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Volume 16

Number 1

UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH

STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND
AWARENESS IS KEY TO SUCCESS

THE CRITICAL ROLE OF TRANSLATIONS

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
LANGUAGE BARRIER

COMMUNITY WILDFIRE TRAINING GRANTS

THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNITY
WILDFIRE DEFENSE TRAINING

BUSTING THE MYTHS

WHAT LIFE AS A UTILITY
ARBORIST IS REALLY LIKE

RESPONSIBLE APPROACH TO URBAN FORESTRY

PARTNERING TO CREATE A SUSTAINABLE
TREE PROGRAM





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2024-2025 OFFICERS



We are an organization of over 5,000 individuals with interest in, and a commitment to, the maintenance of trees and other vegetation for the purpose of ensuring the safe and reliable distribution of energy, including electric, oil, and gas, to business and residences.

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Learn how Springfield, Missouri, is building connections with their community on **page 14**.



Read about community wildfire defense training on **page 26**.



Find out the importance of translations in communications on **page 48**.

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

Artificial Intelligence (AI)
Best Management Practices (BMPs)
Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG)
Integrated Vegetation Management (IVM)
Geographic Information System (GIS)

Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR)
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA)
Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)
Rights-of-Way (ROW)

Subject Matter Expert (SME)
Transmission and Distribution (T&D)
Utility Vegetation Management (UVM)
Vegetation Management (VM)

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Matt Goff

Hello everyone! Welcome to a new year filled with fresh opportunities and challenges. As we embark on this journey together, let's prioritize our well-being, both physical and mental. As I mentioned in my President's Message at Trees & Utilities in Fort Worth, mental health is a topic that can be difficult to discuss—but with effort, we can all make it easier.

Your mental health is just as important as your physical health. As an industry advocate, the UAA encourages open communication and a supportive work environment. If you're feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or need someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to reach out to National Alliance on Mental Illness (www.nami.org) or contact the mental health hotline by dialing or texting 988.

Here are some tips for managing stress and maintaining a positive work-life balance:

- **Practice mindfulness:** Take short breaks throughout the day to meditate or simply relax.
- **Set boundaries:** Define clear boundaries between work and personal time.
- **Prioritize tasks:** Focus on one task at a time to avoid feeling overwhelmed.
- **Seek support:** Talk to a friend, family member, or therapist about your feelings.

Remember, you're not alone. The UAA is committed to realizing a safe and supportive vegetation management industry where everyone feels valued and respected.

As we begin 2025, it's a wonderful time to recap how the UAA closed out 2024. During the third and fourth quarters, all board members took time to reflect on 2024 and prepare for 2025. Here is a summary of what to expect from the standing UAA committees in 2025.

Editorial Committee

We are excited to explore our 2025 themes: Community Engagement and Outreach; Environmental Stewardship; Safety; Technology and Innovation; Sustainability and Environmental Conservation; and Workforce Development and Education. Join our committee or contact newsline@gotouaa.org to submit articles. See our 2025 Media Guide on the UAA website for submission details.

Events Committee

2024 was a successful year. We hosted six regional events, including the first Southern Regional in Georgia with a record 86 attendees! 2025 has five locations already planned: Ohio, New York, Western, DTX, and Pennsylvania. Reach out if you'd like to be involved in planning. The committee also needs a co-chair in 2025; contact UAA staff if you're interested.

Environmental Stewardship Committee

The committee thanks everyone for a great 2024, especially for your support in producing the *Newsline* articles that were published. In 2025, we are considering several new BMPs and standards to support UVM. This year will also focus on collaboration with other affinity groups—more to come as this progresses.

Safety Committee

Safety around wireless arrays will continue into 2025. Our 2025 themes for safety include de-escalation training for industry workers; tips for dealing with landowners, customers, and others regarding UVM work; and developing new PSAs with a safety theme.

Outreach Committee

2025 Themes:

- What a Spanish-speaking task force looks like for the UAA
- Working to incorporate outreach initiatives into all committee business
- Analyzing and sharing the results of the member survey that closed in November 2024

Professional Development Committee

Our 2025 themes are in progress. There is work taking place in sub-committees focusing on education and credentialing. The committee has capacity to grow in 2025. If any UAA members would like to join or know more, please reach out to UAA staff.

Board of Governors

An MOU with the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point has been signed. The PUVM program continues to be evaluated for offering course credits for students completing the program.

Research Committee

The new champion of the committee is UAA Director Cindy Musick. A sub-committee will take up AI uses in vegetation management in 2025. The committee is completing three different *Newsline* articles that will be published in 2025.

2025 UAA Awards Nominations

The UAA Awards nominations opened in November 2024. Please see our website for more details and take part by nominating someone for recognition.

In conclusion, the volunteers of your UAA Board are working hard for every member of the organization. As I have said previously, the highest calling of the UAA is to advocate for our members. That said, many hands make for light work. So, if you have an interest in helping make our voice heard, please reach out to UAA staff. They can help connect you with your area of interest. Together, we can realize our goal of being "your ultimate resource for all things vegetation management." 🌿

Matt Goff

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon

Every Friday after Thanksgiving in the U.S., I take my tree gear to a local Scouting America camp to team up with other arborists with the goal of removing hazard trees and assisting the camp with unbudgeted tree work. Many of the individuals in this group also gather during the third week of September each year to provide tree work to our local Fort Snelling National Cemetery. These are just two examples of how arborists I know lend their skills and time for the betterment of the community.

It is logical that the folks who spend their days sustaining our communities' energy needs are also the folks who both leave their homes to restore disaster-hit areas and lend their talents to other worthy causes. These folks often have the support of their employers, families, and friends to be able to participate in community engagement—and that support is appreciated.

The UAA is also actively working on community engagement and outreach with our committee initiatives. Our efforts are often aimed at making arboricultural work safer, more sustainable, and increasingly professional. *Utility* arborists have unique training and skills that other arborists may not, namely working with security teams. Many of our customers have their own security teams that work with the vegetation management teams to minimize risks. Violence emerging on tree work sites has increased over the past year, growing into life-threatening or life-altering events. The Safety Committee is leveraging relationships with security experts to craft worksite best practices, training, and educational materials in the hopes to increase the safety of our teams. This work will be applicable to all tree worksites, not just UVM worksites. We have engaged organizations like the ISA, UCFS, and TCIA to bring the products the Safety Committee creates to the

entire arboriculture industry.

Another area the UAA is taking the lead on in the arboricultural industry, with the help of other arboriculture organizations, is amplifying the discussion about how to recognize point-source communication antenna arrays in the field. While the exact impacts of chronic and variable exposure to radio radiation to the human body are not clear, guidance for acute exposure indicates some levels of exposure can have negative impacts to the human body. The Safety Committee has been working on tools to train arborists on how to identify antenna, determine the directions these antennae may be receiving or transmitting in, and where to look for information on who to contact to learn more about the risks on or near a worksite. These antennas are often placed aloft where tree crews may be working, and are popping up more and more as wireless communication expands to track a multitude of things like traffic control, rideshares, deliveries, vehicle diagnostics, doorbell cameras, internet searches, and more.

These are just two examples of how the UAA is engaging with the wider arboricultural community to provide service to deserved causes. Like the gifted work at cemeteries, civic organizations, and neighborhood enhancement events, UAA committee work is carried out mostly by volunteers with the skills and knowledge to contribute great things to make our communities better. The folks offering their time and talents for the work of the UAA also often are supported by their employers, families, and friends to be able to give back. This issue of the UAN is dedicated to community engagement and outreach. Thank you all for your efforts in this area. It makes a difference. 🙏

Dennis Fallon



Small enough to call you by name. Large enough to respond. Since 1945, utility-related forestry has been a core element of the Penn Line organization. Today, we work for some of the nation's largest energy producers. We are a single source for broad capabilities in all aspects of vegetation management.

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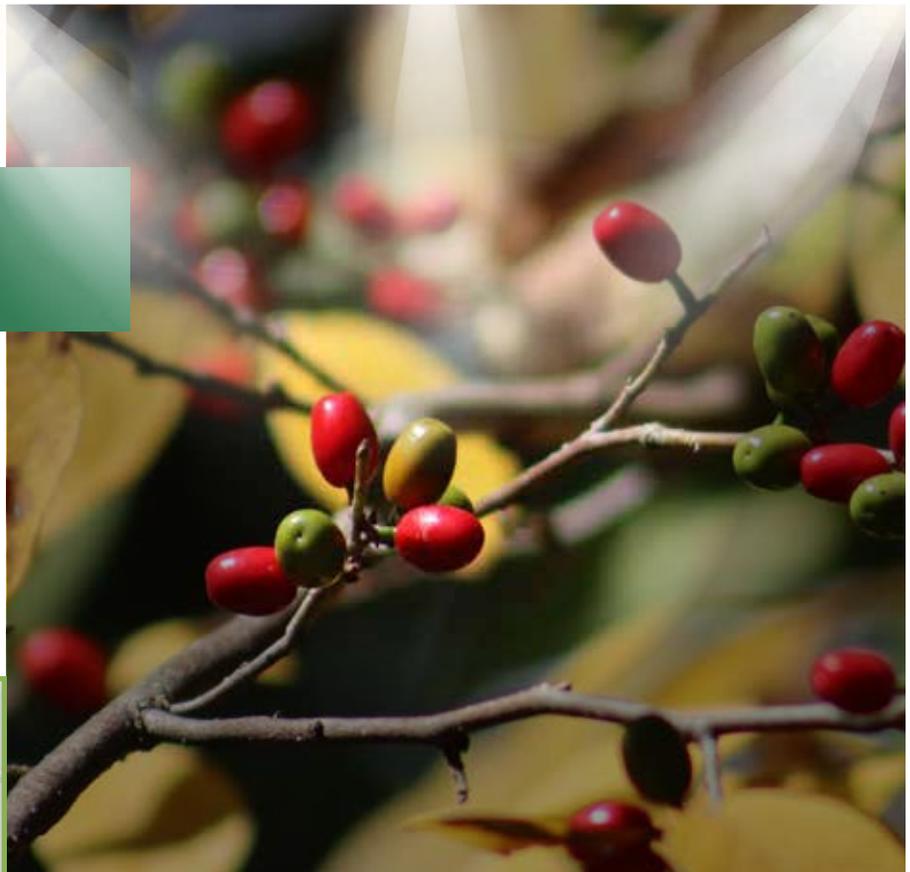
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UVM SUMMIT BEST PRACTICES COMMITTEE UPDATE

Key Takeaways from the 2024 UVM Summit: Contract Consistency, Hazard Trees, and Contractor Safety

By Chuck Sheppard, Manager-Vegetation Management and Forestry, Bonneville Power Administration

The 2024 System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, hosted by Holy Cross Energy, tackled three critical issues in vegetation management: consistency in contract language, hazard tree programs, and contractor safety. These interconnected topics are essential for improving the safety, efficiency, and reliability of utility vegetation management programs, and the summit offered valuable insights into how utilities can collaborate to address them.

One of the summit's main themes was the need for standardized contract language. As utilities increasingly rely on contractors for tasks such as pruning and tree removal, clear and consistent contracts are crucial for minimizing risks and ensuring that all parties are aligned. Inconsistent contract terms can lead to confusion about responsibilities, safety protocols, and performance expectations, potentially increasing safety risks.

Experts at the summit emphasized the value of standardized contract templates that clearly outline safety standards, required qualifications, and reporting protocols. By ensuring consistency across contracts, utilities can more effectively manage contractor performance, reduce safety incidents, and improve overall program efficiency. Consistent contracts also provide a framework for both utilities and contractors to evaluate progress and communicate about safety, ultimately fostering more successful partnerships. You can find an in-depth recap of this topic in the article "Building Successful Partnerships Through Effective Contract Strategy" by Brian Sprinkle

in this issue of the *Newsline*.

The summit also highlighted the importance of hazard tree programs. Hazard trees pose a significant safety threat and are a leading cause of wildfires, power outages, and infrastructure damage. Proactive investigation, identification and removal of hazard trees are essential components of a comprehensive vegetation management strategy.

Summit discussions focused on data-driven tree assessments and regular inspections to identify and address at-risk trees before they cause harm. This includes utilizing predictive modeling to assess risk and implementing clear protocols for tree removal. By prioritizing hazard tree management, utilities can significantly reduce safety risks and improve system reliability.

Contractor safety remains a significant concern in UVM, with many utilities relying on contractors to manage vegetation near powerlines. The summit featured presentations on improving contractor safety. Attendees were challenged to shift from traditional behavior-based safety (BBS) to a more holistic approach, Human and Organizational Performance (HOP), which focuses on building trusted partnerships and transparent communication between utilities and contractors.

Discussions also emphasized the importance of aligning utility expectations with contractor deliverables to improve safety and efficiency. A key takeaway was that when both parties are transparent and share responsibility, safety outcomes improve. The summit also discussed the roles utilities and contractors play in ensuring safety, with utilities acting as the "host



employer" and contractors as the "controlling employer," each having distinct responsibilities under OSHA guidelines.

The 2024 UVM Summit underscored the importance of collaboration in addressing key issues like contract consistency, hazard tree management, and contractor safety. By standardizing contracts, proactively managing hazard trees, and fostering transparent and accountable partnerships between utilities and contractors, the UVM community can improve safety, reduce risks, and enhance the effectiveness of vegetation management programs.

The summit wrapped up with a brief discussion on the upcoming changes in the Z133 standards. This was identified as an area of focus for future summits.

The next UVM Summit, hosted by Bonneville Power Administration and Flathead Electric Cooperative will be held in Kalispell, Montana, from May 13–15, 2025, where these conversations will continue as the industry works to tackle new challenges and opportunities. We hope to see you there. 🌲

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OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE



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Transforming Transportation: An Interview with the American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association

By Michelle Lejins, UAA Outreach Committee Chair

Founded in 1899, the American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association (AREMA) plays a crucial role in enhancing the safety, efficiency, and sustainability of railway infrastructure across North America, which are vital for freight and passenger transportation. AREMA brings together railway engineering professionals and industry stakeholders to advance technical standards and recommended practices that underpin railway operations.

In addition to publishing the recommended practices for railway infrastructure, AREMA offers railway engineering personnel educational opportunities and hosts the largest annual railway conference in North America.

The UAA Outreach Committee corresponded with AREMA President Bill S. Riehl III (P.E., F.SAME) to learn more about AREMA and discuss vegetation management in the railway industry.

1. What is your organization, where are you located and, and why does it exist?

Like the Utility Arborist Association, the American Railway Engineering and Maintenance-of-Way Association is a professional association for railway engineering personnel. For those who do not know us, our mission is the development and advancement of both technical and practical knowledge and recommended practices pertaining to the design, construction, and maintenance of railway infrastructure. Unlike the UAA, our 5,700 members span the breadth of the railway infrastructure disciplines from maintenance-of-way, to signals and communications, to engineering, and all disciplines in between. The members themselves include professionals from railroads large and small, passenger and transit agencies, educators, the large consultant and supplier community, and our regulatory partners.

2. Can you give me an example of a way you've seen your organization's work make a difference?

Our recommended practices are issued in the Manual for Railway Engineering (MRE) and its companion Communications and Signals Manual, as well as other supporting publications. These recommended practices are the basis for our various educational programs and seminars, the chief of which is our Annual Conference & Expo. Our 2024 event just concluded in September in Louisville, Kentucky. This event had over 3,100 attendees and more than 230 exhibitors.

3. Do you have ideas on ways that the UAA could benefit your organization or opportunities for collaboration?

While AREMA's recommended practices are primarily focused on the railroad infrastructure and its supporting systems, this infrastructure spans some 190,000 miles of right-of-way across North America. This means the railway community faces the same challenges with vegetation management as the UAA members do in their ROW. However, as a general statement, this is not a primary focus of our maintenance-of-way teams. In fact, Chapter 1: Roadway and Ballast of the MRE only has Part 9 dedicated to vegetation control, with topics like preparing, executing, and evaluating a vegetation control plan.

Clearly there are opportunities for collaboration between the two associations. While we do not think of railways as utilities, our vegetation management needs are not dissimilar. The difference is one of focus. Building AREMA-UAA cooperation could be beneficial to the membership of both associations and their recommended practices. This may not be hard to achieve as I assume there is some overlap in membership. I see there is an overlap in the suppliers that participate in our expo and that advertise in UAA publications. †

Davey Utility Solutions Creates Community Connections Nationwide

Davey Utility Solutions prioritizes volunteer work and community outreach programs to foster and reinforce partnerships between utilities and their customers. From volunteering at tree planting events to creating programs in conjunction with local organizations, Davey is committed to improving the communities where they live and work. Here are a few examples of their work in action.

In the Southeast, Davey's utility vegetation management teams in Florida worked with the nonprofit organization Future Forestry to plant slash pine, live oak, cypress, sea grape, red cedar, and red maple trees in Cape Coral, Florida, as part of the city's Arbor Day celebrations. Lee County Electric Cooperative sponsored the planting to restore urban tree canopy.

On the West Coast, Davey's UVM teams helped San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) source 10 Tecate cypress trees as part of the utility's Sustainable Tree Program during the Tribal Earth Day celebration at the Lipay

Nation of St. Ysabel in California. As part of the program, UVM team members provided tree care information to individuals interested in fostering tree growth on their land. Davey also sourced 50 Brisbane box trees through the same program to plant streetside in Del Mar. City officials and SDG&E volunteers joined Davey's UVM team for the tree plantings.

In the Midwest, Davey's FirstEnergy line clearance crews provide freshly trimmed limbs to the Akron Zoo for animal enrichment. Animal specialists from the zoo join Davey's crews in the field weekly to hand-select a truck full of branches to haul to the zoo. The zoo's primates and hoofstock animals, such as lemurs, tufted deer, alpacas, and goats, chew on the limbs which provide nutritional value as well as entertainment for the animals.

Through partnerships like these across the U.S., Davey Utility Solutions shows its commitment by lending a helping hand to the local populace. 🌳



SAFETY TOOLS

Increasing Incidents of Hostile Encounters

By Rich Alexander, Product Manager, ACRT Services

The UAA Safety Committee is deeply concerned about the rising number of hostile customer interactions involving utility arborists and vegetation management workers. In recent months, there has been a noticeable increase in aggressive confrontations, with some even involving firearms. While the vast majority of customer interactions remain professional and respectful, this growing trend poses a serious risk to our crews. Additionally, we should be extra vigilant during our restoration efforts as frustrations may rise with extended restoration timelines.

Field personnel are often caught off guard when customers express frustration or anger about tree work near their properties. In some cases, these grievances escalate quickly, leading to verbal abuse, physical threats, and, in rare but dangerous cases, the display or discharge of firearms. These incidents not only jeopardize the safety of arborists and crews but also create highly stressful work environments that can affect the quality of service and the mental well-being of workers. Having situational awareness of people or potential conflicts is important in all locations and aspects of the work we conduct in the field.

The UAA Safety Committee recognizes that the core of these conflicts may stem from misunderstandings about the necessity of utility vegetation management and the potential impact on property aesthetics. Regardless of the root cause, the safety and well-being of our field workers is our utmost priority. We urge all members to remain vigilant and report any threats immediately to their supervisors and law enforcement if necessary.

Staying Safe and De-Escalating Hostile Situations

To mitigate risks in hostile situations, it is essential to prioritize personal safety and take a proactive approach to defusing tension. The following best practices should be followed to stay safe and de-escalate encounters with aggressive customers:

1. Remain calm and professional: In the face of hostility, maintaining a calm and composed demeanor is critical. Avoid arguing or escalating the situation with emotional responses. Speak in a measured tone and listen actively, showing the customer that you are taking their concerns seriously.



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2. Keep a safe distance: If a customer becomes aggressive, maintain a safe distance and avoid entering their personal space. If you sense any physical danger, back away slowly while remaining nonthreatening. Never turn your back completely, as this can increase the risk of attack.

3. Avoid confrontation and escalation: Do not engage in confrontational behavior or argue with the customer. If the situation begins to escalate, disengage immediately by stating that you will refer their concerns to your supervisor or the appropriate department for further action.

4. Use defusing language: Phrases such as "I understand your frustration," "Let's find a way to address this," or "I'm here to help" can help reduce the intensity of a situation. Acknowledge their concerns but do not make promises outside of your authority.

5. Know when to walk away: If a customer refuses to de-escalate or begins to display threatening behavior, including the use of firearms or physical threats, walk away and seek safety. Do not try to reason with an armed individual. Notify law enforcement and your supervisor as soon as possible.

6. Always report incidents: All hostile incidents, no matter how minor, should be reported to supervisors. Keeping a log of interactions allows for patterns to be identified and addressed with further safety measures if needed.

7. Train for safety: Participate in conflict de-escalation training, if offered, and familiarize yourself with company protocols for handling aggressive customers. Knowing how to respond in these situations can prevent them from escalating to dangerous levels.

The UAA Safety Committee is committed to supporting the safety of all utility arborists and VM workers. While hostile interactions may be on the rise, following best practices for de-escalation, maintaining professionalism, and knowing when to remove yourself from a dangerous situation will go a long way in ensuring the safety of our field workers. If you ever feel unsafe, trust your instincts and remove yourself from the situation immediately. In the end, trust your intuition and remember your safety comes first. 🌳



NOW OPEN

ANNUAL AWARD NOMINATIONS

NOW OPEN THROUGH FEBRUARY 5, 2025.

The UAA annually recognizes select individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of utility arboriculture. Current UAA Members have the opportunity to nominate fellow members who are active and in good standing for the following awards:

Will Nutter Silver Shield

Utility Arborist

Education Award

Lifetime Achievement

Rising Star



Watch for more information in your email. UAA member portal, Association Happenings, and social media!



PHOTO: ISTOCK © JASBOSWELL

City Utilities of Springfield Strengthens Connections with the Community



By Blake Simmons, Supervisor of Vegetation Management, City Utilities of Springfield



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As the supervisor of vegetation management at City Utilities of Springfield, I have seen firsthand just how important it is to make sure the community is involved and educated in utility vegetation management. Over the years, we have been working to engage with the community, and we have recently received beneficial assistance from our contractors.

In Springfield, City Utilities has been bringing the community together and providing education on VM through various events. From working with schools, to improving environments for pollinators, to giving back to the veteran community, we have been working to raise awareness about VM and foster relationships within our community. Not only does this help us easily complete current and ongoing projects but it will make future work easier and help us continue our community engagement.

Read on to learn more about our past community engagement events, how

working with contractors has helped us accomplish our goals, and what future plans we have to continue improving our community.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EVENTS Alternative School Career Day

A local school in Springfield hosted a career day for its students to highlight the different career paths open to them. My team at City Utilities visited to teach the 115 attending students about careers in arboriculture. We were among many companies that came and spoke to students, including the State Conservation Department highlighting women and forestry, and a local tech company demonstrating how drones can be used by tree care companies.

The city forester in Springfield came out to talk to students about the work that is done each and every day, and a tree trimmer attended and did a climbing demonstration. Nolan McElroy and Dan Monfils from ACRT explained to the kids why vegetation along powerlines must be managed, along with general information about the utility vegetation management industry.

Arbor Day Poster Contest

Every fall, the State of Missouri holds a poster contest for fifth graders to highlight Arbor Day. City Utilities partners with the City of Springfield, Missouri Conservation Department, and Missouri Community Forestry Council, visiting each Springfield school that participated in the contest. We plant a tree with the



PHOTOS COURTESY OF CITY UTILITIES

Brian Higgins (center) is one of many helping to expand outreach to schools, educating students on career possibilities in the UVM industry.

students and teach them about Right Tree, Right Place and the history of Arbor Day. Then, the winning student for each school receives a prize. This past year, our team visited over 19 schools in the Springfield Public School District and educated more than 800 students on these important issues surrounding utility vegetation management.

Veterans Cemetery Maintenance

Every year during the weeks of Memorial Day and Veterans Day, members of the Springfield community go out and tend to the trees and flower beds found in the Missouri Veterans Cemetery. This tradition was started by a city worker who noticed that the cemeteries had



Blake Simmons teaches local fifth graders about Arbor Day and the important issues of VM, as part of the annual fall poster contest.

very few trees, and those that did were in bad shape.

Members of the community and City Utilities gather each year to help with the maintenance of vegetation. We send out a representative each year to prune trees and shrubbery, and more of our team members come out to help lay mulch and take care of the flower beds. While this is an extremely large cemetery with much work to be done, all the professionals and members of the community who come out get the job done in a very short amount of time.

City Utilities also participates in Saluting Branches' Day of Service each year. This initiative brings together arborists and tree care professionals to volunteer their time and expertise to care for the properties dedicated to our veterans.

Native Plant Restoration

Many entities in our community have garnered an increased interest in pollinators and native plants. Following suit, we have started some projects in native plant restoration. McElroy has helped further establish pollinator plots on City Utilities' properties, including on solar farms, that were started by the previous vegetation supervisor at City Utilities, Scott Gunzenhauser. These efforts have helped pollinators and other wildlife reclaim their habitat that has been lost. In the future, we plan to expand this effort to create pollinator plots to showcase to homeowners so they can see the positive impact on our local environment.

Fiber Project—Everest

Recently, City Utilities completed a major fiber expansion project. This project helped the Springfield community gain faster, easier access to the internet. Our team needed some assistance to get this massive project accomplished, so we called ACRT. We have been working with ACRT for eight years now to help us with our vegetation management and community events. They stepped up to the challenge and helped us get this project through the finish line.

HOW WE MEET THE UTILITY VEGETATION MANAGEMENT NEEDS OF OUR COMMUNITY

As our VM needs continue to expand, we've brought contractors in to help us with our work. All of our contractors have the same mission: to get on a cycle. We all want to make sure the system is as reliable as



For a career day at a local school, Nolan McElroy and Dan Monfils from ACRT teach about the UVM industry and why vegetation must be managed near powerlines.

possible, so we have no problem working together to make this possible.

Our contractors are responsible for managing much of the vegetation management, including 200 miles of transmission lines, 1,200 miles of distribution, pre-planning maintenance tree trimming, notifying customers of planned work, and more. This helps us ensure that all of the UVM work is getting done in a timely manner and our customers are receiving adequate notice of planned work and getting all of their questions answered.

FUTURE WORK

In the upcoming months and years, we hope to continue the great work we have done with our contractors and community. From getting on a cycle, to implementing herbicide programs, to continuing community involvement, we have many plans for the future.

First, we implemented an herbicide program in 2020, which we are currently respraying and assessing its effectiveness. We will analyze these results and address how to best use this program to help improve our VM. We are also in the process of starting a major pole replacement project that will provide up-to-date poles for powerlines.

Additionally, we are making strides toward getting on a regular UVM cycle. There are some locations that haven't been trimmed in over twelve years. In the upcoming two years, City Utilities will be implementing a cycle to address these problem areas.

In regards to getting the community more involved, we have a game plan. Our team is getting out more than ever to educate the young members of our community about UVM and get them interested in the possibility of pursuing it as a career. Several individuals from ACRT, one of our contractors, are also getting more involved with the Missouri Community Forestry Council to teach some curricular topics to children in schools and provide necessary information to residents and homeowners.

Continuing to educate the community and build these relationships will help us understand the needs of our community and further foster relationships so we can best serve Springfield, Missouri. We cannot wait to see what the future brings to the City of Springfield and the community.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Blake Simmons

graduated with a Bachelor of Science, and previously worked with ACRT. He is an accomplished Certified Arborist who now works as the supervisor of vegetation management for City Utilities of Springfield. Outside of work, his hobbies include trapping, fishing, leather working, camping, cooking, watching movies, and hanging out with his wife and daughters. 🌲



Blake Simmons



Many hands make light work to honor our veterans at the Missouri Veterans Cemetery, maintaining trees, shrubbery, and flower beds.



SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Neighbors and Nature: Building Community Through Equitable

By Whit Bouton, Utility Urban and Community Forestry Lead, Seattle City Light

In August of 2022, the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law, bringing a historic 1.5 billion dollars to increase tree cover throughout disadvantaged communities across all 50 states, the District of Columbia, two U.S. territories, and three affiliated Pacific islands. In 2023, the USDA and Forest Service announced the awarding of grants, demonstrating there is a new synergy and vision emerging as various agencies are working in lockstep to imagine new ways to cocreate systems that benefit all parties.

These funds and simultaneous efforts in urban and community forestry are a first step in acknowledging the harm caused by discriminatory housing policy and practices, such as historic redlining, which results in a disproportionate exposure to adverse environmental impacts and health outcomes for people of color, immigrants, and low-income communities.

People typically associate redlining with large-scale transportation infrastructure projects like the construction of highways and train corridors which can disrupt existing greenspace, reduce tree canopy cover, and drastically increase impervious surfaces. However, it is important to recognize the many other types of development that resulted in the displacement and disruption of these communities. In cities throughout the United States, this includes the establishment of large industrial and medical complexes as well as many sports stadiums. Similarly, power and utility infrastructure projects often bisect historically redlined areas, which can result in isolating communities. The culmination and concentration of the large-scale land conversion in redlined areas has contributed to disproportionate environmental degradation and negative health outcomes for the communities in which they were situated.

While working with communities, engineering and environmental professionals tend to focus on “getting the work done,” with timelines and objectives taking priority over feedback and collaboration. When we fixate on all the logistics and moving parts (plans, plants, data, materials, physical constraints, schedules, the science, deadlines), we risk deemphasizing effective relationship building, equity, and sustainability.

Utility urban and community forestry strives to use an intersectional framework to combine traditional physical, applied, and social sciences with the goal of actively addressing inequality to improve human, ecologic, and economic outcomes.

With 84% of Americans living in urban areas, the demand for space has only intensified, and collectively we are struggling to find environmental mitigation means to combat the climate crisis and extreme weather events. In addition to the methods utility companies are already leveraging to address climate change, land-use strategies around wildfire mitigation, forest health, canopy cover, and the enhancement of greenspaces have become essential. The combination of these approaches can support goals related to the reduction of fossil fuel usage, improving energy efficiencies, strengthening and improving the resiliency of our grid, transitioning to renewable energy sources, and refining transportation modalities and networks.

It is estimated that throughout the United States 90% of urban trees are located on privately maintained land.¹ The utility sector is uniquely positioned to manage segments of both private and public tree populations, through the establishment of right-of-way easements and large, forested tracts of utility-owned land adjacent to transmission corridors. The way in which we do our work and how we engage with our customers matters. Remembering our customers are our neighbors is essential in positive relationships building.

As focus and pressures around affordable housing, tree planting, and green infrastructure increase, it is incumbent upon us to recognize that while “greening” has the potential to serve both as a positive driver of change for humans and ecosystems, it can also act as a driver of further inequities within the system.²

Though it may be counterintuitive, it’s important for us to be cognizant that urban development has historically translated to displacement that has disproportionately affected Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. Consequentially, resistance to civil projects is a legitimate response to historical trauma.

While the intention of increasing canopy and tree



Green Infrastructure

planting may be to improve health outcomes, this can be interpreted as an attempt to “beautify” neighborhoods in an effort to rebrand a community, raise property values, and ultimately gentrify. As urban forestry professionals, we are responsible for developing plans that support communities in place, where they historically have and currently exist, in the places they call home.

As investments and interests grow surrounding tree planting in disproportionately impacted neighborhoods, we need to ask ourselves what we are doing to offset the life cycle cost of maintaining the next generation of urban trees and how we are positioning communities to withstand external drivers of displacement. Responsible environmental stewardship requires acknowledging past harm and honoring the true value of land to occupants. Climate change mitigation efforts at large will not be successful without meaningful engagement of diverse stakeholders and an intersectional lens.

At Seattle City Light, we are building a framework for initiating more trusting relationships with the communities most impacted by environmental degradation. This work is not secondary to keeping the lights on; we know safety, reliability, sustainability, trust, and integrity are interwoven, and because of this, these principles are foundational to our mission, vision, and values. One of our first steps towards elevating this has been to build out a Utility Urban and Community Forestry Program within our vegetation management group. The program aims to identify improvements utilizing a community-driven approach to understand how restoration can benefit neighborhoods that have experienced the greatest harm. Simultaneously, we seek to address inequities in our workforce, improving recruitment and retention, with focuses on attracting candidates from BIPOC communities, creating safe and inclusive work environments and following up by providing opportunities for professional training and advancement equitably.

As advocates for healthy urban forests and infrastructure, we are obligated to include the input of communities that have experienced marginalization.



Listening will have the dual benefit of improving innovation and ensuring we adequately improve the environment for those who stand to gain, or lose, the most.

I welcome you to reach out via LinkedIn (<https://www.linkedin.com/in/wabouton>) or email (whitman.bouton@seattle.gov) to connect should you desire to learn more or collaborate. 🌱

¹ Gerhold, H. D. (2007). Origins of Urban Forestry. In J. Kuser (Ed.), *Urban and Community Forestry in the Northeast*, 2nd edition (New Jersey: Springer), pp. 1-24. <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/35822/1/36.pdf>

² Campbell, L.K., E.S. Svendsen, M.L. Johnson, and S. Plitt. Not by Trees Alone: Centering Community in Urban Forestry." *Landscape and Urban Planning*, vol. 224 (2022): 104445. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.landurbplan.2022.104445>



UVM AND THE LAW

NEW!

The Ramifications of Failing to Engage in Community Outreach When Performing Chemical Applications

By Rowlie Flores, Juris Doctor Student, Tulane University Law School

In *Wilber v. Curtis*, a property owner sought to prevent his utility's vegetation management contractors from performing necessary UVM work within their easement across his land. He attempted to physically prevent the work from proceeding by placing yellow warning tape and then blocking the easement. He was arrested and the work continued.

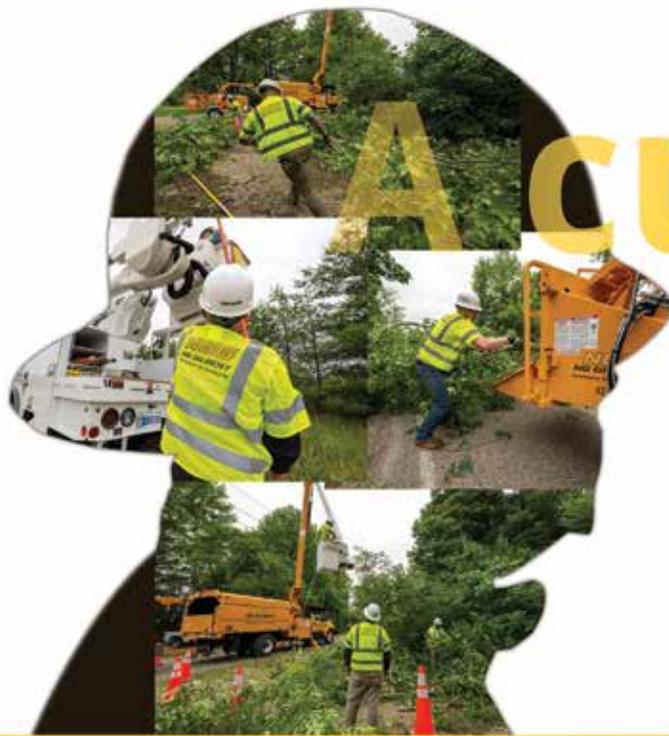
In the lawsuit that followed, the First Circuit Court of Appeals (the federal appellate court for the states in the Northeastern U.S.) held that the utility's written easement "ran with the land," continuing from one property owner to the next, and that the utility could prune and remove trees in the easement that would interfere with or otherwise endanger infrastructure. Had the utility provided better community engagement and outreach, the incident that led to this lawsuit—and the fees incurred in trying it at the district and appellate courts—might have been avoided.

Through chemistry, new tools have been developed for utilities to perform UVM. Herbicides often provide the best means of controlling vegetation, and tree growth regulators (TGRs) have been successful at slowing problematic growth. These are important tools for preventing power outages and fires. But the public has become increasingly concerned with—and resistant to—the application of industrial chemicals.

It should be considered that the use of herbicides and

TGRs in utility vegetation management is fairly recent. And to be fair, improper use of herbicides can be quite dangerous. Safety concerns led Congress to enact the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA). Enforced in part by the Environmental Protection Agency, chemicals are classified as either Restricted Use Pesticides (RUPs) or General Use Pesticides (GUPs). Those classified as RUPs require an applicator to be state-certified in RUP application. In addition, RUPs must meet certain labeling requirements.

Currently, though, herbicides used in utility vegetation management are often GUPs. For these chemicals, FIFRA does not require states to mandate applicator certification requirements. Accordingly, applicator license requirements for UVM professionals using GUPs vary widely from state to state, and might not be required at all. For the most part, FIFRA's provisions for utility arborists are focused on the safety of the arborist (and not necessarily the safety of the environment). While applicators might see this as a positive,



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nervous customers might view this situation with alarm.

Originally, FIFRA was developed to address chemical application in agricultural contexts for crop management. Agricultural use under FIFRA is enforced by the Department of Agriculture, not the EPA. Odd as it may seem, a farmer applying a chemical to croplands is governed by a completely different set of rules than a UVM applicator applying the very same chemical within a utility easement—and these rules are in turn enforced by two different federal agencies.

Another federal law is also at play. The Emergency Planning and Community Right-to-Know Act, or EPCRTKA, provides that those who use hazardous chemicals must report the presence and amounts of these chemicals to state and local emergency planning committees and the EPA. Three key factors are important under the EPCRTKA:

1. Whether a powerline is a “facility”
2. Whether herbicides used are hazardous enough
3. The quantity used or possessed by the entity performing the application

On the first factor, the EPCRTKA defines a “facility” broadly: all structures and buildings owned and operated by the same person, and so could encompass utility infrastructure. However, proving that herbicides used for UVM fit within EPCRTKA is a closer question. The statute includes herbicides and other chemicals used in the *agricultural context* under FIFRA; however, at present, UVM utilization is not “agricultural.” Moreover, the volume requirement is unlikely to be met by a single applicator with respect to a single property. Accordingly, unless the EPA determines otherwise, the EPCRTKA may not provide property owners with the safeguards they might assume they should have. Additionally, the EPCRTKA is *reactive*—property owners ordinarily would only learn about their risks after they have already been exposed by an applicator.

States and localities will have varied approaches to addressing notice of the application of chemicals on private property. In some jurisdictions, “constructive notice” in the

form of a newspaper announcement might suffice, while others may require flyers to be posted on a property owner’s door. There is, of course, a real and substantial difference between constructive notice and actual notice.

A lesson can be taken from the 1980 decision of the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals (the federal appellate court for the Mid-Atlantic states) in *C/R TV, Inc. v. Shannondale, Inc.* There, the Fourth Circuit balanced the property owner’s health interests against the utility’s legal right to access the property to perform UVM, and held that aerial spraying was beyond the scope of the utility’s easement due to possible drifting of the herbicide. The case stands (in part) for the proposition that the courts will likely side with the perceived health and privacy interests of a property owner against the interests of a utility in performing what it feels are proper chemical applications.

The truth of the matter is that the spraying of chemicals is a major concern for most people, and regardless of whether it is actually the scientifically best method for addressing a UVM problem, courts are prone to side with property owners against utilities with respect to what can and cannot be done in a utility easement. Under the circumstances, utilities need to make a better effort at educating their customers through community engagement and outreach. It will be far more efficacious than the mere placement of a door hanger and assuming consent.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Rowlie Flores earned his Bachelor of Arts in government, with minors in both sociology and environmental studies, from Georgetown University in 2022. He will earn his Juris Doctor from Tulane University Law School in 2025, where he was selected to participate in the Tulane UVM Scholars program in 2023. Flores has prior work experience with FERC’s Office of Enforcement, the U.S. Department of Justice (Environmental Crimes), and as a legislative intern for both U.S. Senator Hirono (D-HI) and former U.S. Representative Gabbard (D-HI). ✉



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Community Engagement and Awareness in the Arboriculture Industry: The Impact of a Company Apprenticeship Training Center for Employees and Employers

By Thierry Bourdy, Director, Serpe Formation

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In a technical and demanding sector like arboriculture, training and knowledge transfer are essential to ensure safety and quality in the industry. Facing current challenges, such as a shortage of specialized skills and a growing demand for environmentally responsible practices, more and more companies are turning to in-house apprenticeship training centers to prepare the next generation of professionals while meeting the industry's high standards.

In this context, the Serpe Group—a national leader in tree care in France with over 38 branches across the country—launched Serpe Formation in 2022. By training future employees in-house for landscape professions, Serpe Formation provides added value for both the company and the apprentice. With the inclusion of the UAA's educational resources, we have been able to bring an international dimension to our training programs, enhancing their quality and supporting arboriculture community engagement and awareness.

Benefits for Employees and Apprentices

Choosing an in-house training center offers numerous advantages for apprentices. They have the opportunity to gain hands-on skills directly in the field, and are closely connected to real job conditions in a safe environment. Thanks to experienced trainers and specialized resources, such as the UAA's educational videos, apprentices benefit from concrete, sector-specific training aligned with arboriculture standards and best practices. By incorporating the UAA's teaching resources, such as video lessons on working at height near powerlines, Serpe Formation adds an international and innovative perspective to its programs, providing apprentices with quality resources and a global outlook on arboricultural best practices.

Moreover, by training directly within the company, apprentices acquire specialized skills tailored to meet their future employer's needs and expectations. This approach optimally prepares them for entering the workforce, equipped with qualifications that are valued and sought after in the industry.

Benefits for Employers and the Arboriculture Industry

An in-house training center also presents many benefits for employers. By training future employees internally, companies ensure consistent skill quality and alignment with their standards. At Serpe Formation, we have developed tailor-made

training programs to meet the specific demands of landscape jobs, reinforcing both theoretical and technical skills, along with work safety practices. The UAA's support in developing our educational resources has been crucial, providing additional technical expertise and high-quality educational content aligned with the best practices in the industry.

In addition, a company-based training center serves as a powerful recruitment tool. By training apprentices directly, companies can more easily identify and onboard talents who are well-suited to their needs. This model not only trains employees in essential skills but also attracts candidates motivated by the prospect of joining an organization that invests in their development.

A Long-Term Impact on the Arboriculture Industry

For the arboriculture industry as a whole, this training model contributes to increased professionalization and heightened awareness of contemporary issues, such as safety and environmental responsibility. By integrating specific programs into their training center, arboriculture companies set new standards for safety and competency that benefit the entire sector. Collaboration with organizations like the UAA strengthens the bonds between industry actors and fosters mutual knowledge-sharing.

The in-house training center model also supports the sustainability of the arboriculture industry, ensuring a skilled workforce that is aware of environmental challenges. This approach focuses not only on individual training but also on building a stronger arboriculture community better equipped to respond to the evolving needs of the sector.

The Strength of International Collaboration

In such a technical field as arboriculture, community engagement and international cooperation play an essential role. By partnering with the UAA, Serpe Formation has enriched its educational resources, offering apprentices high-quality training aligned with international standards. We would like to thank the UAA for its valuable support in our mission of training and raising awareness. Together, we contribute to strengthening the safety, expertise, and commitment of the arboriculture community, ensuring a sustainable future for our industry. 🌱

Herding Cats and Leading Change: A Farewell to Diona

By Renée Bissett, Director—Marketing and Communications, ACRT Services, and Craig Kelly, Principal of Land Management—Safety and Compliance, Pacific Gas and Electric Company

Saying goodbye to Diona Neeser, a cornerstone of the Utility Arborist Association, is bittersweet. Over the past 10 years, Diona has been an essential figure in shaping the UAA, and her contributions will leave an indelible mark on the organization and the industry as a whole.

From her role as program and operations manager, Diona has been much more than just a manager—she has been the driving force behind the innovation, organization, and growth of the UAA. Her unparalleled ability to navigate complex challenges, manage countless moving parts, and maintain a steady hand under pressure has set the foundation for the UAA's success. Whether she was orchestrating large events, streamlining operations, or ensuring that every piece of the puzzle fit together, Diona was always there making things happen seamlessly, and always with a smile. Her aptitude for “herding cats”—as she humorously puts it—has been key to keeping everything running smoothly.

What truly sets Diona apart is her dedication to building relationships and fostering collaboration. She has cultivated strong, meaningful connections with both UAA members and partners across the industry, which has been the bedrock of the association's success. Her natural talent for relationship-building, coupled with her honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness, has allowed her to bridge gaps and solve problems that others may shy away from. In a role where maintaining clear communication and fostering trust are paramount, Diona has excelled. She's a master at managing expectations, keeping people informed, and ensuring that every stakeholder feels heard and valued.



Diona Neeser

But beyond her logistical and operational expertise, Diona's passion for continuous improvement is evident in everything she does. She's always looking for ways to elevate the member and client experience, ensuring UAA members not only have what they need but also have opportunities to grow and thrive within the association. Whether it was refining operational processes or collaborating with others to enhance member engagement, Diona consistently strived to make the UAA a better organization, one relationship at a time.

Her work on a variety of projects within the UAA and alongside industry partners has not only expanded her expertise but also reinforced her passion for cultivating exceptional relationships. Diona's commitment to the industry and its people has always been resolute, and her impact on the UAA will be felt long after her departure. She leaves behind a legacy of dedication, hard work, and a deep connection to the heart of the organization.

We say goodbye to Diona as her journey with the UAA comes to an end, but her influence will continue to shape the association for years to come. We are grateful for her efforts, her spirit of collaboration, and her commitment to the UAA mission. Diona has not just been a colleague—she has been a true partner, a mentor, and a friend. Her contributions are unmatched and her presence will be deeply missed.

Thank you, Diona, for everything you've done for the UAA. While we're sad to see you leave the association, we're excited that you'll still be part of the industry, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with you in your new role. We know you'll continue to make an incredible impact, and we can't wait to see all the great things you'll achieve moving forward in your new role at EDM International. †



WOMEN IN VM

THERESA HURT How a College Mix-Up Forced Me to Branch Out

By Theresa Hurt, Project Manager, Atlas Field Services



Theresa Hurt

When I first went to school, I thought I wanted to be a dentist, so I enrolled in pre-dental as my major. After a small mix-up in the office, I ended up in general biology instead. I found myself taking some interesting wildlife biology classes and soon decided that was what I wanted to do. Growing up, I

went to camp each summer and I love being outside, so to be able to do that for my job sounded amazing. I even spent a couple of summers through college being the “Nature Lady” at the same camp I had attended growing up, where I got to teach kids of all ages how to identify trees, bugs, and animals.

After graduation, I followed the suggestion of a friend of mine and applied to the company he worked for. I got the job and started my career as an inventory arborist in Worcester, Massachusetts, on the Asian longhorned beetle project. I worked there for several years, developing friendships I still maintain to this day. I then was given an opportunity to transfer to Maryland to work in utility vegetation management. When I got there, the leadership team was incredible—they supported me, coached me, and encouraged me to try new things and push myself. I also met my mentor Ryan Cordrey there, my biggest cheerleader. Ryan encouraged me to be more confident in my decisions and pushed me to be a good leader. I think it is

important in a male-dominated industry to have mentors who want you to be successful and be yourself.

Over the next three years,

I moved from Maryland to Tennessee to Ohio for various roles before parting ways with my former company. I headed back to Maryland to work for Atlas Field Services. Kevin Pullan was my supervisor for my new job as a safety specialist. One year after joining Atlas, a project manager position was open in Georgia. Kevin called me and told me to give my notice at my apartment—he knew I would be good at the job. I embraced his belief in me and jumped at the opportunity to move to Georgia.

Since moving to Georgia, I have grown my team to four people and have gained more confidence in myself. It occurred to me that this is what Ryan and Kevin had seen in me all along. I had these abilities the whole time, but it took a push from someone else for me to see them for myself. I always felt being a woman in arboriculture that I had to fight twice as hard to be seen and be given opportunities. As the industry evolves, I hope more women can see they are just as capable as men to be good leaders, good arborists, and good mentors. I also hope that one day I can provide to the next generation what Kevin, Ryan, and so many of my past and present supervisors have provided to me.

I ended up in this career by accident, but it feels like it was meant to be all along. This job is my version of adult summer camp and I get to do it every day! I hope awareness around our industry continues to grow so more people can discover the joy of this job. Maybe in the future, when kids are asked what they want to be when they grow up, at least one will say, “a utility arborist.”

Ultimately, I may not be doing much related to the wildlife biology degree I obtained—although I do volunteer with the local wildlife sanctuary—but I will forever be grateful for that little “mix-up” in the office because it led me to this wonderful career! 🌿





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Community Wildfire Defense Grant Training: A Journey Towards Fire Resilience

By Amanda Opp, Integrated Services Manager, Flathead Electric Cooperative



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The smokejumper center near the fire sciences lab in Missoula, Montana. The smokejumper center is part of the Aerial Fire Depot, which is managed by the U.S. Forest Service Northern Region.

This year, several cooperatives across the U.S. received a Community Wildfire Defense Grant (CWDG). The Community Wildfire Defense Program, funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, assists at-risk communities, including Tribal communities, with planning for and lowering wildfire risks on Tribal, state, and privately managed land. The program comes at a time when the nation faces an ongoing wildfire crisis, and these grants support the Forest Service's plan to confront the wildfire crisis across all lands.

Recently, several grant recipients attended training on community wildfire mitigation best practices. This training was hosted by the Forest Service in Missoula, Montana, in collaboration with Coalitions and Collaborations (COCO). Excited by the prospect of networking with others who had also received the grant, I set off for Missoula, a brief two-hour drive from my utility in Kalispell, Montana.

Upon arrival, I was eager to participate and learn from others in the room, most of whom were firefighters or rewriting their Community Wildfire Protection Plans (CWPPs). I felt somewhat out of place initially, as I do not actively fight fires. However, I soon realized that my unique perspective as a utility representative would contribute to the broader discussion about wildfire mitigation.



© MIKE JENSEN

Community Wildfire Mitigation Best Practices Class in Missoula, Montana.

Meeting the Experts

The training was facilitated by two passionate professionals: Mike Jensen and Steve Markason. Both brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to the table, driven by their backgrounds in fire management and community outreach. They kept me and my classmates engaged throughout the entire course by offering mini bottles of hot sauce for the correct answer to questions.



© AMANDA OPP

Mike Jensen has over 30 years with the Cooperative Extension Service, working in Michigan, Florida, and Washington State. His experience includes collaborating with thousands of volunteers and communities on wildland fire mitigation efforts. In Michigan, he served on the L'Anse Fire Department and secured more than \$2 million in grants for structural and wildland fire protection. He played a key role in developing Michigan's first countywide CWPP and continues to volunteer as a firefighter, EMT, and wildland firefighter while consulting with COCO.

Steve Markason is the principal of the Teton Wildfire Mitigation Team, LLC in Jackson, Wyoming. With more than 27 years of experience at the United States Forest Service, he retired as the north zone fire management officer. His roles have included wildland firefighter, engine captain, and fuels specialist. Markason's consulting business helps community members prepare for wildfires through site assessments and recommendations for creating defensible space around properties. In 2022, he authored the Sublette County CWPP and has worked with homeowners associations and small communities to enhance wildfire preparedness.



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This sculpture endeavors to honor all of the wildland firefighters who over the years have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty protecting our lives and property. May they rest in peace! The charred heart-shaped wood pendant was collected from the site of the Mann Gulch fire in central Montana in 1949. On that occasion, 13 firefighters, all smokejumpers, lost their lives while fighting that fire.

Understanding Mitigation vs. Prevention

The course began with an important discussion on the differences between wildfire mitigation and prevention. The primary goal of wildfire *prevention* is to reduce the number of human-caused wildfires through outreach, education, and best practices. Wildfire *mitigation* efforts are aimed at increasing the likelihood for successful initial attack suppression efforts, mitigating wildfire impacts to communities, infrastructure, and forested landscapes by reducing fire behavior. Many agencies are increasing funding for fire prevention and mitigation work, recognizing that while fire cannot always be entirely prevented, proactive measures aimed at mitigating excessive fuel loading and hardening communities and infrastructure can significantly reduce wildfire impacts.

Home Assessments: Practical Steps for Property Owners

A significant portion of the training focused on conducting Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) assessments. The facilitators emphasized the importance of creating defensible space around homes to enhance their resilience to wildfire.

The first step is to look at the structure itself to ensure roof, attic, and crawlspace vents are protected with one-eighth inch or less steel screens to keep embers from intruding into the home. Ensure decks and gutters are clear of flammable debris, firewood, or other flammable items, which should remain at least 30 feet from the home or structure. Managing the five-foot buffer around structures is very important. Simple actions like removing wood chips and replacing them with rocks, cleaning gutters, and removing overhanging branches, trees, and shrubs can make a substantial difference.

In the 5-to-30-foot buffer zone, thinning or removing vegetation is crucial, and it's



The Home Ignition Zone (HIZ) used for property assessments

essential to remove branches from the lower eight feet or 50-percent of the tree to reduce ladder fuels and to keep the trees from torching, which increases the amount of embers impacting the home. Maintaining green, watered lawns was highlighted as one of the best ways to protect structures.

In the 30-to-300-foot (or more) buffer, participants learned to minimize ground fuels and thin trees adequately, creating a safer environment and more resilient forest should a fire pass through the area. This zone can extend well beyond 300 feet if the home or structure is located on a slope steeper than 20-percent and on a south or west aspect, which tends to be the warmest and driest sites.

One key takeaway from the training was the surprising fact that most structures are lost not to the flames of a wildfire but to embers that can travel over a mile. Doing basic maintenance like cleaning gutters and roofs regularly is a simple yet effective way to prevent fires sparked by embers.

Importance of Building Codes and Materials

The training also covered the importance of building codes, particularly in the Wildland Urban Interface (WUI). Many states have specific roofing codes for structures in these areas. Even if local regulations do not enforce these codes, property owners can take the initiative by using nonflammable roofing materials, such as replacing cedar shakes with asphalt shingles. This proactive approach can greatly enhance a home's ability to withstand wildfire.

The Role of Utility Vegetation Management in FireWise Communities

A crucial discussion point was how the utility vegetation management industry can be a better partner in creating FireWise communities. Throughout the training, utility infrastructure was highlighted as critical in most CWPPs. Recognizing the utility's role in wildfire prevention and mitigation opened doors for collaboration between utilities and communities.

Utilities can engage in meaningful conversations with property owners about maintaining clear rights-of-way, while also emphasizing the importance of additional mitigation measures that protect both the utility infrastructure and homeowners' properties from wildfires.

To enhance these partnerships,

utilities should actively reach out to local fire agencies, seeking to be involved in conversations surrounding wildfire mitigation efforts. Collaborating with fire departments, county, state, and federal agencies, and community stakeholders provides an excellent platform for sharing knowledge and resources, ensuring all parties understand their roles in building resilient landscapes. It is likely that a local collaborative group is already established to provide community assistance in your area, like FireSafe Flathead is in our area.

A Collective Effort Towards Fire Resilience

By the end of the training, I no longer felt like the oddball among firefighters. Instead, I recognized that my role as a utility representative is vital to wildfire prevention and mitigation efforts. The insights gained from Mike Jensen and Steve Markason were invaluable, equipping me with practical knowledge to share with our cooperative and the communities we serve.

Mike Jensen shared his favorite mantra on the completion of the course with us: "May the Mitigated Forest Be with You!"

The path to creating FireWise communities is a collective effort that requires collaboration among all stakeholders. By fostering relationships, sharing resources, and implementing effective wildfire mitigation strategies, we can work together to protect our homes and landscapes from the ever-present threat of wildfires.

As I returned to Kalispell, I felt a sense of commitment to our community's wildfire-resilience efforts. Armed with knowledge and resources, I am excited to contribute to ongoing discussions and initiatives that promote fire safety and sustainability in our region and am looking forward to others finding the benefit in these discussions as well. 🌲



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We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2023 PinE Award Recipients.

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Building Successful Partnerships Through Effective Contract Strategy

By Brian Sprinkle, Director of Consulting Services, Iapetus Infrastructure Services

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In utility vegetation management, a structured contract strategy is essential to guide resource management, timeline adherence, and quality control across project stages.

Contracts serve not just as legal documents but as frameworks that align both client and vendor to a common purpose. When dealing with critical infrastructure, the consequences of a poorly executed contract strategy can be severe, potentially leading to public and worker safety issues, budget pressures, and negative reputational impacts. The phrase, “The lowest bid can cost you millions,” captures the risk of focusing solely on cost without evaluating supplier capabilities and long-term impacts. Instead, a comprehensive approach to contract strategy helps utilities and vendors prioritize factors beyond cost-efficiency, such as safety, quality, reliability, and efficiency.

A mutually beneficial contract strategy fosters accountability and builds strong, lasting partnerships. When both client and vendor feel supported and share responsibility, the probability of contract performance issues diminishes. For utilities, where reliability and public safety are paramount, a collaborative strategy that promotes shared goals and proactive problem-solving is critical. Vendor underperformance directly impacts clients, making a balanced approach that emphasizes mutual success essential to project reliability.

Key Factors in Developing a Mutually Beneficial Contract Strategy

Developing a successful contract strategy requires a close examination of key factors, including project scope, budget, risk tolerance, and vendor capabilities. Establishing a clear project scope and defined objectives ensures the contract aligns with specific goals. Budget constraints should be realistic, balancing affordability with quality. Allowing room for unforeseen expenses helps prevent quality compromises on critical elements.

Risk tolerance is another essential factor. Utility vegetation management programs are subject to environmental, regulatory, and public safety risks, which emphasize the need to have clearly defined scopes of work and fully vet vendor capabilities to ensure they can meet the project’s demands.

Different contract types offer unique benefits depending

on the needs of the project. Fixed-price contracts provide predictability in costs but can lack flexibility. Time-and-materials contracts offer adaptability, billing based on actual resource use but can lead to cost overruns if not closely managed. Performance-based contracts incentivize quality by linking compensation to measurable outcomes, making them effective when quality and efficiency are top priorities. A well-chosen contract structure supports both accountability and alignment, setting the foundation for mutual success by ensuring that both client and vendor expectations are met.

Common Practices for Effective Contract Management

For long-term success, managing the client–vendor relationship is essential, and communication is a foundational element. Regular check-ins create opportunities for transparent communication, allowing both parties to address emerging issues early. This is especially useful in long-term projects where project requirements may shift. Clear definitions of project scope and deliverables help prevent “scope creep,” the gradual expansion of project requirements without adjusted terms or compensation. Documentation is another critical component, providing a reliable reference for all involved and helping ensure that decisions, timelines, and expectations remain transparent.

Risk management and regulatory compliance are vital to contract success. Contracts should include regulatory clauses to minimize legal risks and clearly define the responsibilities of each party, reducing the chance of disputes. Measuring success through key performance indicators (KPIs) establishes an objective basis for tracking contract performance. Regularly reviewed KPIs—such as safety, schedule adherence, and quality standards—provide clear insights into whether the vendor is performing in accordance to the contract scope of work. When performance metrics do not meet or exceed the goal, triggers and controls within the contract allow corrective actions to be initiated. Specific triggers, like repeated delays or deviations from quality standards, prompt corrective action plans to prevent small issues from escalating/compounding into larger setbacks. Stakeholder engagement is also critical, involving cross-functional teams to ensure the contract addresses a

range of perspectives. Collaborative planning fosters broad support, allowing the contract to align seamlessly with organizational objectives.

Creating a Strategy for Long-Term Success

A balanced contract strategy is essential in utility vegetation management, where safety, reliability, and operational efficiency are priorities. By establishing a mutually beneficial contract, utilities can create a foundation for communication, shared accountability, and proactive problem-solving. A carefully structured contract strategy that prioritizes the needs of both the client and vendor increases the likelihood of a program's success.

To create a strategy with lasting impact, utilities should consider all aspects of contract development, from scope definition and risk tolerance to vendor capabilities and budget constraints. Regular performance tracking, comprehensive documentation, and risk controls are effective management practices that address issues early, allowing the program to stay aligned with its objectives. In an industry as complex and essential as utility vegetation management, a proactive, balanced approach to contract strategy supports operational excellence and fosters resilient partnerships.

Contract strategy was one of many topics addressed at the System Utility Vegetation Managers Summit held in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, in 2024. Join us for this year's summit, hosted by Flathead Electric Cooperative and Bonneville Power, in Kalispell, Montana, near Glacier Park on May 13-15, 2025. Help us discuss and build new solutions for other complex topics in our industry. 🌱

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Lewis Services Welcomes Barry Downes Director of Safety and Human Performance

Lewis Services is pleased to announce that Barry Downes has joined its Corporate Leadership Team and is serving as the Director of Safety and Human Performance. In this role, Downes leads the strategic development and technical execution of standardized safety and human performance policies, procedures, and training across the organization. With over 30 years of experience in safety and operations, Downes brings a wealth of knowledge from his extensive background in vegetation management, utilities, oil, and gas.



Barry Downes, Director of Safety & Human Performance

"It's not enough to simply value integrity—we must act with integrity in order to earn the respect and trust of others."

Throughout his career, Downes has successfully developed, implemented, and managed safety and training programs across the United States and globally. As a Certified Safety Professional and Certified Treecare Safety Professional, Downes specializes in regulatory compliance and incident investigation. His leadership has driven the creation of company-wide, multisite safety initiatives that prioritize risk mitigation, foster employee ownership, and uphold the highest safety standards.

Downes is committed to developing the next generation of safety professionals. He believes that integrity is paramount when it comes to leading by example and strives to "walk the talk" in his daily interactions.

That commitment to integrity, one of Lewis' Operating Principles, is critical to the safety and success of Lewis' 4000+ employees across 27 states, and the customers they proudly serve in blue-sky weather and storm response. To learn more about Lewis Services and its **85-year history of Job Done Right®**, please visit www.lewisservices.com. 🌱



Mayor John Williams
(Scranton, South Carolina)
with Lewis crews.

A Lunch Break to Remember: A Local Mayor's Gesture of Thanks to Their Vegetation Management Contractor's Crews

By Amanda D. Raymond, Digital Marketing Specialist, Lewis Services



Amanda D. Raymond

If there's one thing that's true about the utility vegetation management world, it's that no two days are exactly alike. In fact, it's what many of our crew members say is one of their favorite parts of the job—the variety from day to day. Let's look at a day back in July, for example. One second, a crew in South Carolina is performing their vegetation management tasks per

usual, and the next, they're having lunch with the local mayor.

Scranton Mayor John Williams was aware that Lewis crews had been performing vegetation management for Duke Energy systems in their area of South Carolina. He knew a lot of vegetation had grown up into the powerlines. As mayor, he was concerned about the well-being of his constituents and worried the high winds that accompany hurricanes and other types of severe weather might lead to power outages. He also knew that Lewis crews were working diligently to get the vegetation under control, and that knowledge gave him peace of mind.

"I was just impressed by the professionalism of all the different crews working in different areas," Williams said.

These crews were under the leadership of Stacy Rowell, a general foreperson who has been with Lewis for eight years. Rowell said there had already been a few power outages in the area in recent months, so Duke Energy and his team were especially driven to keep the powerlines as clear of vegetation as possible.

While driving down the road, the mayor came across one of Rowell's crews and was reminded again of how hard they were working. An idea dawned on him: "I thought, 'Wait a minute. I want to feed these guys.'"

And he did just that.

With the help of his secretary, Mayor Williams arranged lunch for all of Rowell's crews. He ate alongside them, getting to know the crew members and remaining open to questions from them. Rowell said he and his crews were appreciative for more than just a good meal—it meant a lot to them to know that Mayor Williams valued their work and understood its importance.

"Things like this show that our work is not going unnoticed," Rowell said.

Mayor Williams said he was taken aback by the work ethic of the crews he saw around town, even without direct supervision. "We could lose power," he said, "but it will not be because of the growth we had into the wires prior to [Lewis] coming here."

Here at Lewis, 2024 was a study in how to put leadership in action as we go about our work every day. It's easy to see that one of the seven principles we developed—"Be the leader, employee, and supplier you wish you had"—was in play here. Rowell and his crews understood that the mayor and greater Scranton, South Carolina, community were counting on them to do their part in keeping power flowing throughout the town, and they would want a team who took their duties seriously. They knew because it's what they would want themselves.

"I appreciate what [the mayor] did for us," Rowell said. "It's just more motivation for the crews to continue doing a good job. It reassures them that when you do good things, even when you don't think someone is looking, someone is." 🌱

The Lewis logo is displayed in a red, italicized, sans-serif font within a red rectangular box. The background of the entire advertisement is a photograph of a power transmission tower at night, with bright orange light trails from power lines stretching across a dark blue, starry sky.

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Rooted in Responsibility: A Collaborative Approach to Urban Forestry

By Michael Daleo, Vegetation Management WMP Manager, San Diego Gas & Electric

Editorial review by Vince Mikulanis, Director of Western Operations, Davey Resource Group

San Diego Gas & Electric (SDG&E) has demonstrated a long-term commitment to sustainability and Right Tree, Right Place initiatives. As with many utility overhead electrical systems, there are trees located throughout SDG&E's system that have the potential to conflict with powerlines—and the best mitigation option is removal. Historically, SDG&E and their consultants have offered appropriate replacement trees to homeowners as part of the tree removal negotiation.

In 2021, SDG&E took that replacement tree process to the next level, committing to planting 10,000 trees annually as part of their corporate responsibility and environmental, social, and governance initiatives. This program aims to support biodiversity, improve air quality, sequester carbon, and improve community relationships throughout their service territory.

To go from providing a few hundred trees annually to 10,000+ is no easy task, especially as this program was conceived during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting in-person contact with customers. To accomplish the goal, SDG&E brought in one of their vegetation management partners, Davey Resource Group, Inc. (DRG) to provide customer-focused program support and management.

To start, DRG and SDG&E collaborated in defining the staffing requirements, how to process customer requests for trees, and how the process would work from nursery to the homeowner. Several required factors were decided early on for a successful program, including:

- **Customer Engagement:** Customers and homeowners need to be engaged in the process and educated on how to plant and care for the trees. With San Diego's Mediterranean climate, watering trees throughout the dry summers (and sometimes winters) is crucial, and

a commitment to watering is a required element of the program.

- **Proper Nursery Stock:** This was identified as a critical element, as trees are a long-term investment. Starting a tree off right from the planting stage is important to realize the benefits decades down the road.
- **Diversity:** SDG&E covers an incredibly diverse area in its 4,100-square-mile footprint. Temperatures in a single day can vary by 30 degrees or more from the coast to the inland areas. SDG&E serves diverse spaces from heavily urbanized areas with concerns about heat island effects and air quality to rural areas concerned about revegetating properties after wildfires. SDG&E also wished to prioritize socioeconomic equality for the program and ensure access to residents in underrepresented communities.
- **Partnerships:** SDG&E serves 25 unique communities, and the area has the support of numerous nonprofit organizations dedicated to enhancing the environment. SDG&E sought to partner with many of these entities to help broaden the reach of their program
- **Reporting:** As this is an ESG-focused program, funded utilizing ratepayer dollars, SDG&E wants to ensure that the program benefits can be easily documented for their own internal and external reporting requirements.

Sustainable tree programs of this magnitude are relatively uncommon. However, DRG has experience working as partners for similar projects, including City Plants in Los Angeles, California. Through consultations with those partners, listening to what worked and didn't work, a framework for the local





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program was developed. It was understood that flexibility and responsiveness were going to be key, especially considering the challenges of directly engaging with the public during the development stages. DRG and SDG&E management worked to develop online engagement tools for potential recipients of the trees, emphasizing contactless methods and forging relationships with local nurseries who would be providing the stock.

DRG's ResourceKeeper software formed the backbone of the program, ultimately serving as a platform to handle program requests and track program participants from initial contact to site evaluation, tree planting, and follow-up. The software allows SDG&E and DRG to monitor how many trees have been planted, oversee how many agreements have been signed and are pending delivery, and provide necessary reporting for environmental benefits of the program and tree survivability.

Locally, support for the program has exceeded expectations. SDG&E maintains a robust, customer-focused website for their operations and includes the sustainable tree program in many areas. Word-of-mouth advertising has also proven to be an extremely effective method of supporting the program's growth. Excited customers who receive trees tell their neighbors who then sign up for the program. Both DRG and SDG&E are active in local urban-forestry-based nonprofits, which also helps ensure the general public is aware of the unique program SDG&E offers. Currently there are nearly 4,000 people or organizations on a waiting list to participate in the sustainable tree program.

SDG&E has also partnered with local municipalities,



particularly with the City of San Diego, to help repopulate the urban forest. Typically focusing on underserved communities, SDG&E provides trees and planting within the city ROW in front of residences while the City of San Diego commits to contracted watering for tree establishment. The importance of this watering partnership cannot be understated, and it has contributed to an 80-percent success rate in tree survival in many of the planting projects. Hundreds of trees have been planted in underserved communities, helping improve neighborhood aesthetics, and over time will provide important environmental benefits to the local residents.

The sustainable tree program has also provided an opportunity to engage with other large stakeholders, including local Native American governments, school districts, and homeowner associations. All of these entities have also provided an important opportunity to engage the constituents, educating them about the importance of trees in our communities, and of course Right Tree, Right Place concepts regarding safety around overhead electrical facilities.

To date, the program has seen more than 40,000 trees planted in San Diego County over the past four years. Through a well-coordinated partnership, SDG&E and DRG have been recognized as local stewards of sustainability and improving the urban forest for communities throughout the service territory. Presentations and regional- and national-level workshops have helped to spread the word about the ability of this program to bring similar success to other utilities, and help us all live up to the standard of providing safe, reliable, and sustainable energy to our communities. †

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Trees & Lines Explores Top UVM Topics with 2024 Trees & Utilities Speakers

Did you know that over 1,200 people attended the UAA and Arbor Day Foundation's Trees & Utilities Conference in Fort Worth last September? That's roughly three times the approximately 400 people who attended the comeback conference in 2017! As the number of Trees & Utilities attendees has grown in recent years, the conference agenda has expanded too, with an increasing number of impressive speakers making the list.

If you're reading this, there's a good chance you were one of those 2024 Trees & Utilities attendees. Did you miss any sessions with speakers you admire? Were there speakers you thoroughly enjoyed listening to and would like to hear even more from? If so, our *Trees & Lines* podcast, providing fresh perspectives on UVM, is here to help.

Over the course of the three-day conference, 25+ industry difference-makers joined *Trees & Lines* hosts Phil Charlton (UVM veteran) and Tej Singh (Iapetus Infrastructure Services COO)



to record new episodes of the podcast straight from the Trees & Utilities expo floor.

Among those guests were several 2024 conference speakers, including Ashley Bennett, Matt Goff, Jim Greene, Jason Grossman, Steve Kerr, Jeff Labelle, Dan Morrow, Rigo Ortiz, Jonathan Rizzo, Jenna Turner, and Tim Walsh. Other 2024 Trees & Utilities speakers—Nigel

Barry, Dennis Fallon, Leslie Kass, and Robert Vanderhoof—have previously joined the podcast too. Our conversations with these UVM leaders cover a broad range of important industry topics, from grid modernization to wildfire mitigation and everything in between.

We've already begun rolling out episodes from the 2024 conference and we'll be releasing more in the coming weeks. So head over to treesandlines.com to hear from everyone mentioned above, as well as many other bright minds from around the industry! 🎧

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Pre-Inspector Training Program Boosts California Workforce

Vince Mikulanis, Director of Western Operations, Davey Resource Group

Pre-inspectors play a significant role in most utility vegetation management programs. They are responsible for thoroughly assessing trees and vegetation within and beside ROW to identify potential hazards and routine work requirements. Through these assessments, utility companies can detect and eliminate outage risks early, reducing the number of service disruptions while creating a safer environment. Pre-inspectors also play a critical role in working with property owners and public agencies to gain approval for the work and to arrange access for the crews who will follow them.

Despite the critical role of utility vegetation management in a power company's operations, this remains a "behind the scenes" industry that few people know. This lack of visibility creates challenges for recruiting and hiring a skilled workforce to ensure the work is safely completed. To combat this scarcity, raise awareness about the opportunities our industry provides, and provide the skills needed to be successful, a group of stakeholders collaborated to develop a pre-inspector training program. Led by the Foundation for California Community Colleges and UpSkill California, along with technical support and instruction from industry partners, the program began instruction in the fall of 2021.

UpSkill and the Foundation for California Community Colleges fund the program through utility partnerships and

state and federal grants. The program is a two-week, 80-hour standardized course that consists of classroom and field experience. Instructors show students how to identify trees as well as identify clearances and growth rates and navigate the often-complex decision processes involved in determining required maintenance activities. Included in these evaluations are entry-level tree risk assessments, identifying obvious tree defects through visual inspections within the ROW, following the ISA Level 1 Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) requirements.

The program also provides instruction on identifying utility equipment and associated electrical hazards according to the Tree Care Industry Association's (TCIA's) Electric Hazard Awareness Program (EHAP). Rounding out the curriculum is customer service training, helping students learn how to explain to property owners the pruning activities required and the public safety reasons behind them. The course is available at nine different community colleges throughout the state of California, with more colleges being added for 2025.

The program provides students with classroom instruction on the principles of UVM. They also obtain field experience in evaluating trees and real-world data entry using Davey Resource Group's ResourceKeeper field software. Combined, these training modules are intended to provide entry-level job

training specific to UVM, which is often absent in a bachelor's-level education curriculum.

Ryan Steele, a program instructor with Davey Resource Group, Inc., says, "As an instructor with this program, it is rewarding to watch the transformation of students who come into the class with varying levels of experience, to see them leave with so much UVM-specific knowledge and the capability to conduct a basic tree risk assessment. We joke as instructors that students will never look at a tree the same way again, which speaks to the effectiveness of the material being taught."

While most students are individuals interested in entering the field of utility vegetation management, local utilities also encourage their employees to attend the course to enhance their skill sets. This can be especially valuable to utility employees who enter the UVM program from other utility departments.

Moving forward, the Foundation for California Community Colleges, UpSkill, and their industry partners hope to expand the program into a suite of courses taught nationwide, providing this valuable training experience to utility partners across the nation. The development and execution of the utility vegetation management pre-inspector training program demonstrates a commitment to nurturing a skilled and professional workforce that will help strengthen the UVM sector over time. 🌳



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BUSTING THE MYTHS: WHAT UVM JOBS REALLY ENTAIL



PHOTOS COURTESY OF WALTER KIRK III

Life as a Utility Arborist in the Heart of Atlanta

Sam Morris, Utility Arborist—Downtown Atlanta Distribution Team, Georgia Power

Growing up in Birmingham, Alabama, I always had a passion for the outdoors. If I wasn't playing sports, you could find me in the woods or on the water, hunting, fishing, or hiking. From a young age, I always knew I wanted to be outdoors—I just didn't know exactly what that would look like in a career. My passion for the outdoors is what ultimately led me to Auburn University's School of Forestry and Wildlife Sciences (now the College of Forestry, Wildlife, and Environment). I graduated in 2017 with a degree in natural resources management.

While in school, I knew power companies and forestry had some sort of connection but didn't know exactly what that was. Utility arboriculture didn't seem to be a popular field, as it wasn't discussed much in class or amongst peers. Searching for a career upon graduating, I was connected with a Utility Arborist with Georgia Power. I was fortunate to schedule a ride-along, which I will always be grateful for. After spending a day in the field and catching a glimpse of the job, I knew this was the field for me and a company I wanted to work for one day.

In December of 2017, I started my career in utility arboriculture as an ECI contractor with Georgia Power. I helped support their transmission team by identifying

vegetation hazards through danger tree and NERC ground/aerial patrols, as well as meeting with customers about pre- and post-work needs. I learned a significant amount, and had a great experience that helped me get the start I needed.

After spending about a year and a half as a contractor, I was hired by Georgia Power as a Utility Arborist Technician (UAT) in June 2019, supporting the North Metro Atlanta distribution territory. I remember looking at a circuit map for the first time and thinking, *What am I getting myself into?* I was used to the simplicity of the long, straight, rural transmission rights-of-way because that was all I had looked at. But after a short period of time, I got the hang of distribution vegetation management. As a UAT, almost all my time was spent in the field working with tree crews and customers. Some of my main roles included pre-planning work on our GIS platforms, post auditing the crews' work to ensure our specifications and quality was met, performing crew safety audits, meeting with customers, and responding to storm calls.

I spent three years as a UAT before moving up to a Utility Arborist in North Metro Atlanta distribution. In this role, I still had the same field responsibilities but added more administrative duties to my everyday job. These duties include managing my budget, pruning and herbicide schedules, tree

crew personnel, processing weekly invoices, and taking on more storm duties.

Our group had some personnel changes, and in April 2023, I moved to support the Downtown Atlanta distribution team, which is where I currently am. The City of Atlanta has one of the highest percentages, if not the highest, of overall urban tree canopy in the nation. With well over 1,000 miles of overhead distribution lines in the city, I'm sure one can imagine the unique challenges that come with. The canopy is made up of large, mature trees too, so it makes our job more complex. Fortunately, I oversee a group of extremely skilled tree workers who work incredibly hard to help improve our reliability by obtaining clearance and making proper cuts. Also, I've served on several Georgia Power committees, from technology- to safety-focused, and am a current board member of the Georgia Vegetation Management Association. It's always great to interact with internal and external partners and learn from them, which I can apply to help me in my everyday job.

A common misconception people might have about my position is that I "ride around in a truck all day looking at trees." Yes, I do spend time doing that, but it's only a small part of my job. I spend a significant amount of time meeting with people—tree crews to ensure they are working safely, and customers regarding their concerns—plus quite a bit of time on storm response. Utility Arborists and tree crews play a vital role in storm restoration, which is often overlooked. If I'm not in the field, there is always plenty of office work to be done with managing a budget and schedule.

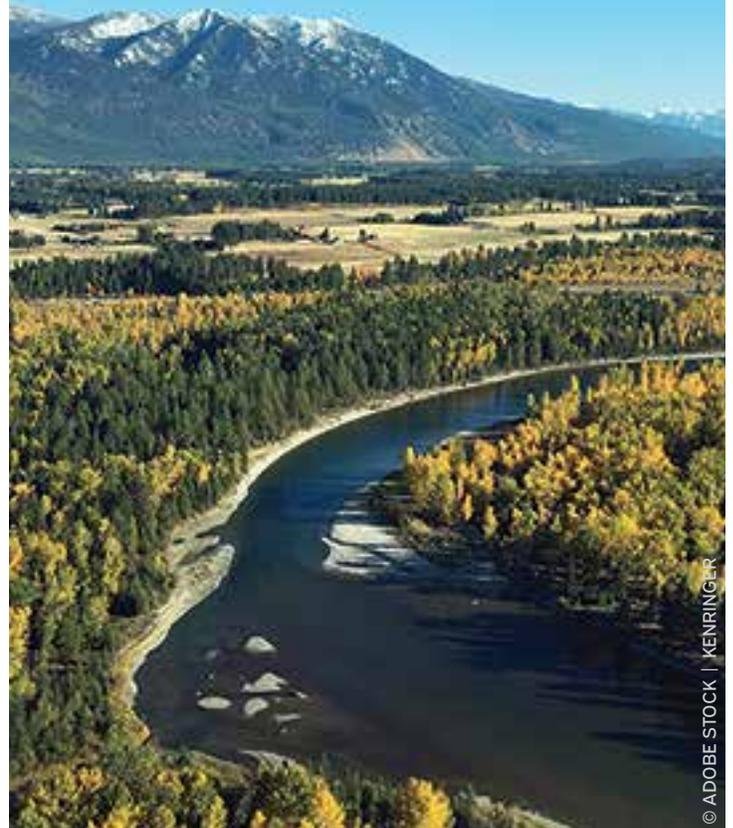
I certainly am passionate about this field. This is an excellent and rewarding industry to work in. Each time I speak with college students, I encourage them to consider the utility vegetation field, as it is a great career and there will always be overhead powerline and vegetation conflicts. Ultimately, without IVM, power delivery would be affected to our most critical places such as hospitals, schools, grocery stores, homes, and beyond. It is up to us to make sure the lights stay on and power is delivered safely and reliably. 🌳



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Five Life Lessons That Have Guided Me so Far

By Kimberly Laing, Business Development Manager, ArborMetrics Solutions

Years ago, in one of my second-year university classes, we were studying communication theories in the workplace. My assignment was to interview a woman of a previous generation about her experiences in the workforce—it was a no-brainer to talk to my mom. But the lessons I learned from that conversation were a wake-up call for how far women have come, as well as how far we still have to go.

When I had a debrief with my professor about the assignment, she said, “If you are ever wondering how to make it as a female in the business world, try a sense of humor.” That statement was drastically confusing—not only do I have to be multifaceted, knowledgeable, and work hard to become a successful professional but now I must be a source of entertainment and laughter? It was not until recently that I understood what she meant.

Bringing humor to your job allows you to:

- Build empathy
- Bridge connections
- Allow room for a comical break
- Minimize stress
- Not take yourself so seriously
- Form a positive outlook

It’s wise advice that reflects my professor’s life experience—and I wish I had understood it sooner.

In 2022 I was speaking at a “Women in Power” panel at an industry conference where I was asked to prepare one major question: If you could go back to your younger self, the time when you were just starting your career, what advice would you give YOU? Two years later, I’m still contemplating this question, but these are five lessons that have guided me so far.

1 Find Your People

Find your *people*. It can be leaders in your organization, peers, family, or your friends. You will know who they are because you can be yourself around them and they want the best for you. It can be difficult to navigate the turbulence of work life, so find a mentor who can help you grow. When it comes time, give back to those who have supported you along your journey. I’ve had many mentors along the way, both men and women, and I’m so grateful for them.

2 Be Authentic

One of the reasons I was confused with my professor’s advice was because it felt inauthentic to try and be anything other than myself. Early in my career, I had a “work” self and a “personal” self. It was not until I merged the two together that I felt comfortable. It does not matter if you’re loud, quiet, funny, serious, assertive, passive, weird, nerdy, or anything else—just be yourself. People will appreciate it, and even better, they will embrace it. If not, maybe you’re in the wrong place.

3 Accept Criticism

Accepting criticism has been key to my personal and professional growth. Find the people in your organization who you admire and respect and ask them for advice. When taking advice, be prepared to accept fair and honest criticism. If you take feedback seriously and acknowledge there is room for improvement, you will only get better and it’ll help you in the long run. Always build bridges, never burn them. At some point, you’ll also find yourself in a position where you have to deliver criticism and have difficult conversations, so remember to be honest, fair, and empathetic.

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4 Establish Your Brand

It is hard to stand out. Early in our careers we want to be martyrs and take on everything. This is good when you want to learn a variety of new skills, collaborate with different people, and get noticed in your organization. But be sure to take a balanced approach and do not overpromise and under-deliver. Wanting to help as much as you can is admirable, but spreading yourself too thin will inevitably catch up with you.

Along the way you will find your strengths and know your weaknesses. You can find where you excel and capitalize on it. Find a few good things that make you stand out, become an expert in those things, and never stop learning about the things you struggle with. The hard path is often the right one and will pay off eventually.

5 Make Loud Mistakes

If you have ever played in a band, you will know that everyone needs to work together harmoniously and in perfect time to produce a cohesive and pleasant melody. When you are playing in a group, you can play quietly and hide your mistakes, but you will never get better—and eventually people will know.

If you make a loud mistake, you will stand out. It may be for reasons that are uncomfortable—people will hear you and may even judge you—but that will force you to get better with practice and skill development. This will only make the band (i.e., the team) better. So, if you make a mistake, make it a loud and proud one and stay dedicated to your professional development. Don't let fear decide your fate.

CONCLUSION

I have always worked in the utility space, but in 2018 I joined the UVM industry full-time. This is where I feel at home. Our industry is filled with so many hardworking and incredible people, and the camaraderie is second to none. I've often noticed that people who spend their days considering the safety of others, as well as reliability, quality, and environmental stewardship, tend to care about the people they work with and their success, whether men or women. If I knew about this industry years ago when I was still in university, I would have jumped at the opportunity to work with the people in the position I'm in today.

A career path is seldom a straight line. There will be bumps along the road, with many detours. But eventually you will find your people and your place. And it's nice to enjoy a few laughs along the way. 🌱



PG&E Volunteers Take Care of Final Resting Place for Those Who Served Our Country

By Tony Khing, Business Operations Communications Principal, Pacific Gas and Electric Company

When Mike Bockrath, PG&E regional senior manager for the San Francisco and Peninsula divisions, found out that PG&E volunteers were going to be at San Bruno's Golden Gate National Cemetery to help tend the grounds as part of the annual Saluting Branches Day of Service, he made it a priority to be there on September 18 to help.

His reason was the same as the one given by the other 46 volunteers—24 in San Bruno and 22 at the Sacramento Valley National Cemetery in Dixon.

"Remembering why and how we're here through our veterans is very important," said Bockrath. His grandfather is buried in a national cemetery in the San Joaquin Valley. "Being able to come here and do something is very special."

The Best Turnout Yet

When PG&E started participating in the Saluting Branches program in 2022, one coworker volunteered to help at Golden Gate National Cemetery. Last year, five were present in San Bruno and 11 in Dixon. This year's turnout was the highest in the short history of PG&E's involvement.

Saluting Branches was started in 2015 by a group of arborists in Minnesota. They wanted to give back to communities and honor veterans by offering tree care services for free. Billed as "the largest one-day volunteer event in the tree industry," 4,500 volunteers visited 100 national cemeteries on September 18 and donated \$4 million in services.

"Saluting Branches has a long history of caring for our national cemeteries when no one else would step up," said veteran Steven Schulz (U.S. Air Force), expert safety program manager and president of PG&E's Veterans Employee Resource Group. "They're dedicated to making sure our national cemeteries look good."

"Saluting Branches offers specialized tree care by knowledgeable and highly skilled arborists that are often outside of the abilities or budgets of the locations we serve," said Brian Eubanks, quality control specialist, who led PG&E's participation and was a U.S. Navy hospital corpsman.

PG&E volunteers helped tree companies clear cut branches from trees, rake the grounds, and clean headstones.

"There's no higher honor than to serve those who served you," said Burt Skurtun, a Bay Area-based superintendent in gas construction and a former U.S. Marine. "It's in the area where

I work. When we talk about giving back to our hometowns, I couldn't think of a better way to do it."

"Every veteran who spent time on a battlefield left behind a friend or family member," said Cybersecurity Analyst Chris Maul, a former U.S. Army paratrooper. "It's important to come here and care for the grounds where those veterans have their final resting places."

'PG&E Is Always There for Us'

The work, not to mention PG&E's participation, didn't go unnoticed.

"It's good for the local community and for the cemetery," said Golden Gate National Cemetery Administrative Officer Ronnie Campbell. "PG&E is an integral community partner with the cemetery in San Bruno and the other national cemeteries in Northern California. PG&E is always there for us."

"Our veterans have a heart for service," said North Valley and Sierra Region Vice President Joe Wilson, who volunteered at the Dixon event. "They do everything they can to serve our customers, each other, and our coworkers."

Whether you have expertise in tree care or simply a strong desire to contribute, Saluting Branches encourages organizations to make a positive impact: caring for the trees that provide shade, beauty, and a sense of tranquility in our local green spaces, and to honor those who gave so much in service of our country.

This article is republished and adapted with permission by Tony Khing and PG&E. You can read PG&E's original article here: <https://tinyurl.com/PGESaluting-Branches>.





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From Wildfire Frontlines to Frontline UVM: A Nontraditional Path to Arboriculture

By Ryan Stout, CEO, Hotshot Arbor Care



Ryan Stout

I am thrilled to share my journey into utility vegetation management, a career that has grown from the unlikely roots of emergency services to a passion for proactive environmental stewardship. My path, characterized by high-intensity firefighting and crisis management, has provided me with a unique perspective on the vital role of UVM in protecting communities.

Starting my career as a battalion chief and forest aviation officer with the USDA

Forest Service, I was deeply involved in coordinating aerial firefighting efforts and managing emergency responses to wildfires across national forests. This demanding role placed me directly in the path of some of the most severe firefighting operations, including the historically destructive Camp Fire. Experiencing the ferocity of these fires firsthand dramatically shaped my understanding of disaster management and highlighted the critical importance of effective vegetation control.

The devastating impact of the Camp Fire, where unchecked vegetation significantly fueled the destruction, was a profound wake-up call. It led me to a pivotal career shift from fighting fires to preventing them through the science of arboriculture. I was determined to leverage my experience in crisis management to make a tangible difference in enhancing

community safety and resilience against natural disasters through strategic vegetation management.

This turning point was just the beginning. I delved into the world of arboriculture, captivated by the significant impact I could achieve by focusing on prevention rather than response. The transition required adapting my firefighting skills to the nuanced field of tree management, a challenge I approached with zeal. It was clear that the same principles that applied to controlling fires—like assessing risks and managing crises—were invaluable in managing vegetation around critical infrastructure.

As I embraced my new role in UVM, I found my firefighting skills surprisingly relevant. My years of assessing fire dangers equipped me with a keen eye for identifying potential vegetation hazards near utility lines. My background in coordinating complex operations became a cornerstone for devising comprehensive vegetation management plans. Moreover, the ability to stay calm and take decisive action under pressure was equally crucial in UVM, particularly in emergency response scenarios.

As I deepened my engagement in UVM, my role expanded beyond VM to include direct involvement in managing and safeguarding critical utility infrastructure. More than once, my work in assessing and addressing potential hazards has identified issues with utility infrastructure that likely prevented large catastrophic wildfires, significantly impacting community safety and ecological health.

My enthusiasm for UVM grew as I explored the integration of advanced technologies into our field practices. With a



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strong background in aerial operations, I championed the use of geographic information systems and LiDAR for precise vegetation mapping. My commitment to minimizing environmental impacts led me to advocate for precision herbicide techniques, significantly reducing ecological damage. Additionally, recognizing the potential of unmanned aerial vehicles, I spearheaded the adoption of drone inspections to enhance the safety and efficiency of reaching challenging areas.

Working in UVM has also afforded me the privilege of working in some of the most beautiful landscapes in the world. The breathtaking views and pristine environments where we operate are constant reminders of the importance of our work in protecting these areas. Each site presents unique challenges and learning opportunities, enriching my professional experience and deepening my appreciation for our planet's natural beauty.

In pursuit of excellence in UVM, I have earned several critical certifications over the years, including ISA Certified Arborist, Utility Specialist, and Tree Risk Assessment Qualified professional. These certifications have not only bolstered my expertise but also underscored my commitment to leading with authority and informed decision-making in the industry.

The need for diverse talent in UVM is more pressing than ever as we face complex challenges posed by climate change, urbanization, and aging infrastructure.

Fresh perspectives and innovative problem-solving are crucial for addressing these issues effectively. That's why I am passionate about urging individuals from varied backgrounds, whether they come from emergency services, the military, or entirely unrelated fields such as marketing or archaeology, to consider a career in UVM.

UVM offers a fascinating convergence of technology, environmental science, and critical infrastructure management, providing a platform where you can make a substantial impact. This field not only allows you to protect communities but also supports continuous personal and professional growth.

For those contemplating a career shift to UVM, I can affirm the abundance of opportunities for advancement. The field is continuously evolving, driven by new technologies and methodologies, ensuring there's always something new to master. UVM professionals play a pivotal role in maintaining ecological balance and ensuring public safety—a dual responsibility I find profoundly rewarding.

By sharing my journey from a firefighter to a utility arborist, I hope to inspire the next generation to explore the diverse opportunities within the UVM industry. It's more than just managing vegetation; it's about safeguarding communities, nurturing our environment, and contributing to a resilient and sustainable world. There's no greater satisfaction than knowing your daily efforts significantly impact community safety and environmental conservation. ♻️



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OPINION EDITORIAL



Unlocking Opportunities: The Critical Role of Translations

By Mariana Rodriguez, Program Manager, Wright Service Corp.

Every day, across the United States, millions of workers step onto jobsites ready to contribute, learn, and build better lives for themselves and their families. However, for one in every three of these workers, there's one major barrier that stands in their way: the language barrier.

I have worked in vegetation management for over 10 years and have witnessed these barriers up close. I've seen talented workers struggle to keep up, not because they lacked the ability but because the materials they needed weren't available in their native language. I've also seen the immense potential that's unlocked when we break down these barriers and provide the tools everyone needs to succeed.

Quick fact: "In the U.S., over 43 million people speak Spanish at home, and Hispanic workers represent nearly 30% of the arborist industry."

These men and women are out there every day, trimming trees, handling hazardous materials, operating heavy equipment, and working in dangerous conditions. But how many of them fully understand the safety protocols and guidelines that keep them and their colleagues safe? How many have missed a critical piece of information because the materials were only available in English?

Without proper translations, we're asking people to risk their lives without giving them the tools to protect themselves. *Every lost word, every misunderstood sentence, is a potential accident waiting to happen.*

A Personal Mission

As a Venezuelan immigrant, I understand how it feels to be in a new environment and feel like you're always a step behind because of language. The harsh reality is that language can be an invisible barrier that keeps people from fully thriving. And yet, this is something we can fix.

In the past few years, I've had the privilege of working

with the UAA to translate their materials into Spanish. Our mission has been to make sure every Spanish-speaking member has the same access to critical information as their English-speaking counterparts. We've translated the member and volunteer benefits brochure, created a glossary of industry-specific terms and a style guide, and worked on vital safety materials like the PSA series of videos, including subjects like: Look Up and Live, Step and Touch Potential, Dog Bite Prevention, and UAA Environmental Stewardship: Establishing Biological Controls.

But these translations are more than words on a page, they're a statement. A statement that says: You matter. Your safety matters. Your contribution to this industry matters.

So, imagine you are standing on a jobsite, eager to learn and grow, but feeling helpless because you don't understand the training material you're given. Imagine knowing that your safety depends on understanding a safety guide, but not being 100% sure you've interpreted it correctly.

Through these translations, we are giving people back their power to learn, to grow, to stay safe, and to feel confident in their work. This commitment to language inclusivity strengthens our workforce, builds a culture of safety and fosters respect for all who are part of this vital work.

If you want to make a difference in your workplace, start by championing the importance of language inclusivity. Advocate for translated materials and ensure all employees, regardless of their native language, have access to the information they need. Consider partnering with professional translators who understand our industry's terminology or reach out to organizations like the UAA for resources. By taking this step, you can help create a safer and more inclusive work environment for everyone. 🌱

¡Precaución!

Caution!

¡Veneno!

Expandiendo Oportunidades: La importancia de las traducciones

Por Mariana Rodriguez, Program Manager, Wright Service Corp.

Cada día en los Estados Unidos, millones de trabajadores llegan a sus lugares de trabajo listos para contribuir, aprender y construir una vida mejor para ellos y sus familias. Sin embargo, para uno de cada tres de estos trabajadores, existe una gran barrera que se interpone en su camino: la barrera del idioma.

He trabajado en la industria del manejo de la vegetación durante más de 10 años y he sido testigo de esto. He visto a trabajadores talentosos teniendo problemas para mantenerse al día, no porque les faltara capacidad, sino porque los materiales que necesitaban no estaban disponibles en su idioma natal. También he visto el inmenso potencial que se desbloquea cuando eliminamos estas barreras y proporcionamos las herramientas necesarias para que todos puedan tener éxito por igual.

Dato curioso: "En los Estados Unidos, más de 43 millones de personas hablan español en casa, y los trabajadores hispanos representan casi el 30% de la industria arbolista."

Estos hombres y mujeres salen todos los días a podar árboles, rociar herbicidas, operar equipos pesados y trabajar en condiciones peligrosas. Pero ¿cuántos de ellos entienden completamente los protocolos de seguridad y las directrices que los mantienen a salvo a ellos y a sus compañeros de trabajo? ¿Cuántos han perdido información crítica porque los materiales solo estaban disponibles en inglés?

Sin traducciones, estamos pidiéndoles a las personas que arriesguen sus vidas sin darles las herramientas para protegerse. *Cada palabra perdida, cada frase mal interpretada, es un accidente a punto de suceder.*

Una Misión Personal

Como inmigrante venezolana, entiendo lo que se siente estar en un nuevo entorno y sentir que siempre vas un paso atrás debido al idioma. La cruda realidad es que el idioma puede ser una barrera invisible que impide que las personas avancen. Y, sin embargo, esto es algo que podemos solucionar.

En los últimos años, he tenido el privilegio de trabajar con la UAA para traducir sus materiales al español. Nuestra misión ha sido asegurarnos de que cada miembro hispanohablante tenga el mismo acceso a la información que sus compañeros que hablan inglés. Hemos traducido el folleto de beneficios para miembros y voluntarios, creado un glosario de términos específicos de la industria, y trabajado en materiales vitales de seguridad como la serie de videos PSA, que incluye temas como: Look Up and Live, Step and Touch Potential, Dog Bite Prevention, y UAA Environmental Stewardship: Establishing Biological Controls.

Pero estas traducciones son más que palabras en una página, son una declaración. Una declaración que dice: Tú importas. Tu seguridad importa. Tu contribución a esta industria importa.

Imagine estar en tu lugar de trabajo, con ganas de aprender y crecer, pero sintiéndote indefenso porque no entiendes el material de capacitación que te han dado. Imagina saber que tu seguridad depende de entender una guía de seguridad, pero no estar 100% seguro de haberla interpretado correctamente.

A través de estas traducciones, estamos devolviendo a las personas el poder de aprender, crecer, mantenerse a salvo y sentirse seguros en su trabajo. Este compromiso con la inclusión lingüística fortalece a nuestra fuerza laboral, construye una cultura de seguridad y fomenta el respeto por todos los que forman parte de este trabajo tan vital.

Si usted desea marcar una diferencia en su lugar de trabajo, comience por promover la importancia de la inclusión lingüística. Abogue por la traducción de materiales y asegúrese de que todos los empleados, sin importar su idioma nativo, tengan acceso a la información que necesitan. Considere asociarse con traductores profesionales que comprendan la terminología de nuestra industria o comuníquese con organizaciones como la UAA para obtener recursos. Al dar este paso, usted puede contribuir a crear un entorno laboral más seguro e inclusivo para todos. 🌱

A Quick Guide to Operationalizing Advanced Vegetation Intelligence

By Phil Chen, Strategic Solutions Lead, Overstory



As utilities navigate evolving challenges—from extreme weather to aging infrastructure—the need for innovative, scalable solutions has never been greater. But beyond recognizing the need for change, utilities must know how to choose, vet, and implement the tools that can help them meet such challenges.

In a recent webinar with vegetation management experts from ComEd, ATC, and OG&E, we heard how leading investor-owned utilities are using advanced vegetation intelligence to meet their resilience and reliability goals.

Building the Case for Vegetation Intelligence

Vegetation management is often the largest line item in utility operations budgets, making it a frequent target for cost-cutting. However, trimming budgets at the expense of long-term resilience is counterproductive. Data-driven decision-making can help vegetation managers communicate the value of their programs by connecting operational outcomes to overarching goals like system reliability and affordability.

For example, ATC's Ben Gura recommends using data to craft a compelling narrative through three core reports:

1. Total system costs
2. Budget utilization
3. Risk assessment

By aligning VM strategies with executive priorities like reliability and risk mitigation, operations teams can get critical buy-in for advanced technologies.

Choosing the Right Technology

The utility landscape offers a growing array of remote sensing technologies. Assessing the strengths and weaknesses of different technologies

like LiDAR, satellite, and aerial imagery—and how they fit within your most relevant use cases—is critical in determining which tool is right for which project.

When utilities evaluate different solutions on precision alone, they often miss actionability and correlation with meaningful operational metrics. Ultimately, system reliability and ROI mean more to ratepayers than owning an expensive digital twin of every tree branch across their network.

As an example, CenterPoint Energy recently requested \$9.9M in capital spending for a LiDAR-based model of its network as part of its pre-Beryl System Resiliency Plan. But Texas's PUC staff recommended denying that request for failing to consider more cost-effective alternatives. And Texas isn't alone; utility commissions in Michigan and Illinois have also publicly pushed back on the high cost of LiDAR for vegetation programs in the last year.

All remote sensing technologies are evolving, but they're evolving at different rates, meaning technology cost-effectiveness depends on which use cases a utility aims to address. A balanced approach—considering accuracy thresholds, budget constraints, and long-term goals—ensures utilities adopt tools that deliver maximum ROI.

Developing Impactful Pilot Programs

An objective, system-wide view of risk is essential for effective VM, but utilities need to know how they can use the information to get the most value from it. Pilot programs can offer more affordable entry points to explore and prove how you can

use data to answer specific questions about prioritization and actionability.

For instance, after a severe ice storm, OG&E used vegetation intelligence to proactively identify high-risk spans and mitigate storm damage at a record pace, identifying more than 80 critical risk spans in 30 minutes—work that traditionally takes days.

"What we learned," said OG&E's Steven Frazier, "is that we no longer have to be reactionary. We can start being more proactive and prevent some of these problems before they ever happen. It helped sell the point that storms are expensive for us, and we can use those storm dollars and resources much more efficiently."

Overstory customers have used objective data from vegetation intelligence to:

- Pinpoint off-ROW hazard trees
- Optimize trim cycles
- Prepare for severe weather events
- Optimize customer management programs

"A co-op with 500 miles of transmission does not have the same challenges or the same opportunities as an IOU with 36,000 miles of overhead line," said ComEd's Nick Day. Piloting the technology can help you identify the most efficient use cases for your business goals.

Driving Long-Term Change

Integrating advanced vegetation intelligence is not just about adopting new tools—it's about fostering a culture of innovation. Utilities that align clear objectives, success metrics, and collaborative partnerships can evolve alongside emerging challenges, building resilience for the future.

By prioritizing data-driven decision-making, utilities can optimize budgets, enhance system reliability, and improve grid resilience against extreme weather events. †



Scan here to watch the full webinar with ComEd, ATC, and OG&E about how leading investor-owned utilities are using advanced vegetation intelligence to meet resilience and reliability goals.



Scan here to download the Playbook for Operationalizing Advanced Vegetation Intelligence and learn more about how teams like ATC, ComEd, and OG&E put Overstory to work in their programs!



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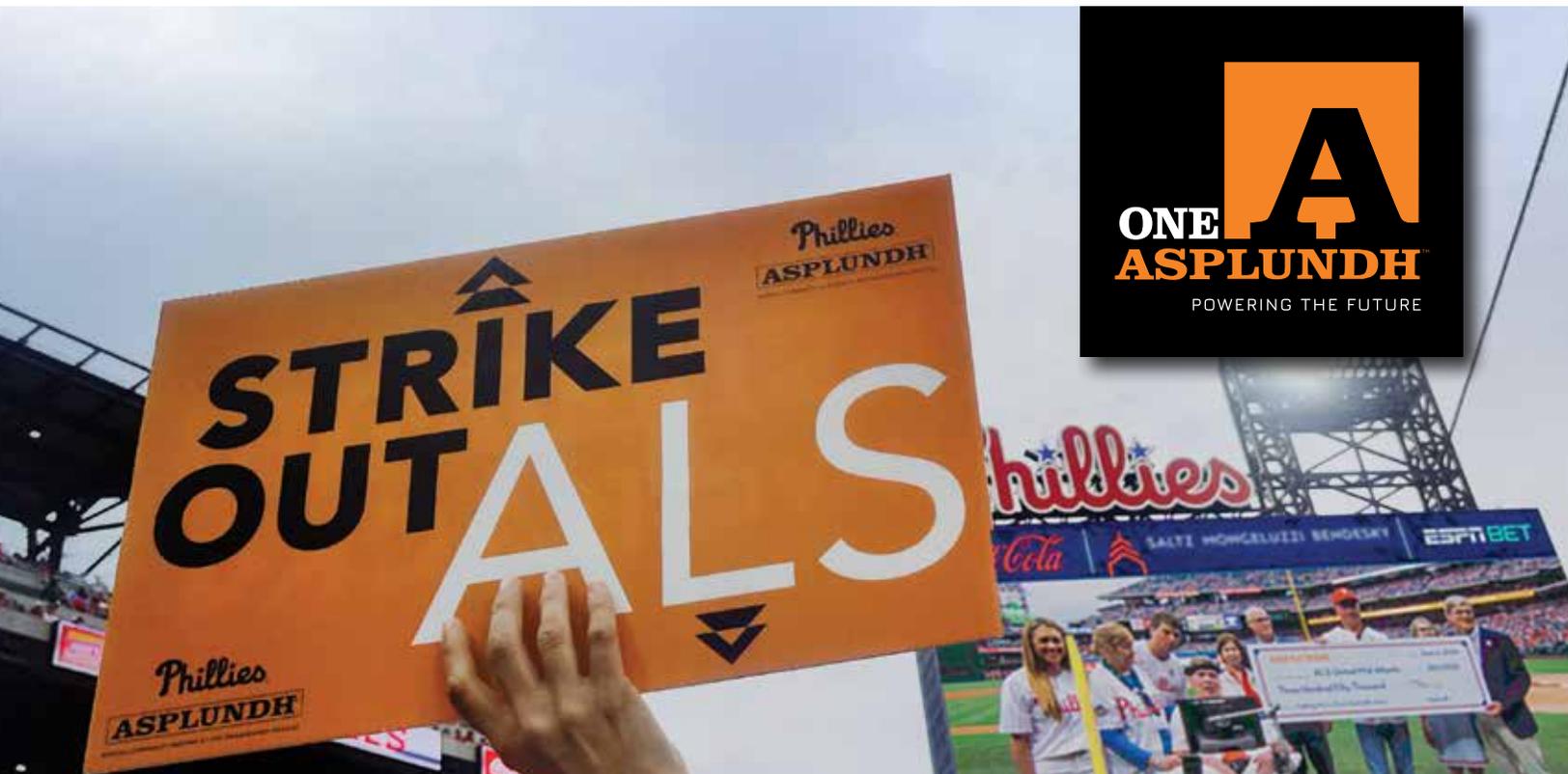
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