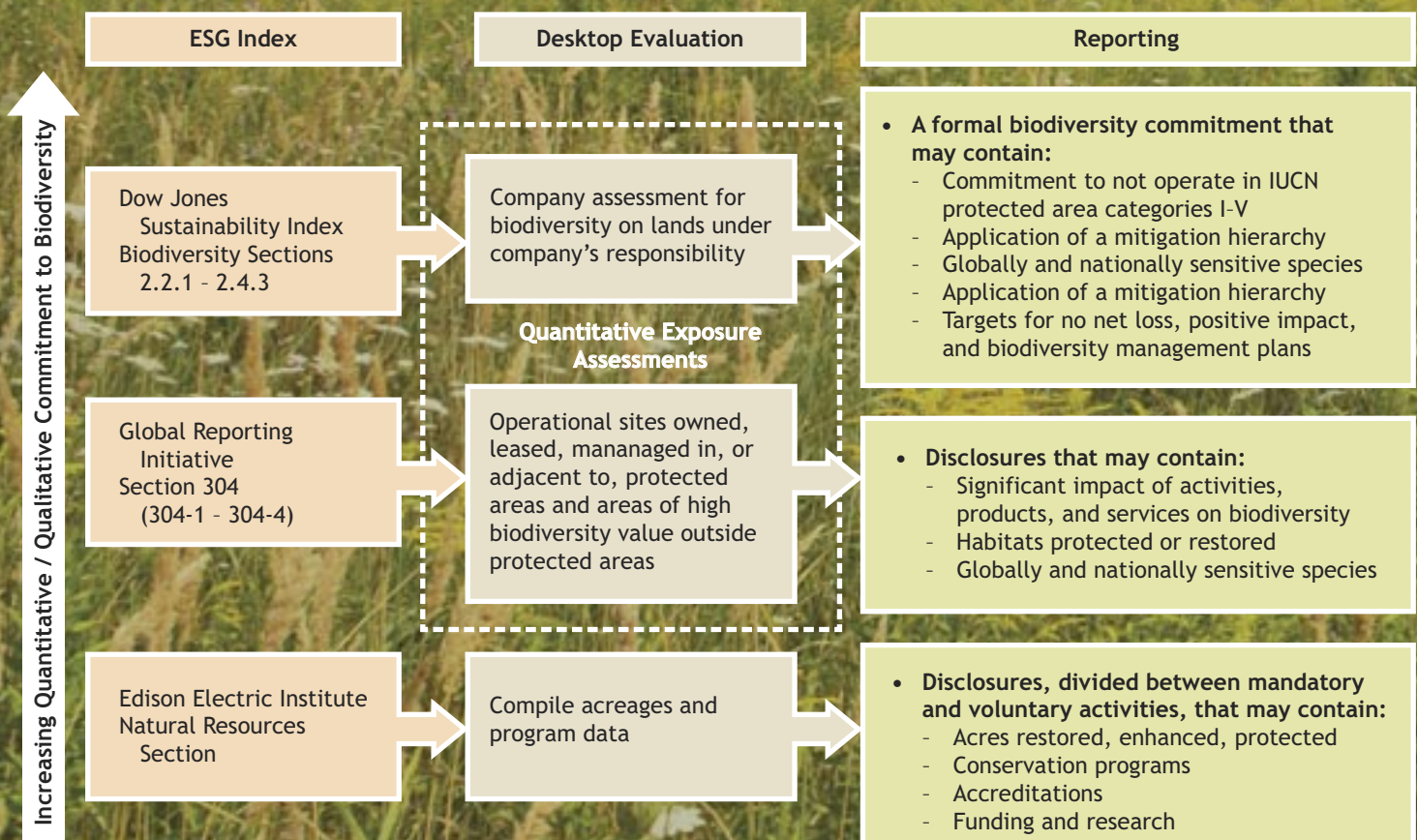


Figure 1. Reporting Biodiversity through ESG Indices

GRI and then EEI’s ESG template. This quantitative continuum is by no means a ranking system; it is simply intended to represent the general level of effort required for reporting biodiversity on these indices.

Both the DJSI and the GRI require a quantitative exposure assessment and, fortunately for us, their requirements are remarkably similar. If a utility satisfies requirements for the GRI, then the DJSI is not much more work, and vice versa. The exposure assessment consists of a system-wide evaluation for protected areas, key biodiversity areas, and species of global and national concern like International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List Species and federally listed threatened and endangered species. The exposure assessment is largely a desktop analysis and the GIS operations required are not complicated. However, using the data to create useful information can be more challenging.

The exposure assessment is a network evaluation and provides a roadmap for utilities to enhance their IVM programs by quantifying areas of potential habitat for sensitive species and evaluating the actions that IVM might have on sensitive species, both directly and indirectly. The DJSI recommends using these results to set targets and timelines for no-net-loss or net-improvement for sensitive species, if beneficial habitat resources are present. The GRI requires a similar approach to identify “significant direct and indirect positive and negative impacts” and set targets and timelines for monitoring the impacts of selective IVM

activities on compatible ROW vegetation across a utility’s geographic footprint. Simply put, if we know what species our actions may impact, then we can tailor our management approaches to protect and conserve valuable, compatible ROW vegetation to support these species.

Such exposure assessments are not unfamiliar to utilities given existing environmental permitting requirements. Completing an exposure assessment across your *entire* operational footprint provides a systematic approach to manage for regulated or sensitive species. However, it can also raise questions about regulatory liabilities, operational flexibility, and requirements to coordinate with landowners. In our conversations with utilities, we have found a high-level of interest in performing these exposure assessments to support managing beyond compliance and working proactively with regulators and other stakeholders.

If you approach an exposure assessment with an eye for creating a company-specific conservation framework—rather than plowing through a set of ESG checkboxes—then you will add value to the exercise by developing or enhancing your IVM program with a complementary biodiversity plan. Checking boxes is not the point. ESG biodiversity sections have gifted utilities with a roadmap for developing a conservation framework that links IVM practices to quantifiable biodiversity metrics.

Both the DJSI and the GRI also provide opportunities to report qualitative descriptions of habitat initiatives and

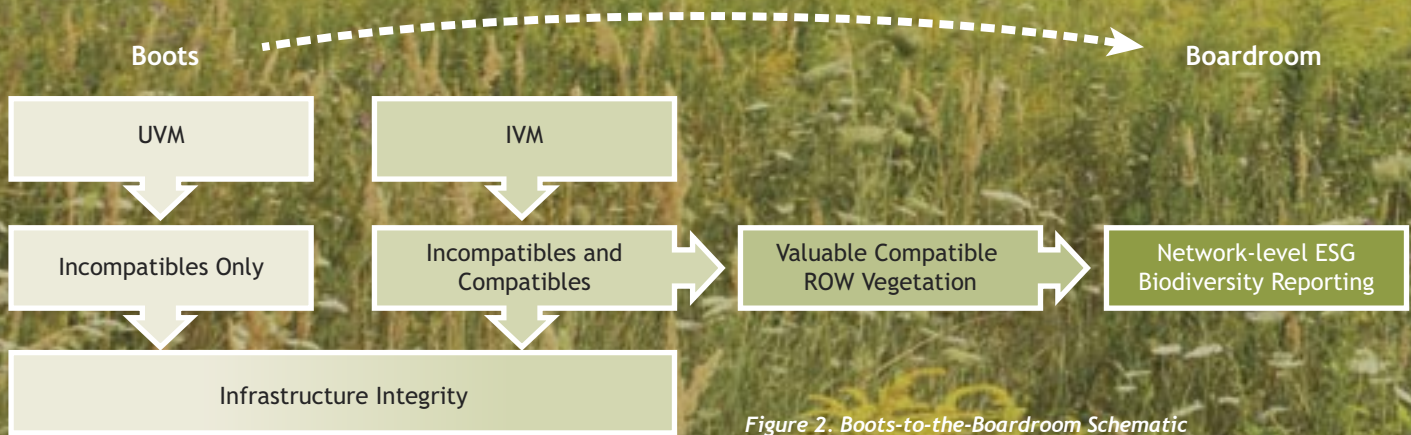


Figure 2. Boots-to-the-Boardroom Schematic

biodiversity impacts. The DJSI requires the publication of a biodiversity commitment that, in addition to certain requirements, can help to showcase partnerships, endorsements, and certifications that your utility has received for habitat management activities, while the GRI is more flexible to providing this information within an annual corporate sustainability report. In 2018, the DJSI shifted towards a more quantitative approach to reporting biodiversity activities, while the GRI maintains more qualitative opportunities for reporting. EEI’s ESG template includes opportunities to report industry-specific commitments, such as accreditation by the ROW Stewardship Council, participation in the monarch butterfly Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances, and investments in VM research.

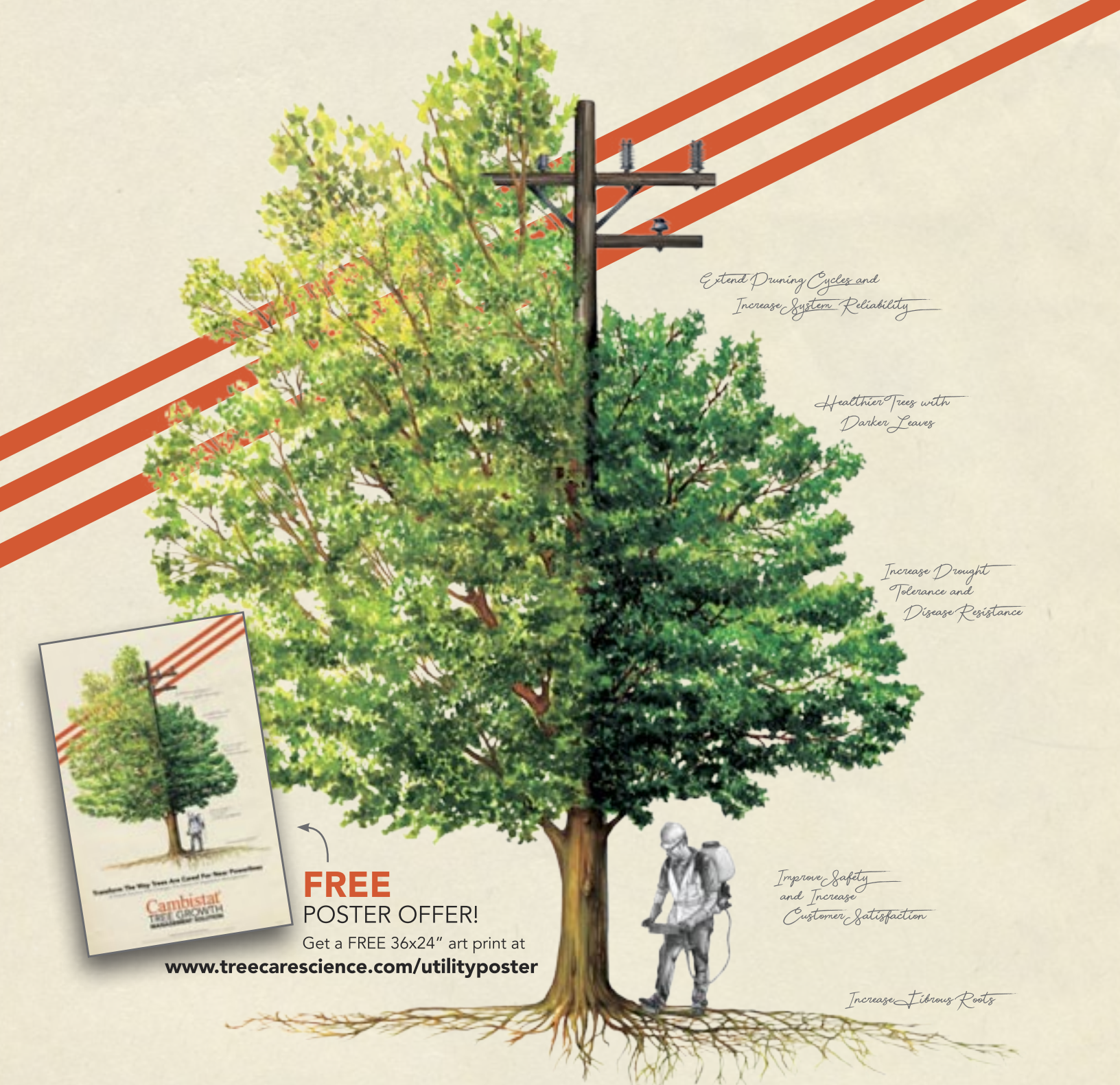
If you are curious about the types of ESG information that your utility discloses, check your annual corporate sustainability report. In either the introduction or the appendix, you should find listings of specific reporting platforms and the associated sections disclosed. If you still have questions or would like to report IVM as biodiversity management, we suggest contacting your sustainability department to inquire about what information they currently collect and their desire for enhancing disclosures. If biodiversity is not currently on their radar, then consider forming an interdepartmental task force to scope the opportunities that may be available at your utility.

Regardless of how your company chooses to report biodiversity metrics, it is ultimately the actions of the VM crews, i.e., the boots-on-the-ground, that positively or negatively impact the types and extent of vegetation communities on your ROW. If boots-on-the-ground are unable to identify valuable, compatible ROW vegetation and therefore do not implement selective IVM best management practices in support of habitat conservation, then a utility’s ability to report the status of biodiversity management is limited. This distinction is important to note, especially as ESG indices have recently shifted from primarily qualitative narratives to predominantly quantitative metrics to avoid greenwashing. To effectively link the actions of boots-on-the-ground to boardroom reporting, VM crews need training to adequately identify, conserve, and monitor compatible ROW vegetation that satisfies the conservation framework and provides biodiversity value.

If your utility is not currently training vegetation crews to identify and protect compatible ROW vegetation, then now is a great time to begin to scope training that can leverage biodiversity reporting in the future. How can VM crews embrace conservation initiatives that are important to their leadership and to the boardroom? Training must be fun to be sustainable. We have found that it helps to create a personal connection between the crews and the vegetation they manage. For instance, an herbicide applicator who learns how to identify plants that are useful for hunting, fishing, wilderness survival, or emergency medicine is more likely to remember which plants to protect and conserve. This type of training requires a semi-customized approach to ensure that VM crews are familiar with their region-specific vegetation. Plant identification training is available in a variety of forms, such as plant field guides, smartphone apps, desktop learning, and on-site field training. We believe what makes training most effective is not the technology, but rather the level of engagement. There is value in connecting training programs to ESG reporting because this helps to link IVM from boots to the boardroom.

When we successfully engage VM crews as an integral part of the utility’s conservation framework, we build valuable partnerships and empower all people involved. If we succeed for one season, we can do it for two. If we succeed for two seasons, we can do it for four. After several seasons of measurable success, we can begin to tackle some of the systemic challenges that utilities face, like contract structures and incentives, work force retention, and job satisfaction. Once we tackle the systemic challenges, our boots-to-the-boardroom IVM program becomes self-sustaining.

Figure 2 provides a simple schematic of the boots-to-the-boardroom concept. Utilities that choose to adopt an IVM program—and manage for both incompatible and compatible vegetation—maintain infrastructure integrity the same way that incompatible-only focused UVM does. IVM programs that adopt the framework provided by ESG indices, like the DJSI and GRI, can utilize beneficial ROW-compatible vegetation to quantify biodiversity impacts across their system and engage their full teams in implementing sustainable vegetation practices. That’s using boots-to-the-boardroom to inspire the future of vegetation management!



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JESSE SANKO

Helping Timber Rise from the Ashes

By Travis Rogers, Marketing Development Specialist, Corteva Agriscience

Charred logs where trees once grew serve as a reminder to foresters of the ever-present threat of wildfires. Today, herbicides are playing a larger role in mitigating the risk of these devastating events while effectively protecting seedlings from weeds and incompatible woody species that would overtake them.

Growing timber requires good planning and lots of patience. Nowhere is that truer than in California where foresters must deal with restrictive state and federal regulations, drought cycles, and the ever-present threat of devastating wildfires, insect infestation, and rugged terrain. There's also the 75 years or so it takes for trees to get from a seedling to a mature tree ready for harvest.

The payoff comes in the form of some of nature's finest-quality timber. But more than that, foresters remind us it's about the opportunity to preserve the land and ensure the sustainability of the industry for the next generation.

Sierra Pacific Industries, based in Anderson, California, is a third-generation family-owned forest products

company that owns and manages more than 2 million acres of timberland across California and Washington. Mark Gray is the reforestation manager for Sierra Pacific's Coast Cascade region in northern California. He has been involved in reforestation for nearly 25 years, and before that, he spent 14 years as an herbicide contractor for the forestry industry.

"This is a fraternal industry, and foresters here want to pass our knowledge down to the new generation of foresters to help ensure the sustainability of this industry for years to come," Gray said.

It is knowledge built on many years spent refining effective management practices to prepare foresters to deal with whatever comes their way; a big part of that is vegetation management (VM).

Providing a Strong Foundation

After hearing foresters like Gray talk, the message is pretty simple: VM means life or death for newly planted trees. For Sierra Pacific, herbicides are an important tool in safeguarding the six million trees planted each year across its ownership. Without proper site prep in a true Mediterranean climate, competition

from weeds would cause a high mortality level. Trees planted in March or April may not receive much additional rainfall until late fall, which makes weed control crucial.

Prior to reestablishing a forest, Sierra Pacific applicators will make what Gray calls a "preharvest spray" to knock vegetation back. Then, trees are harvested and the next spring a site prep application may be made.

"We let everything emerge, treat it with a mix of Cleantraxx®, Accord® XRT II, and Transline® herbicides and then plant right through that," Gray said. "With that mix, we're seeing good results even in year two, so in many cases there is no need for further treatment."

Applications are primarily made by ground crews of about 12 applicators. Those crews can cover between 60 and 80 acres a day walking and spraying, usually at an application rate of 10 gallons per acre.

New herbicides, such as Cleantraxx herbicide, have helped Sierra Pacific and other foresters make better site prep applications. With excellent tree tolerance, Cleantraxx provides applicators with the ability to safely apply it right over the tops of

seedlings, eliminating the need to shield them during an application. And the proven long-lasting residual control reduces application frequency.

In addition to effective weed control, Sierra Pacific goes the extra mile in its site prep as part of an overall commitment to ensure the land is well maintained. On many sites, bulldozers are brought in for contour subsoiling. This process breaks up any compaction from previous logging and creates ridges in the soil to reduce erosion and save moisture for trees by increasing water infiltration.

Helping Break the Scourge of Wildfire

Beyond just establishing new forest stands, VM is helping protect forests from wildfires. Many foresters are making herbicide applications to control brush that emerges in established fuel breaks. These shaded fuel breaks are typically corridors with widely spaced trees in which the small trees and undergrowth have been cleared. Establishing them allows firefighters the opportunity to safely work at controlling active fires.

“We place them in strategic positions that include ridge tops and roads that are accessible to firefighters,” Gray said. “These breaks can be as wide as 300 feet or as narrow as the width of two bulldozer blades and go for miles.”

Gray believes that establishing and maintaining these breaks is critical, and Sierra Pacific has recently added four new VM forester positions dedicated to doing just that. While much of that work will be done with herbicides, some will utilize integrated approaches like goat herds, which are capable of clearing vegetation from even hard-to-access areas.

“We treat these fuel breaks with herbicides as needed, using Accord XRT II for the broadleaves and using Vastlan® on brush species,” Gray said. “Vastlan helps establish low-growing grasses to keep woody species out of these areas.”



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Certainly, even the best-laid plans are hardly guaranteed to work against something as unpredictable as a wildfire, and Sierra Pacific has certainly not been immune.

In the summer of 2008, near Redding, California, Sierra Pacific lost 12,000 acres to what was known as the Moon Fire. Then, in the fall of 2018, the Carr, Hirz, and Delta Fires scorched almost 350,000 acres of land north and west of Redding, including portions of the previous Moon Fire and more than 50,000 forested acres owned by Sierra Pacific.

Fires like these enact major unplanned reforestation efforts. The first step is a salvage harvest to try to recover the timber of value that remains before it deteriorates. Then, the normal site prep process begins. Cleantrax herbicide is an important component for the acres that are reforested.

“We go in and spray, and there is no waiting to plant because of the excellent crop tolerance,” Gray said. “It helps us get these acres planted back quicker and results in a rapid restoration of the forest.”

Reforestation is good for both Sierra Pacific and the land.

“Our goal is to responsibly reforest as many acres as we can—even land that is very difficult to access,” Gray said.

Going the extra mile in site prep, wildfire prevention, and reforestation are big reasons why Sierra Pacific has been producing quality timber for generations.

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Liberty Utilities and CNUC Deployed a System-Wide ROW Habitat Program

By Jason Grossman, Manager Vegetation Management, Liberty Utilities (Missouri); Chet Ellis, Senior Consulting Utility Forester, CN Utility Consulting

In the Fall of 2018, we at Liberty Utilities (LU) and CN Utility Consulting (CNUC) started a conversation about how to create pollinator habitats on LU's entire rights-of-way (ROW) system. Now, almost two years later, we are fully engaged in increasing ROW habitat value within the border and wire zones of our electric transmission ROW.

More than three hundred years ago, much of North America's heartland landscape was comprised of long and shortgrass prairie. By the middle of the twentieth century, nearly all the North American prairie grasslands had been destroyed due to extensive farming. Healthy prairie landscapes are made up of a variety of grasses, herbaceous plants, and about 10 percent woody shrubs. Not only is the composition of a prairie landscape mostly compatible from the perspective of managing vegetation on electrical ROWs, but it also provides food sources and shelter to pollinators like bees, birds, butterflies, as well as other wildlife. LU's transmission and distribution networks are located throughout this former prairie landscape in Missouri, eastern Kansas, northeast Oklahoma, and northwestern Arkansas. The area of LU's system also coincides with the 3,000-mile annual migration path of the monarch butterfly—from Mexico to Canada and back. Monarchs feed on



ANNETTE MEYER - PIXABAY

Grow With Trees' naturalist, Johnny White, leads a plant walk to study compatible ROW vegetation with Liberty Utilities' herbicide contractors.

nectar resources and lay their eggs exclusively on milkweed plants. Prairie habitat is needed across their migratory route to fuel their journey.

The desire to create, encourage, and protect pollinator habitat on LU's network has many drivers. First, sustainable practices can be reported within an organization's sustainability report (Environmental, Social, Governance [ESG] reporting), allowing LU's Vegetation Management (VM) department to contribute positively to the company's sustainability ranking. Second, in December of this year, the U.S Fish and Wildlife Service will make a listing decision regarding the endangered species status of the monarch butterfly. Implementing pollinator habitat activities under the recently approved Candidate Conservation Agreement with Assurances (CCAA), designed specifically for the monarch butterfly, secures operational flexibility for LU in the event the monarch butterfly becomes listed. Third, we are interested to see if managing vegetation *with* vegetation (i.e., letting the compatible vegetation do the work of minimizing incompatibles) will lower VM costs in the long run. And finally, we hope by shifting focus to the enhancement and conservation of compatible (and beneficial) habitats on ROW, we will increase job satisfaction (and employee retention) for ROW VM managers and crews.

Our approach to implementation has been straightforward. We initially pulled together all stakeholders,



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ECI’s Gold Leaf Award Presented to John Schweinsberg

On June 15, 2020, ECI Consulting Utility Forester, John Schweinsberg, was able to prevent a possible serious injury from occurring to the public. While driving down a

gravel road in Indiana, Schweinsberg noticed a dump truck pouring gravel. From a distance, he noticed the truck operator begin to lift the bed further to dump more gravel, but the driver was not paying attention to the wires above him and eventually struck a service drop connected to a three-phase distribution line. The momentum of the truck snapped the three-phase pole in half and pulled the wires onto the dump truck. Schweinsberg was able

to spring into action immediately after witnessing the operator’s error, and began communicating with the driver of the threats of getting out of the vehicle with the step potential surrounding the truck. The electric utility was contacted,



Environmental Consultants

and supervisors were on the scene within 15 minutes to handle the hazardous situation. Schweinsberg helped secure the scene and managed traffic control until it was confirmed safe for the driver to get out of the vehicle.



ECI’s Gold Leaf Award recognizing Schweinsberg’s commitment to safety

ECI’s Gold Leaf Award recognizes actions taken by an employee to prevent serious injury, property damage, or loss of life. ECI’s executive leadership presented Schweinsberg with a Gold Leaf Award for his commitment to ECI’s culture of safety and for keeping himself and others safe in an extremely hazardous situation.

communicated our program goals, and mapped out concerns and opportunities. In doing so, we realized that among other things, we needed a compatible plant species standard to benchmark our progress in plant species composition over time. In addition, we needed a compatible plant identification training program, including a compatible plant species field guide, for LU's VM managers and contractors. We also needed a structured format that would allow us to report progress within our sustainability report.

To address these identified needs, we utilized the services of CNUC's certified arborists as well as biologists, ecologists, and land managers, also employed by CNUC. Their specialized knowledge of environmental consulting, wetland delineation, plant identification, and many other ecosystem services, has proven invaluable when proactively managing for a compatible, biodiverse prairie landscape on ROW. With the assistance of the Missouri Department of Conservation, CNUC led the creation of a compatible plant species standard for LU ROW that will be used to benchmark our plant species composition changes over time. We used FieldNote®, a Terra Spectrum Technologies software, to map, plan, and monitor not only incompatible vegetation, but also compatible plant species and compositions. In addition, we collect relative abundance, coefficient of conservatism (COFC) ratings, terrain types, hydrology and insolation, among others, to help us plan compatible plant composition per site. Using this data in combination with our new compatible plant species standard allows us to track biodiversity changes, habitat quality, and overall health of our plant communities over time.

We also teamed up with Grow With Trees (GWT) to assist with compatible plant species training for our VM crews and to structure our sustainability reporting (ESG) components related to ROW habitat management. We use an online training platform that begins training VM crews early in the growing



PUBLIC DOMAIN PICTURES - PIXABAY

season. Each week, a 10-minute lesson, including short videos, animations, quizzes, and interactive plant chats with GWT's naturalist, is sent out to all LU VM personnel and contractors. Lesson plans cover a variety of topics, such as compatible border zone shrubs, compatible herbaceous plants recommended by the Pollinator Partnership to enhance LU's wire zone, and aggressive, invasive species LU proactively manages against.

Later in the growing season, the online training is complemented by on-site compatible plant ID classes provided by GWT's naturalist. These field classes are primarily attended by LU's herbicide crews. During the on-site training, significant time is spent helping personnel create personal plant connections. These connections are established by addressing the values that many compatible plants provide to wildlife and pollinators for medicinal qualities and during survival and hunting activities. By emphasizing the benefits and utility of compatible plants, we are more likely to remember the plant identification. In addition, reinforcing the positive cognition (e.g., habitat for wildlife) is more effective than a negative one. Both online and on-site classes are accompanied by a compatible plant ID field guide. The field guide includes pictures of plants throughout the seasons, plant characteristics, uses, and bloom periods. In the years to come, we hope to create a diverse prairie habitat to have plants in bloom from early spring to late fall. To further support our commitment to creating

pollinator habitat, LU is preparing a Wildlife Habitat Council certification application, hoping to certify our integrated vegetation management (IVM) training program later this year.

Investing in our VM crews is important to us because they directly influence the quality of our ROW habitat. By minimizing over-spray and using selective application methods combined with selective herbicide chemistries, compatible plant species are protected and collateral plant damage can be limited. In addition, biodiversity metrics reportable on ESG indices will improve by moving away from brush-hogging towards seasonal mowing activities and by proactively protecting—not negatively impacting compatible shrubs in the border zone and herbaceous plant species in the wire zone.

To meet additional ESG reporting requirements, we asked GWT to perform a geographic information system (GIS) analysis of LU's system. GWT mapped all operational sites, owned and leased, either managed in or adjacent to protected areas or areas of high biodiversity value. This data has been sent to our sustainability department and is ready for their ESG publication later this year.

There are always challenges associated with implementing change. The realization that we had to create our own plant species standard to benchmark and track plant composition over time originally threw us for a loop. In addition, we discovered early on that continuous positive reinforcement is crucial. Throughout the past year, we have made substantial progress towards deploying border zone/wire zone prescriptions, as well as focusing on compatible—not just incompatible—plant species. We conduct plant species composition surveys, and biodiversity changes over time are being tracked. Feedback received thus far from the VM crews and from the sustainability department have been positive. We are looking forward to the years ahead where we will continue to fine-tune our ROW habitat management program.

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The Sustainability Imperative for Business: Emerging Stronger, Greener, and More Equitable

By Caleb Northrop (Environment and Strategy Leader – Energy, Environment & Utilities Industries, IBM Global Markets)

Businesses, governments, investors, and society at large have placed great emphasis on sustainability in recent years. We hear it from the activists' calls to protect the environment to the governments that set ambitious emissions reduction targets; we hear it from Big Tech companies and other businesses that reevaluate their operating models (riding this big green wave) to Blackrock's censure of companies that lack climate action (including seven utilities in July).

And while sustainability and the environment are inherently interconnected, sustainability extends beyond just caring for our air, soil, and water; it requires organizations to also address social justice issues and transparency in governance. In short, sustainability works for the betterment of *people, planet, and profit*.

When discussing sustainability and how it is measured, you may have heard the experts use the acronym "ESG" for Environment, Social, and Governance. Given utilities' unique position as essential service providers to all, they have the power to dramatically affect change on all three fronts. By focusing on the environment, consumers, and transparency in governance, utilities can remain leaders in the sustainability movement—and even chart new territory—to drive substantial impacts across the globe.

As we emerge from this global pandemic, it's important to know that organizations can solve for COVID-19 and for climate change. They help address each other; they are not trade-off decisions or investments, but if approached correctly they could lead to a green and equitable recovery.

Utilities—as organizations that consistently balance social good, environmental protection, and their bottom-line—can think of themselves as more than just organizations of the future, and instead recast themselves as organizations *for a sustainable future*.



The State of Sustainability

Incorporating sustainable practices into your business model can create new value for you and your consumers. As the world overcomes the COVID-19 crisis, utility industry leaders have a unique opportunity to leverage the current social and economic situation to build back stronger, smarter, and more equitably.

What do you think about making new markets and minimizing your client's carbon footprint? Two industries are electrifying the fastest: buildings and transportation. First, buildings currently account for about 40% of global energy consumption and about 10% of global emissions. For utilities, this provides a major challenge and a major opportunity as building/real estate owners substitute fossil fuels with electricity to heat their buildings. And if we can ensure that there's a clean input of renewable energy, all the better. Second, road transportation accounts for about 20% of global emissions and provides another opportunity for significant

impact on emissions reductions. Consumers, investors, and governments are calling for greater and faster adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), and technology companies like IBM are stepping up to the challenge to create data analytics, technologies, and platforms that accelerate the Energy Transition from fossil fuels to renewably-sourced electricity.

Across the world, this shift to renewables is being accelerated. In Germany, a \$60 billion plan for climate change initiatives was unveiled last year. The EU has been aggressive in its tactics to reform how energy is utilized and constituents around the globe are becoming more vocal on the policies they expect from their governments (e.g., Europe's Green Recovery).

For utilities, this shift to sustainability does not mean reliability can suffer. Utilities face the extremely difficult challenge of strengthening the grid and improving ROI while maintaining network resilience and operational excellence for their customers. Whether it's during planned maintenance and during unplanned outages, the lights must remain on. Even as utilities go through digital transformation, continue integrating renewables into the grid, and enable industry electrification at scale, electric utility crews work night and day to maintain operational excellence.

Amid this global crisis, utilities have maintained their social contract with customers to provide safe, affordable, and reliable electricity. As we emerge, from the pandemic, it seems they will also be required to provide clean and secure electricity—or be plagued with negative brand perception and loss of revenue. Sustainability initiatives

can help solve these challenges while inciting positive changes for the environment, consumers, and business.

An Emphasis on Environment as We Build Back Better

While a global pandemic could have served as an excuse for business leaders to neglect their responsibilities for environmental protection, we've observed the opposite; governments, corporations, investors, and citizens have made it clear that now is actually the time to double down on sustainability by ensuring corporate social responsibility and a dedication to environmental and social justice. This approach will positively affect brand perception and ROI as we power through the pandemic and emerge stronger on the other side.

A key path toward achieving a more sustainable world through decarbonization begins with work that utilities began prior to COVID-19—and which they continue to promote as the pandemic tears across the globe. This crucial work cannot be postponed, because we are face to face with the climate crisis:

- Integrating more renewable energy sources by using more distributed and granular sources of flexibility, like batteries
- Improving service levels, using artificial intelligence (AI) in customer relationships, and lowering cost-to-serve
- Merging multiple technologies to optimize the performance of assets, from turbines to transformers
- Re-architecting information technology to allow faster change and digital transformation
- Enabling Energy Ecosystems that create new markets and drive sustainable outcomes

Several global entities—countries, utilities, cities, and regulators—are paving the way for success by driving new business models for the industry and demonstrating the market's need for flexibility services that make sustainable markets and that improve grid reliability. In a post-COVID-19 world, these policies will be increasingly important as businesses capitalize on a “green recovery” and place great emphasis on consumers' quality of life, health, and equity.

Energy Ecosystems: The Equigy Project

Equigy leverages new energy ecosystems and capitalizes on new markets that rely on distributed energy resources to ensure grid reliability and flexibility. Backed by TenneT, a grid provider in the Netherlands and parts of Germany, Equigy is setting a new European standard for renewable energy markets. This initiative allows three of Europe's national TSOs (the entities tasked with transporting energy and balancing supply and demand) to work together to improve the integration of renewables while providing more flexibility for the grid. Using blockchain technology, electrical vehicle (EV) owners can essentially sell back part of the electricity stored in their batteries to the energy provider when demand is high and production is low.

Ultimately, hundreds of thousands of “batteries on wheels” will help balance the grid at times of high stress and “pro-sumers” (consumers who are also producers) are compensated for increasing the flexibility, reliability, and affordability of the system.

UN SDGs: Environmental Justice and Social Justice are Intertwined

The United Nations' global development agenda for 2015-2030 is defined by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which serve as the blueprint for achieving a better and more sustainable future for all. The SDGs address the global challenges we face—including those related to poverty, inequality, climate change, environmental degradation, peace, and justice—and they demonstrate the interdependence of the three pillars of sustainability discussed earlier: *people, planet, and profit*. In order to promote sustainable development globally, it is important that we achieve the SDGs by 2030. These global challenges of environmental and social inequities are intertwined and part of complex global systems, the organizations that recognize social justice as central to sustainable outcomes will remain essential as we emerge from this pandemic.

In 2020, we've seen one global health crisis expose the risks of a potential planetary crisis. And it's clear that society wants solutions: activists are taking this agenda directly into boardrooms, citizens are voting with their dollars, investors are considering climate- and brand-related financial risk, and government actors across the globe are leading from the front with regulation and mandates—all in the direction of driving three pillars of sustainability into business processes. Case in point, a recent McKinsey survey showed that 100% of respondents named a social issue that was directly affecting the success of their business. These two issues of Environmental and Social Justice can only be addressed as two sides of the same coin.

Business leaders are recognizing that now is the time to lay the groundwork for a green and equitable recovery. In IBM's 30th Environmental Report, IBM President Jim Whitehurst wrote, “I believe this moment constitutes a renewed mandate for change; an opportunity to not just rebuild, but to build back smarter: making our world more sustainable by reinforcing our commitment to environmental leadership.”

Transparency in Reporting and Governance is Key

Transparency is important when it comes to environmental protection and all aspects of sustainability. In the same Environmental Report, Whitehurst writes, “Core to [IBM's environmental] efforts will be accountability, setting goals, and measuring progress against those goals, with complete and transparent reporting.”

But the lingo used in environmental reporting can sometimes lead to confusion—or worse intended deception. For example, when consumers see terms like “carbon neutral,”



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they might want to ask themselves how the organization is achieving that. Is the company *actually* changing processes to eliminate carbon emissions from energy generation, manufacturing, and the supply chain? Or are they simply buying Renewable Energy Credits (RECs) to offset their emissions? (It's an important distinction!) Currently, organizations do not have the ability to remove large amounts of carbon from the air instantaneously, and even through forestry, carbon emissions will not be negated today. It's always worth a third and fourth look at a company's environmental report to truly understand the environmental, economic, and social impacts that result from their operations.

Transparency in reporting and governance will help regulators, companies, and constituents make more informed decisions. Disclosures of the following are key:

- The names and locations of the offset projects the company relies upon
- How each project is supposed to

- store or save emissions
- The amount of emissions each project is estimated to store or save when those storage or savings are supposed to occur, and how long they are supposed to last

Climate change continues to represent a serious threat to our planet. In order to enact change, clear, affirmative, and transparent communication will be essential to receive support from regulators, investors, businesses, and the public.

Final Thoughts

Utilities—as providers of essential services—have the power to drive change globally and at scale. The responses to the COVID crisis that we've witnessed should serve as a proof points: the rapid acceleration of digital transformation and the implementation of exponential technologies (Cloud, AI, Blockchain, 5G, Edge analytics) will continue to improve supply chain efficiency, decarbonize our energy system, and better monitor and manage natural systems—among *many* other things.

Sustainability requires proactivity and intentionality. As we emerge from COVID-19, let's confront the underlying systems that perpetuate global inequities and the destructive market dynamics that result in our warming planet. Let's challenge the business models that create additional climate risks and that capitalize on exploitation. Let's find a way to create wealth and revenue as we emerge stronger, greener, and more equitable.

Interested in learning more about how utilities can lead the charge in environmental change? Read IBM's latest Annual Environmental Report and visit www.ibm.com/energy.

Caleb Northrop received his Master's Degree of Environmental Management from the Yale School of Forestry & Environmental Studies, where he focused on water security and environmental justice. At IBM, he helps utility clients incorporate sustainability in their strategies and business models, and he works cross-industry to drive sustainability into all client engagements.

Hidden Values of the ROW Stewardship Accreditation

Opinion Editorial by Derek Vannice, Chair, ROW Stewardship Council and President & COO, CNUC

One of our greatest opportunities to expand the ROW Stewardship Accreditation is communicating the value of accreditation relative to the costs. There are the obvious costs of the accreditation fees and reimbursing the auditors and the more subtle costs of making lasting changes to your ROW vegetation management (VM) program to meet the necessary certification criteria. So, how do we show the value exceeds the costs? One advantage of the accreditation is that benefits are determined, documented, and verified by a non-biased, independent auditor team. The auditors' recommendation is then approved by the council, which is made up of stakeholders representing all impacted by ROW VM practices, including private citizens.

So, what kind of truthful marketing claims can be made by accredited utilities? There is certainly the traditional benefit and savings of a well-run integrated vegetation management (IVM) program, which can lead to reduction in maintenance costs by establishing a compatible plant community. There are also environmental benefits by increasing plants that attract pollinators. These aims are at the core of the ROW Steward Accreditation.

I would like to highlight some rarely discussed benefits of accreditation by reviewing three of the five principles outlined in the ROW Stewardship Council's *Accreditation Standards for Assessing IVM Excellence*.

Principle #1: Compliance with Laws, Standards, and Best Management Practices

Laws and regulations are developed to protect natural resources and

their associated benefits to society. IVM practitioners must demonstrate an awareness of and engagement in practices that comply with all laws and regulations and also meet or exceed guidelines related to VM on ROW and the safety of VM workers.

While the actual value would vary for each utility, there is no question that the value included in being ROW Stewardship Accredited outweighs the costs.

One of the criteria under this principle is that personnel are educated, trained, licensed, or supervised in accordance with applicable regulations and best management practices (BMPs). ROW Stewards assure that VM program personnel are appropriately trained, licensed, and supervised. A well-trained and educated workforce leads to better production, fewer safety incidents, improved retention, fewer claims, and improved public relations.

Principle #3: Community Relations

IVM programs provide outreach to affected communities and other affected stakeholders. One of the real values of the ROW Steward Accreditation is the positive and verifiable public relations opportunities created by adoption of this principle. Criteria under this principle include:

- **Public Education—Stakeholders are apprised of the ROW Stewardship program, IVM practices, and resulting benefits. ROW Stewards help their communities and neighbors understand why and how they use IVM to manage ROW.**
- **Internal Stakeholder Engagement—The IVM plan is based in part on interdisciplinary collaboration with other departments within the organization that can provide relevant support. Internal collaboration leads to an integrated approach to VM.**
- **External Stakeholder Engagement—Management planning, including the development of management objectives, considers the societal impact of planned activities. The input of appropriate stakeholder**

groups interested in or affected by ROW IVM is welcomed and considered when developing management objectives. Consideration of stakeholder input is an essential component of integrated pest management (IPM) and IVM. **ROW Stewards actively seek to engage stakeholders in consideration of the societal and community impact of VM activities.**

Principle #5: Understanding Pest and Ecosystem Dynamics

The ability to identify both incompatible and compatible vegetation, plant communities in the managed system, and understand the effects of various IVM methods based on knowledge of pest life histories and ecosystem processes is foundational knowledge for VM workers.

This principle has multiple criteria but what shouldn't be overlooked is commitment to research, development, and demonstration (RD&D). RD&D activities, such as field trials, should be supported to provide an opportunity to enhance understanding and knowledge of the ecology of the managed ROW and to support continuous improvement. **ROW Stewards are committed to supporting research and demonstration activities that enhance understanding of the ecology of the managed system.**

When these principles were developed, marketing claims were attached to each criterion. The claims bolded in this article are only a few of the advantages of the approximately 50 marketing claims for the ROW Steward Accreditation that can be documented and verified by obtaining the credential.

While the actual value would vary for each utility, there is no question that the value included in being ROW Stewardship Accredited outweighs the costs.

Spotlighting Davey's Women in Utility

To the average person, utility work is associated with male-dominated fields like construction, demolition, or the trades. But recently, more women have started plugging into the often-overlooked career path with utility services that has provided them with fulfillment and growth opportunities.

Davey is proud to have many female team members who uphold the company's commitment to safety, integrity, expertise, leadership, stewardship, and perseverance. Meet a group of women who are on the rise with Davey Utility Solutions.

Caitlin Gilbert was interested in a new challenge at Davey after working on a few short-term field projects. Her willingness to learn new skills allowed her to become the head of a make-ready engineering

field team that uses innovative technologies to collect data and analyze it remotely using imagery and photo measurement tools.

Amy Nichols' passion for making a difference in natural resource management drove her to rise through the ranks in Davey and become an area manager for the Natural Resource Management Team of Davey Resource Group's (DRG) Utility Vegetation Management (UVM) division.

As a general foreman with the line clearance division, **Maybi Napoles** is a crew leader who focuses on safe, quality work completed correctly and efficiently.

Marissa Buskard made the case to the DRG Asset Management division leadership for her current position, verifying and auditing inventory data

from the field. She prides herself on delivering quality data to her clients.

Catherine Maldonado brings her prior experiences from a variety of backgrounds to her current customer service specialist role, where she wears the many hats of communicator, planner, and helper.

Sara Dreiser, an Upper Midwest area manager, oversees teams of about 75 people planning work for utilities in Indiana, Wisconsin, and Illinois.

Whether they know it or not, these women influence the future of the utility industry as they build more expertise and passion for their work each day.

Amy Nichols of Davey Resource Group



Seattle City Light's Vegetation Management Group Travels a New Path: A Brief Look at a Transmission Corridor Conservation Mowing Program

By Heidi Asplund, Arboriculturist, Seattle City Light

Seattle City Light (SCL) is a public utility that has been serving its customer owners since 1910. Its mission is to deliver affordable, reliable, and environmentally responsible energy services to its customers

In 2019, SCL embarked on a new Conservation Mowing Pilot Program in one of its transmission corridors. The Chief Sealth Trail, a 4.5-mile trail popular with pedestrians and bicyclists, is located within this corridor. SCL had long maintained this urban multi-use corridor by mowing it end-to-end throughout the spring and summer months. In this year, vegetation managers delayed the timing of the mowing to support bird and pollinator habitat. The corridor was eventually mowed end-to-end in the late summer/early fall.

This corridor has multiple stakeholders: trail users, adjacent residents, and city residents. City streets run through it in several areas making visibility for motorists and bicyclists a priority. Additionally, Seattle is an Urban Bird Treaty City and a Bee City USA. Designations which reflect its residents' passion for the natural world. In assessing all stakeholders' desires, the following mowing program was developed:



Early Season

- Reduced mowing to focus on public safety
- Transmission tower bases
- 10-foot buffers off adjacent property lines/fences
- 3-foot buffers on either side of the Chief Sealth Trail
- 10-foot buffers at all street-ends and crossings

Late Season

- Mowing after July 31 at the end of local primary bird nesting season
- Remaining areas in transmission corridor

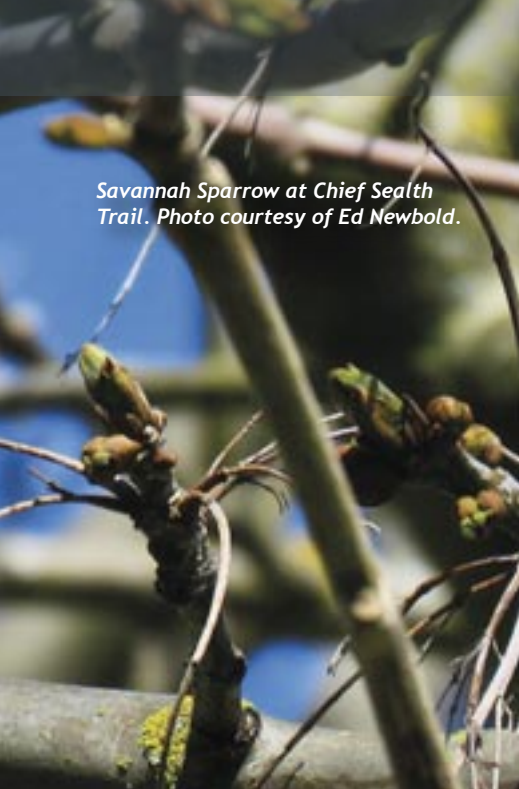
- Re-mow previously mowed areas as needed

What could go wrong? Some stakeholders accustomed to the corridor being mowed by July 4 had concerns about grass fires being set by celebratory fireworks. Others felt that SCL was neglecting a long-cared-for corridor, while others expressed concerns about predatory wildlife lurking in the grass.

SCL designed its early season mowing specifications in partnership with the Seattle Department of Transportation (SDOT) and Seattle Fire Department (SFD). SDOT called for the street-end



Mason Bee on Dandelion. Photo courtesy of Will Peterman.



Savannah Sparrow at Chief Sealth Trail. Photo courtesy of Ed Newbold.



buffers, while SFD recommended creating fire breaks three times the height of the fuel load (i.e., unmown grass). With the unmown grass growing three feet tall, the program's 10-foot buffers met both departments' recommendations. But while SCL did its homework partnering with other city departments, it failed to meaningfully communicate its change in plans to the public. And they let us know.

At the end of the 2019 mowing season, it was clear that the program's success would require outreach to neighboring residents and trail users before the 2020 mowing season began. Additionally, the program lead and the crew chief responsible for the corridor considered leaving unmown patches for birds and pollinators year-round, utilizing IVM methodologies to control undesirable species as needed. As the 2020 mowing season approached, the VM group worked closely with SCL Communications and Marketing to draft a new vision for the program and to communicate it directly to abutting residents and trail users alike.

In late March 2020, a local group email list for birding enthusiasts contained a post from a well-known Seattle birder who had spotted several Savannah Sparrows—migratory ground-nesting birds—along the Chief

Sealth Trail. He attributed their presence to the 2019 mowing change. He felt the amount of tall grass that remained unmown until late summer had provided better habitat for this species. An SCL staff member took GPS data points of Savannah Sparrows observed in the corridor and produced a map. Mower operators were provided with this map to help them avoid potential nests.

In mid-May, letters detailing the Conservation Mowing Program were sent to all residences abutting the transmission corridor. It included access



Conservation Mowing Program Informational Sign

Example of a Conservation Mowing Site

to translations in the six most frequently spoken languages in the neighborhood. In mid-June, signs with excerpts from the letter were posted at several popular trail access and egress points. Mowing began mid-June implementing the previous year's mowing treatments and the new unmown pollinator and bird plots.

After the signs were posted, several neighbors contacted the utility to express support for the program, one volunteering to plant and maintain native prairie plants at the site. There were far fewer complaints fielded than the previous year.

At the end of the 2020 mowing season, vegetation management staff will assess the Conservation Mowing Program's successes and failures and adjust next year's program accordingly. The hope is to eventually develop partnerships and garner resources to expand the Conservation Mowing Program to include planting and maintaining low-growing native plants for pollinators, birds, and the community's enjoyment.

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By Shannon Lux, Operations Manager, Sustainable Environmental Consultants; Greg Williams, Regional Manager, Wright Tree Service

After a vegetation management (VM) service trims a tree, the trimmings can either be recycled or dumped in a landfill. There are various ways that wood chips can be given a second life. Wright Tree Service (WTS) donates wood chips for use in communities throughout the country, such as parks, trails, and zoos for animal bedding. When requested, WTS also gives wood chips to homeowners.

However, organic landscaping is not the only option to salvage tree trimmings. Manufacturing Filtrexx® Silt-Soxx™ is a more environmentally sustainable way to recycle wood chips. WTS and Sustainable Environmental Consultants (SEC) partnered together to create a path for tree trimmings to be reused as SiltSoxx, an erosion control device, diverting organic matter from landfills which reduces those greenhouse gas emissions from being emitted into the atmosphere.

What Is SiltSoxx and Why Does It Matter?

SiltSoxx is generated from a tubular, nylon casing containing wood chips used to filter water runoff and control erosion on construction sites and other disturbed areas. It's used in locations where vegetation is ultimately going to be established. The wood chips in the SiltSoxx have the ability to chemically bind some of the invisible contaminants in water and slow the runoff to minimize soil disturbance as vegetation grows. Maintaining water and soil integrity around construction sites has a far-reaching impact on the environment. Construction sites have compliance regulations to minimize the environmental disturbance of projects, and fines can be issued if sites are not maintained properly. Sedimentation of waterways is a large environmental concern due to its impact on water quality and aquatic life locally and downstream. For example, the Gulf of Mexico's hypoxic zone is a result of sedimentation and nutrient pollution from upstream urban and rural, point, and nonpoint source pollution.

Although there are other erosion control products, SiltSoxx is the most environmentally sustainable option that outperforms all other devices, like silt fencing, in keeping more sediment and contaminants from entering our water bodies. Silt fencing is a petroleum-based plastic product. Instead of being generated from a majority of repurposed organic matter like SiltSoxx, silt fencing is the complete opposite: an additional pollutant that ends its life in a landfill. According to a 2017 EPA report, almost 20 percent of

Turning a Waste Source into a Resource

SiltSoxx placed on a construction site to prevent soil erosion and filter water.

landfill volume resulted from plastics, a figure that has been increasing greatly over the last few decades. One mile of silt fence is equivalent to generating 8,244 tons of CO₂ equivalent in its lifetime, whereas one mile of 12-inch Silt-Soxx with filter media prevents 369 tons of CO₂ equivalent.

SEC became a certified manufacturer of SiltSoxx in 2009. From 2016 to present day, SEC has manufactured about 26,000 cubic yards (8,826 pallets) of SiltSoxx, and their yearly average has steadily increased over the past five years. That is over 6,500 tons of organic matter or 1,733 full chipper trucks. WTS has established a goal to continue to repurpose organic matter waste. They've concentrated their efforts in areas where there are no opportunities to donate wood chips for organic landscaping, thus reducing the waste going to landfills. Both companies hope to continue growing this partnership for a sustainable future. Currently, WTS is doing land excavation for rights-of-way (ROW) in the Midwest. As crews pull out trees and prepare the way for utility poles, soil is loosened up. During this process, SiltSoxx are being installed along creek banks, waterways, and anywhere poles may be set or where there is major soil disturbance. In some cases, the SiltSoxx installed for ROW construction contain wood chips cut from the utility's existing ROW.

How Is a SiltSoxx Made?

As part of the partnership between WTS and SEC, WTS chips the wood trimmed from trees on ROW to be the correct size for SiltSoxx. They then dump the chips at one of SEC's SiltSoxx manufacturing sites, located in Topeka, Kansas, and Austin, Texas. The majority of wood chips reused in SEC's SiltSoxx comes from trees that WTS trims on ROW in a 25- to 30-mile radius around the manufacturing site.

SEC inspects the chips to ensure they meet specifications and removes vines and larger materials. Once the wood chips are approved, they are placed into the SiltSoxx material. SEC manufactures three different sizes of SiltSoxx: 8"x160', 12"x100' and 18"x50'. Once completed, they are

placed on pallets to be shipped to the designated location for onsite installation.

SiltSoxx has a two- to five-year life span, depending on site conditions and rain events. Once the site is stabilized, which is typically when 70 percent of vegetation is established, the contractor can cut the SiltSoxx open and spread the chips around the site to add organic matter to the soil. The remaining SiltSoxx material can then be disposed of. SiltSoxx creates less material to dispose of at the end of a project than other erosion-control materials, such as silt fencing, straw wattles, and excelsior logs.

In order for SEC to remain a Filtrex certified manufacturer, Filtrex annually requires them to submit a

wood chip sample from each manufacturing location to test for the following requirements:

- Between 5.0 and 8.0 pH level
- Less than 60 percent moisture content
- 99 percent of particle sizes pass through a 2" sieve, and a maximum of 60 percent pass through a 3/8" sieve
- Inert or foreign man-made material is less than 1 percent by dry weight
- Any harmful pollutants, like fecal coliform

Pursuing the environmentally responsible ways of reusing and recycling brush, rather than just dumping brush in landfills, helps offset some of the pollution created by using VM equipment, leading toward a smaller carbon footprint. Using

SiltSoxx on construction sites, near waterways, and around utility poles is one of the many ways the VM industry can positively impact the environment.

If you're interested in learning more about SiltSoxx, visit sustainableenviro.com.

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At ACRT, love for the great outdoors is part of who we are. Our team members are in the field day in and day out, assessing vegetation along rights-of-way (ROWs), roadways, neighborhoods, substations, and numerous other areas. Wherever our work takes us, our passion for the environment follows.

ACRT Assistant Operations Manager Judy Redden is no exception. Redden spent the first 20 years of her career in various IT roles ranging from software developer to project manager. However, she returned to school in 2010 to study ecology and botany. Redden earned her bachelor's degree in ecology and environmental biology from the University of Tennessee at Martin in 2012 and her master's degree in botany and plant biology from Austin Peay State University in 2014.

As a research assistant at APSU, she conducted flora studies for recreational areas, wildlife refuges, and state



Judy Redden, ACRT Assistant Operations Manager

SILVER LEVEL

parks throughout Kentucky, Tennessee, and Alabama. She also worked with a University of Tennessee PhD candidate on the effects of fire on oak savannas. She conducted wetland surveys and delineations in Wyoming for the U.S. Forest Service and participated in an ecological study in the Grand Tetons for the National Park Service.

Redden joined ACRT as a consulting utility forester in 2019 and has quickly advanced to assistant operations manager. While in the field, she saw all types of plant communities, from degraded habitats to intact

communities. This gave her a better understanding of what could be accomplished with appropriate stewardship as well as how ROWs could perform important ecological services despite the restrictions placed on them.

"ROWs are an opportunity to restore native grasslands and prairie communities and make these spaces ecologically important for pollinators and other conservative species," Redden said. "As an employee owner for ACRT, I not only get the opportunity to contribute but also benefit from that work as we continue to make a difference for our customers."



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