

JUL/AUG 2024

Volume 15

Number 4

# UTILITY ARBORIST NEWSLINE

FOCUS ON CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER RESPONSE

## WEATHERING THE STORM

LEARN FROM FLORIDA'S VEGETATION  
MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE

## A ROADMAP FOR A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

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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)

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)

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Turn to **page 18** to read how New York is building a safer network of underground pipeline utilities.



Read about the dedication of Saluting Branches in honoring and remembering veterans on **page 28**.



Learn how power and pipeline corridors are offering hope to fast-disappearing wildlife on **page 36**.

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



Brandon Hughson

Climate change and disaster response present unparalleled challenges to utilities, demanding a proactive approach to fortify resilience in the wake of evolving environmental hazards. As extreme weather events escalate in frequency and severity, utilities are intensifying their focus on multifaceted strategies, including integrated vegetation management, biodiversity conservation, undergrounding of infrastructure, and the utilization of geospatial technologies to mitigate risks and ensure consistent service delivery.

Utilities face a myriad of weather-related challenges—hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, tornadoes, snowstorms, and more—all of which can disrupt power distribution and infrastructure. The intensification of extreme weather events has underscored the critical importance of collaboration and preparedness within the utility arboriculture industry. Safety remains paramount in all aspects of disaster response, from initial planning to execution, as weather patterns evolve and new challenges arise.

In 2022, the U.S. faced a staggering array of climate-related disasters, inflicting \$165 billion in damages, marking the third most costly year on record. Climate change-fueled events, including longer wildfire seasons and intensified hurricanes, are becoming more frequent and severe, amplifying

## Building Resilience in Utilities

By Brandon Hughson

risks to communities. Despite some progress in infrastructure resilience and emissions reduction efforts, the challenges posed by escalating disasters continue to outpace responses, highlighting the imperative for immediate and comprehensive action to mitigate climate impacts and transition to a low-carbon economy.

Wildfires, coupled with compliance issues, fines, and other ESG challenges, are compelling utilities to prioritize resilience-building endeavors. Integrated vegetation management stands as a comprehensive approach to vegetation management within utility rights-of-way, incorporating practices like pruning, herbicide application, and mechanical clearing to minimize the risk of power outages triggered by vegetation-related incidents. Biodiversity conservation emerges as another critical facet of resilience-building efforts, recognizing the pivotal role that healthy ecosystems play in providing essential services such as pollination, soil retention, and water filtration.

The transition from overhead powerlines to underground systems, known as ungrounding utility infrastructure, is gaining traction as a pivotal resilience-building measure. This transition diminishes vulnerability to extreme weather events and minimizes the risk of outages. Geospatial technologies, such as geographic information systems (GIS) and remote sensing, play an instrumental role in assessing vegetation risks, planning infrastructure upgrades, and optimizing maintenance activities.

Notwithstanding the benefits of these resilience-building strategies, utilities encounter challenges in their

implementation, ranging from funding constraints to regulatory hurdles and logistical complexities. Collaborative efforts with stakeholders, coupled with investment in innovation and a proactive approach to risk management, are imperative to surmounting these challenges and constructing more resilient systems capable of withstanding the impacts of climate change.

As utilities navigate the intricate terrain of climate change and disaster response, integrated approaches that prioritize vegetation management, biodiversity conservation, infrastructure hardening, and technological innovation are paramount for enhancing resilience. By investing in these strategies and collaborating with stakeholders, utilities can mitigate risks, fortify critical infrastructure, and ensure consistent service delivery amidst evolving environmental threats. As the impacts of climate change continue to unfold, proactive measures and adaptive strategies will be pivotal in constructing a more resilient future for utilities and communities alike.

The utility arboriculture industry must remain vigilant and proactive in its response to shifting weather patterns and escalating climate-related disasters. By working together, staying informed, and leveraging advanced technologies, utility arborists can navigate the challenges of climate change and disaster response, safeguarding communities and ensuring reliable power delivery in the face of adversity. Join us as we prepare for our annual conference and trade show to discuss this and other pertinent trends within our industry at the Trees & Utilities conference in September. 🌳

*Brandon Hughson*

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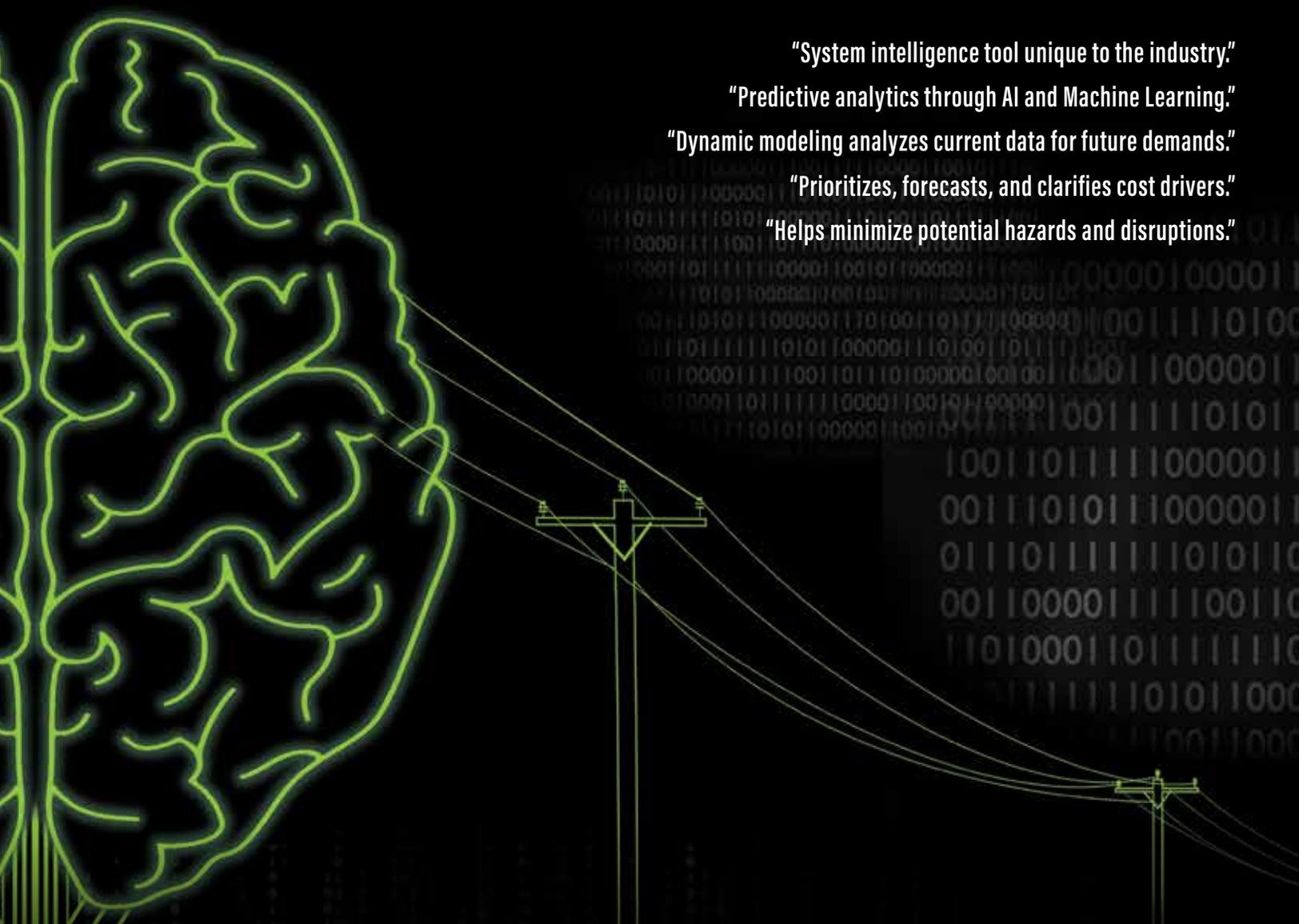
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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR MESSAGE



Dennis Fallon

In college I had a professor who would tell us, “The only constant in the forest is change.” He went on to describe subtle changes around us that may go unnoticed initially. Things like a downed branch that may not have been on the forest floor the day before, or leaves that are here today may be browsed away by wildlife and removed from that microcosm. While some of the impacts of change are larger than others, all the described changes have impacts on the forest.

Our work, worksites, and approaches to work also seem to be under a similar constant of change. In April, I spoke to a group of utility arborists made up of at least six different companies about Radio Frequency Electromagnetic Field (RF-EMF) safety principles. While human-derived RF emissions have been in our worksites for generations, the intensity of these emissions is increasing, as is the quantity of antennae around us. Much of the increase we are seeing in the field lately is in the communication space. Understanding the potential impacts associated with these antennae was not something systematically incorporated into our industry standards in the past. In the upcoming release of the Z133, RF-EMF sources are discussed.

We are also seeing an evolution in work planning by including remote sensing technologies and bringing automation to work management

software. Being able to predict where to allocate labor and then giving labor the opportunity to plan, assign, and monitor workflows from field technology solutions is a game changer. These systems now create a tremendous amount of data that can be used to analyze program efficacy as well as efficiency. With this data comes the need for new roles in the UVM space and new skill sets. Data coming from within UVM programs will only continue to expand.

Our climate is also changing. In reality, it has always been in a state of change. These changes have shaped the current environment, and changes will continue to occur. Different plant conditions and communities are moving across our landscape. These changes are impacting habitats for the inhabitants and users of our corridors, and those impacts are bringing new concerns as well as opportunities to how we approach our work. Opportunities to enhance biological controls used within our programs are increasing the need for more ecologists and habitat managers into our ranks.

As our climate changes, forest policy decision-making of the past is affecting our work as well. One does not have to work hard to find an opinion on the topic of wildfires and utilities. The UVM space has a monumental task of attempting to avoid catastrophic environmental events in forest conditions that are

decades or more in the making. Significant reductions in using fire as a forest management tool and quick-fire suppression responses have allowed fuel conditions to expand to points that are unlike any other time in history. The competition for limited water and nutrient resources can make fertile conditions for pests and pathogens to impact the stability of our forests and forested stands. The UVM space did not singlehandedly create these conditions, and it is unrealistic to think that UVM can singlehandedly reverse what took years of social decision-making across the entire landscape to create. Dr. Robert Vanderhoof of the UAA Board gave prudent advice that “we will need to expand our circle of friends” as we work on changing challenges in UVM.

This edition of the *Utility Arborist Newsline* is focused on climate change and disaster response—two areas of change that directly affect our work. I hope you enjoy the articles our authors have contributed to this edition in an effort to both keep us thinking and offer us insights on how we can continue to innovate our profession and the roles within UVM. Our world continues to change, and with thought leaders like we have within the UAA, we can continue to harness change to bring about continuous improvement to our profession. †

*Dennis Fallon*

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RESEARCH COMMITTEE UPDATE

## Research Prioritization, Web Tool, and the UARF

By Dr. Anand Persad, UAA Research Committee Chair

The UAA Research Committee’s focus on addressing the emerging nuances associated with human health and safety, reliability, biodiversity, and sustainability in climate resilient programs continues in 2024. We are busy continuing to collate research for easier access and consumption. The UAA Board has given initial approval for our research connectivity web tool. We are working on the framing and its advancement with help from several companies in our space. As we build this out, we aim to achieve a connectivity framework to better engage researchers and connect emergent research with industry-related deliverables.

We are also continuing to bolster our research prioritization efforts as we index subject matter information from conferences as well as plan for an upcoming survey this year to ensure our product is current. The research survey is expected to be emailed in July or August—we would appreciate your help and insight.

Our technology transfer sub-committee is working on producing 15 condensed articles for this year, and feedback from past *Newsline* features from these efforts are always welcome. Our second sub-committee is engaging with the Utilities Arborist Research Fund (UARF) in the hope of continuing to encourage new research faces to the industry. As we in the industry build cross-disciplinary teams, we expect to see more practitioner-based researchers who reflect relevant and timely questions in their research proposals. Also, we are continuing to work with industry and researchers to increase submissions to the UARF.

Our wider goals as we plan out 2024 are to continue to engage in the forefront of a changing industry. Several catalysts drive our business and industry, including electrification, environmental concerns, human and safety, economics, and more. And these are opportunities for us on the UAA Research Committee to assist our membership and partners to successfully embrace and help to contribute to solutions-based deliverables. 🌱



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# Navigating Change

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## WOMEN IN VM



Liz Westberg

## Liz Westberg Branching Outward, Growing Inward: Reflections of a Utility Arborist

By Liz Westberg, Manager of Quality Assurance and Training, Growth Solutions

I'm sure these people exist, but I'm not sure I've ever met someone who got into utility arboriculture intentionally. Most folks I've met fell into it by accident and were captivated by some combination of the uniqueness or consistency of the work. While that's definitely true for me, what tempted me away from my comfortable role in residential tree care and into the utility sphere was the promise of travel and adventure—and I certainly got that. Across 22 states, I've befriended rottweilers, been trapped by rising flood waters, been chased off properties by emus, rescued coworkers from hornets nests, and had powerlines come down around my vehicle. And that doesn't include interactions with "interesting" people.

For most of the last six years, I've been gaining skills and responsibilities in the world of tree growth regulators. So much so that I now do a lot of speaking on the subject at conferences and other events. One of the best parts about working in partnership with utilities across the country is to see how contrasting the concerns and management practices really are between the different regions.

I've had a several invaluable mentors over the years: past managers, professors at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, and even other more experienced vegetation managers in the industry who simply took the time to answer my questions. Each of these folks has had an impact on me, and they have all sincerely cared about my growth and development. The benefits of having a reliable mentor are invaluable.

There's another specific type of work relationship that has been

instrumental in my success. I haven't found a good label for it yet...I was first thinking "cheerleader," but it goes beyond simply rooting for someone else. Instead, I'm going with the idea of a linemate in hockey. You train together. You push

each other. Sometimes you get the assist and they get the goal, but you're both working towards winning the game together.

I have a coworker who started at Growth Solutions around the same time as I did. We started in the same role and were promoted to entry-level leadership at the same time. Since then, we've taken turns advancing, earning credentials, and getting involved in the broader industry. We are very competitive. For example, I signed up to take the ISA Certified Arborist Utility Specialist exam the same day as him, with only a few weeks to prepare—simply because I couldn't let him beat me to it. (I passed a few hours before him, but he scored one point better...we'll call it a wash.) But at the heart of this competition, there is a genuine desire for each other's success.

Having this sort of friendly and constructive competitive relationship is beneficial, yet very underappreciated. I think too often we're in competition with a coworker to the point of conflict, or our work friends aren't truly happy for each other's success without some tinge of jealousy or resentment. So much so that there are dozens of words across every language that describe the concept (my favorite is *schadenfreude*). Or almost worse, our work friends are "besties" to whom we complain or gossip without achieving any kind of proactive result.

I am so grateful for my "linemate" and others like him I have seen. But it has been even more gratifying to see that in our industry, and the greater labor force as a whole, there has been a big movement amongst women supporting each other—celebrating and lifting our successes rather than being jealous.

I think the best way to make more of these constructive partnerships happen is if each one of us makes a conscious effort to reach out and take others with us. To actively search for a person—whether it's a coworker or a colleague in the industry—who will push us, keep us accountable for our own improvement, and for whom we are willing to do the same. 🌱

## Learning Plant ID Just Got More Fun!

**G**row With Trees has been providing training to utility field crews for the past seven years. In this time, we have come to see plant identification skills as both the greatest learning need and the key to successful adoption of integrated vegetation management. Every day, field crews encounter a complex landscape of plant species, each with its own set of risks, ecological significance, and management requirements. Without a solid foundation in plant identification, field crews are forced to navigate in the dark.

But how can you make learning plant identification fun? The new Let Grow Plant ID Card Game is turning plant identification into a competitive sport. This is not your average flashcard set. It's a card game inspired by UNO™, but with a botanical twist. Developed with VM professionals in mind, this game is designed to enhance workers' knowledge of diverse plant species, from the compatible and beneficial to the toxic, invasive, and aggressive.

Don't be fooled by the colorful cards and pretty pictures—this is serious play! Each card contains a whole plant profile: how it looks, how it grows, and the trouble it can cause or the good it does. To win, you must know your plants and think strategically, just like out on the job. Card decks are utility specific and customized to each

utility's ecological footprint to ensure your crews are learning the plants they encounter every day.

Building play into learning and work fosters teamwork and collaboration, which can also improve performance in real-world vegetation management scenarios.

The Let Grow game is a versatile training tool, making it suitable for a wide range of environments. Training session? Lunchtime smackdown? Stuck in the truck? Let Grow adapts to fit your crew's rhythm, sneaking in skill building whenever they've got the time. Plus, the fun doesn't stop at work—crews can bring Let Grow home and get the whole family into the plant ID action!

As we look to the future of vegetation management, it's clear that innovation will be the key to success. Grow With Trees is proud to be at the forefront of training innovation, empowering vegetation management crews with the knowledge and skills they need to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. Our customers see Let Grow not just as a game but an investment in their crew's success on the right-of-way, solar field, and beyond. Sharper plant identification means swifter decision-making, fewer missteps, and a healthier ecosystem.

Play online at the Grow With Trees website today! Or order a custom card deck for your utility vegetation management team by contacting [support@growwithtrees.com](mailto:support@growwithtrees.com).



SAFETY TOOLS



Adrienne Jones

## Fostering a Culture of Safety: Building from Within

By Adrienne Jones, Safety Manager, ACRT, and 2023 UAA Will Nutter Silver Shield Award Recipient

In the realm of workplace safety, attitudes matter just as much as procedures and protocols. An effective safety program isn't merely a set of rules enforced from above; it's a mindset deeply ingrained in every level of an organization. From the executive suite to the front lines, safety must be more than a priority—it must be a core value.

Safety managers used to be seen only as faultfinders, waiting in the wings to catch people doing something wrong. Today, we recognize that safety is not about assigning blame but about leaning into learning and preserving the well-being of our most valuable asset: our employees. It takes people who lead by example, fostering an environment where curiosity, accountability, and transparency take precedence.

Finding our *why* resides at the heart of this belief system. Why do we prioritize safety even when it inconveniences us? The answer lies in recognizing that safety is not meant to be convenient; it's imperative to preserving our *why*. Every safe choice we make is a testament to our own personal *why* and a commitment to the people who drive our organizations forward.

Transparency and clarity serve as cornerstones of a culture of safety. We owe it to ourselves and our colleagues to communicate clearly about training, rules, procedures, and policies, holding each other accountable along the way. Clear, accessible guidelines ensure that everyone, regardless of tenure or expertise, can navigate the complexities of real work with confidence in their personal safety.

In this cultural shift, employee engagement is essential. By inviting diverse perspectives to the table, we enrich our understanding of safety and empower individuals to contribute meaningfully. Every voice matters—especially those that challenge the status quo. It's the collective wisdom of our teams that drives us toward safer practices.

Recognizing the uniqueness of each individual, we acknowledge that safety is not one-size-fits-all. Tailoring training and messages to resonate with diverse audiences ensures that no one is left behind. Inclusivity isn't just a

buzzword, but a principle that supports our commitment to safeguarding every member of our workforce.

Accountability to oneself and each other forms the backbone of our safety culture. Utilizing indicators such as near-miss reports and safety audits, we identify trends and address hazards before they escalate. Rather than assigning blame to individuals, we scrutinize the systemic factors at play, asking not *who*, but *how* and *why*.

This shift in perspective—from blame to understanding—requires thoroughness, curiosity, and self-examination. We must resist the temptation to take shortcuts, opting instead

to dive into the details of our systems, invite more perspectives to the conversation, build our relationships, allow for innovation, and celebrate our successes. We discover chances to get better and strengthen our defenses for what lies ahead.

Ultimately, fostering a culture of safety is a journey, not a destination. It requires continual reflection, adaptation, and a collective commitment to progress. As we strive to build safer workplaces, let us remember that our greatest strength lies not in our procedures or protocols but in our shared dedication to the well-being of one another. People care about what they

help to create. Together, with a shared sense of purpose, our industry can move forward with the notion that building a culture of safety is a journey we all contribute to, paving the way for a safer, more resilient future.

### About the Author

**Adrienne Jones** is a safety manager at ACRT. She has three years of industry experience and is a Tree Care Industry Association (TCIA) Certified Treecare Safety Professional (CTSP) and a National Safety Council-certified Defensive Driving Course Instructor. Jones also serves as a First Aid/CPR/AED instructor and is a member of the Utility Arborist Association Safety Committee. She was the 2023 recipient of the UAA Will Nutter Silver Shield Award. Jones holds a bachelor's degree from DePaul University, located in Chicago, Illinois. 🌳

“As we strive to build safer workplaces, let us remember that our greatest strength lies not in our procedures or protocols but in our shared dedication to the well-being of one another.”

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# September 18

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# Weathering the Storm: A Decade of Experience in Florida's Vegetation Management

By Lenora Chase, Assistant Operations Manager, ACRT

**W**hile working in Florida's tree industry since the late nineties, I've become intimately familiar with hurricanes and the challenges they bring. Over the years, I've experienced several scenarios, from being out in the field to coordinating crews during the chaos of storm damage. Working through a storm while living through one is a unique experience, and not limited to vegetation management.

Hurricanes are a part of life in Florida, and personal encounters can hit close to home. Despite having professional expertise, navigating the aftermath of a hurricane at home often brings its own set of challenges. Over the past 26 years, I've only experienced one hurricane that affected me personally. With damage to my house and two weeks without power, I found myself showering at the office and prioritizing work over personal affairs.

The key, I've learned, is to compartmentalize—focusing on the tasks at hand until the storm passes and then addressing personal matters in what seems like a delicate balancing act. Sometimes you have to shut off the home stuff to focus on the task at hand, which is easier than you'd think due to the amount of work needed.

Preparation is paramount in vegetation management before a storm hits. Leading up to a weather event, my team and I meticulously inspect critical infrastructure and ensure power to essential facilities, like police stations and schools. Once the storm approaches, preparations shift to securing personal homes before hunkering down for the duration.

Post-storm, the real work begins. Coordinating crews and resources amidst the chaos becomes the top priority. Safety is always at the forefront of our minds, staying organized is crucial for success, and being adaptable plays a vital role in restoration efforts.



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## Safety First

Ensuring safety is our top priority in VM, especially when dealing with the aftermath of a storm. It's essential to know what to watch out for, because encountering downed powerlines is almost guaranteed. Regardless of the situation, treating these lines as live and dangerous is a must. Our goal is to ensure that every member of our team gets home safely at the end of the day.

## Organization Second

Staying organized is key to handling the many moving parts that follow a storm. Things can get overwhelming as tasks pile up and information comes from every direction. That's why it's important to emphasize keeping everything well-documented and organized. By maintaining detailed records of work orders, safety procedures, and communication with utility companies and contractors, we ensure that nothing slips through the cracks.



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### Adaptability Is Key

Being adaptable is crucial when facing the unpredictability of the restoration process. As someone who has been in the thick of it, I've learned firsthand the importance of flexibility in these situations. You are constantly switching gears, sometimes multiple times in a single day. It's natural to feel overwhelmed, but it's essential to speak up and ask for help when needed. Keeping a level head and staying focused is important, especially when coordinating with different utility companies and contractors who may not be familiar with our processes.

The extended hours when working a storm affect everyone differently. Some people fight through the fatigue, while others take short breaks in their truck or at home for a couple of hours. Regardless of everyone's coping methods, every worker is required to take a mandatory eight-hour break each day. What's important is that teams prioritize physical and mental health and support each other when working together towards a common goal.

In my role as assistant operations manager, my responsibilities extend beyond fieldwork. I support my team, ensuring they have everything they need to stay on track. Despite the hurdles we face, I find pride in the bond I share with my team and the understanding that our efforts have a meaningful impact. Whether we're restoring power and bringing stability back to communities or simply carrying out our routine VM duties, knowing that we're making a difference fuels our sense of purpose and drives us forward.

As Florida and the rest of the country continue to face the threat of severe weather events, it's important to meet each challenge head-on to ensure that our local communities are supported in their times of need.



Lenora Chase

### About the Author

**Lenora Chase** is an assistant operations manager at ACRT and has 26 years of industry experience. She is an International Society of Arboriculture Certified Arborist and serves on the ACRT Ready Force® team. 🌳

## Silver LEVEL SPONSOR SPOTLIGHT



### Going the Extra Mile for Safety: Ulysses Ramos

**S**afety is ingrained in ACRT Pacific's DNA—at all levels. Our infrastructure of safety training, support, and oversight across our family of companies gives our employees a true focus on what it takes to be proactive.



Ulysses Ramos

Ulysses Ramos, a lead utility pre-inspector at ACRT Pacific, is an embodiment of our organization's culture of safety and has been recognized with a Going the Extra Mile (G.E.M.) Award for his actions.

ACRT Pacific Operations Manager Robert O'Brien nominated Ramos for the award, who shared that when Ramos stopped to use the restroom at a skatepark in Crestline, California, he encountered a syringe resting on the sink. The needle was in plain sight and easily accessible, especially to the children surrounding the area.

In an effort to secure the area so that no children would encounter the syringe, Ramos blocked the door with a safety cone to prevent anyone from entering and injuring themselves. He notified his supervisor and the local sheriff's department and kept a close watch on the restroom until a sheriff's deputy arrived. The syringe was safely removed from the sink, and the restroom was once again made safe for public use.

Ramos' act of selflessness may have prevented injury to the public at the skate park. ACRT Pacific is proud to have dedicated and safety-focused employees like Ramos.

Learn more about ACRT Pacific and our safety philosophy at [pacific.acrt.com](http://pacific.acrt.com). 🌳



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It's not only important to educate contractors but homeowners as well, and to encourage them to call 811 before they dig. It doesn't matter if they're only planting flowers, homeowners are supposed to call 811. If you're moving earth, you should submit a ticket.



# Building a Safer Network: 56% Reduction in Gas Damages Caused by Fiber Install in New York

By Jason Marsh, Damage Prevention Supervisor, NYSEG and RG&E

New York State Electric & Gas Corporation (NYSEG) and Rochester Gas and Electric Corporation (RG&E) are subsidiaries of Avangrid, a network that owns and operates eight electric and natural gas utilities, serving more than 3.3 million customers in New York and New England. NYSEG and RG&E operate approximately 43,900 miles of electric distribution lines and 5,600 miles of transmission lines. The two also operate more than 18,900 miles of natural gas distribution pipelines and 125 miles of gas transmission pipelines. Combined, NYSEG and RG&E serve 1,292,900 electricity customers and 589,000 natural gas customers, which is about 40% of Upstate New York.

The damage prevention programs are essential to ensuring the safety of their customers, employees, and surrounding neighbors. To do this, the companies use the latest technology to monitor their natural gas delivery system around the clock, conduct aerial and ground inspections, carry out extensive maintenance, participate in UDig NY,

and more.

The companies work with industry groups to continually enhance natural gas pipeline safety and training methods. At the state level, NYSEG and RG&E work with regulators on programs designed to ensure the safe operation of the natural gas distribution system for customers and residents. As new technologies are developed in natural gas pipeline design, construction, inspections, and operations, they continue to invest in pipeline integrity programs that will allow for the safe and reliable delivery of natural gas.

The damage prevention program is governed by the State of New York Department of Public Service's 16 NYCRR Part 753, the protection of underground facilities. NYSEG and RG&E don't enforce the Code Rule, but they educate on the Code Rule as the law that operators use when performing excavations. There's a big education component when it comes to damage prevention and digging. I'll leave the various damage excuses to your imagination. It used to be cheaper

and easier to rip the lines out and move forward to get the job done, rather than take extra time to go around the lines. Now, safety is the biggest concern with shortcutting.

It's not only important to educate contractors but homeowners as well, and to encourage them to call 811 before they dig. It doesn't matter if they're only planting flowers, homeowners are supposed to call 811. If you're moving earth, you should submit a ticket.

## Driving Preventative Measures

Before stepping into my current role, I served as a driver and locator for three years. When I inherited this program, it was a balancing act of an influx of dig tickets and damages, high turnover rates, disengaged contractors, and the absence of a team mindset. In March 2023, we partnered with Bermex, based upon the metering services company's long-standing history and value, and began to develop the now flourishing NYSEG and RG&E damage prevention divisions. Kenneth Warner, a senior operations manager, and David Mills, an operations manager at Bermex, were



The Common Ground Alliance issued a “50 in 5” challenge to reduce damages to critical underground utilities by 50 percent in five years.

integral in getting the program up and running. They were already familiar with the industry and shared my vision of the program.

Public safety is always priority number one, and the four supervisors on this project have helped drive those efforts. We always want to make a site safe first and foremost, and the Bermex damage prevention drivers are helping NYSEG and RG&E ensure that sense of safety by conducting thorough investigations and educating contractors and homeowners. The teamwork is leading to a notable decrease in certain damages.

The Common Ground Alliance, an organization dedicated to preventing damage to underground utility infrastructure and protecting those who live and work near important assets, issued a “50 in 5” challenge to reduce damages to critical underground utilities by 50% in five years. The “50 in 5” call to action encourages the damage prevention industry to concentrate on the following three areas that contribute to more than 76%

of all damages:

1. Effective and consistent use of 811
2. Key excavator practices
3. Accurate, timely utility locating

These were lofty goals, considering that fiber installs are booming across the country. Going into 2023, right from the get-go, with the help of UDig NY, we were able to coordinate with one of the larger fiber companies in northwestern New York that was doing most of the installs. We coordinated with Bermex, USIC, the fiber company, contractors, and sub-contractors to do walk-throughs on-site before and during the installation of all the fibers. As of now, we’re roughly at a 56% reduction of gas hits due to fiber installs thanks to these preventative measures.

I couldn’t be happier with our program and trending results. It’s nice that everybody shows the same vision and goals. I’m able to send an email out and the team knows the expectation, what I’m looking for, and what I see as the vision for the program. I can just say, “This is what we need to do...” and we now collectively come together and do it. By

setting clear expectations, maintaining transparency, and keeping clear lines of communication, we’ve built a great program.

**About the Author**

Jason Marsh is a Damage Prevention Supervisor at NYSEG and RG&E. He is a United States Air Force veteran and a New York State Licensed Water Distribution Operator. Marsh holds a bachelor’s degree in business administration from American InterContinental University. 📧



Jason Marsh

## OUTREACH COMMITTEE UPDATE

## Strategies for a Sustainable Future: How the U.S. Forest Service Bridges the Gap Between Preparedness and Resilience

The Outreach Committee is publishing a series of interviews with individuals from organizations in affiliated industries. The first interview examines how the U.S. Forest Service manages national forests for long-term resilience to natural disasters and climate change.

We spoke with Mark Hunting, Energy Coordinator for the U.S. Forest Service in their Northern Region. The Northern Region manages 25 million acres of public lands across Idaho, Montana, Washington, North Dakota, and South Dakota. Hunting works in the Land Special Uses department, whose primary area of focus is the U.S. Forest Service's Resilient Energy Corridor Strategy (RECS).

RECS is a risk reduction strategy around critical energy infrastructure, specifically overhead powerlines. The department's objective is to improve energy reliability and reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire ignitions caused by powerlines. Hunting's hope is to build a broadscale culture of partnership between industry and agency to accomplish this objective.

### Q1: In your opinion, what are the most important factors to consider when developing a disaster preparedness plan for a community or organization?

**Hunting:** Resilience and adaptability to change. We cannot always prevent the disaster, but the better prepared we are when it does happen, the quicker we can recover. One of the best ways to do this is through risk mitigation.

### Q2: How do you think climate change is affecting the frequency and severity of natural disasters, and what can be done to mitigate these effects?

**Hunting:** In my 27 years of fire management, I have seen an increase in the severity and duration of both wildfires and the wildfire season. The best practice that a utility can engage in is to employ grid-hardening tactics. Undergrounding powerlines is best but may not always be practical. For overhead powerlines where vegetation is a concern, working with landowners—whether they be federal, state, municipal, or private—utilizing proven industry standards, such as the wire/border zone concept and integrated vegetation management, can reduce risk.

### Q3: Is there anything that you wish more people knew about your organization or the problems you are trying to solve?

**Hunting:** One of the greatest challenges I face is the lack of understanding about the complexities involved

in energy corridor management. Most folks take for granted that the power will always be on, and only realize how important it is to their daily lives when they don't have it. Overhead electric transmission and distribution lines are arguably the most at-risk critical infrastructure on any lands, and even the slightest change in environmental conditions that impact forest health can have a dramatic impact.

### Q4: Do you have a strategic plan? What key things are you trying to accomplish in that plan?

**Hunting:** In January 2022, the U.S. Forest Service launched a robust 10-year strategy to address the wildfire crisis in the places where it poses the most immediate threats to communities. Addressing critical infrastructure, including powerlines, is a major component of the plan. In the Northern Region, we are calling the powerline component the Resilient Energy Corridor Strategy, designed to reduce the risk to and from overhead powerlines with the following objectives:

1. Resilient landscapes
2. Fire-adapted communities
3. Safe and effective wildfire response

### Q5: Where can we learn more about your organization and its efforts?

**Hunting:** For the U.S. Forest Service, our website ([www.fs.fed.us](http://www.fs.fed.us)) is a great way to learn more about the agency and all the work we do. 🌲



## Climate Change and Disaster Response Take Center Stage on *Trees & Lines*

"Many of us are motivated to build a network of wildfire detection cameras that will really blanket the wild areas of the state, so we can detect those fires early before they build up momentum," explained Jordan Ambrogi, the wildfire mitigation program manager at CORE Electric Cooperative, when he joined the *Trees & Lines* podcast. "When two cameras can see the same smoke, they can triangulate and get a very precise location to first responders."

As the UVM industry seeks to respond to climate change and adapt to the intensification of storms and wildfires, we're bringing the conversation to you. Our fascinating chat with Jordan Ambrogi—which covered AI-powered wildfire detection cameras, fuels management, and more—is just one of many in-depth *Trees & Lines* discussions on climate change and disaster response.

Hosts Tej Singh (Iapetus Infrastructure Services COO) and Phil Charlton (UVM veteran) are exploring these pressing issues with a wide range of industry thought leaders, including former UAA presidents Sara Sankowich and Eric Brown. We're

talking to experts in the international community as well, like Steve Martin of Powerlink Queensland.

"With increasing climate change and the increasing likelihood and intensity of fires occurring...we're taking part in international forums to try and learn from what others are doing," Martin revealed.

From wildfires to hurricanes to snowstorms, we're examining how differing natural disasters impact emergency response teams, utilities, and their customers. "It's not just what are we going to get hit for with weather, but what's the timing and impact to customers," said National Grid Vice President of Safety, Health, Assurance Chris Paglia, during an insightful chat about Winter Storm Elliott.

If you're ready to join the conversation on climate change and disaster response, head over to [treesandlines.com](http://treesandlines.com) to start listening today! 🎧



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# Women Are Key Drivers of Innovation: A Road Map for a More Diverse Workforce

By Sara Dreiser, Senior Program Manager, ComEd Vegetation Management

**A**s we race towards a future of green energy, we're facing a shrinking workforce, increasing demands for production, and the mounting effects of climate change. It's clear that we can't maintain the status quo and expect to be successful. Innovation has already become a key performance indicator at many utilities and is being built into many corporate business models. What can we do as an industry to provide new solutions? How do we build a stronger future? Where can we effectively drive industry innovation? The solution is simple.

Women have always been a driving force for innovation in our industry. In 1812, Tabitha Babbitt invented the circular saw. Babbitt was a weaver, not a woodworker. When faced with a challenge, she brought the technology of her spinning wheel to a different field. By attaching a blade to her wheel, she created a more efficient method of cutting wood.

True innovation occurs when you see a problem from a different perspective. The best way to bring new solutions to our industry is by including people with diverse perspectives, backgrounds, and experiences. Increasing the number of women in our industry is critical to ensuring our future success.

## The Research

Studies conducted in controlled research settings and in the corporate world have reinforced this idea for decades. In 2004, The University of Michigan published a study showing that diverse groups outperform homogenous ones in problem-solving. Two groups were created: one had only the highest-performing students, while the other students had diverse features and previous performance. The diverse groups outperformed the high-performing groups. In fact, they found



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

that in the groups of high-performing students, "their relatively greater ability is more than offset by their lack of problem-solving diversity."

Another study conducted in 2010 by MIT, Carnegie Mellon University, and Union College showed an even simpler result: teams that included women were more successful at solving puzzles, brainstorming, and beating computer games.

In the corporate world, successful innovation is measured in financial outcomes. The 2015 McKinsey & Company report "Diversity Matters" looked at 366 public companies and found that the top quartile of diverse companies (measured by race and gender) outperformed the bottom quartile by 25%. In an increasingly volatile economic climate, this kind of finding is crucial for success. If we continue to hire team members with the same skill sets and backgrounds, we miss out on the ability to create teams of diverse thinkers. We handicap our abilities to problem-solve and innovate.

But it goes beyond hiring diverse employees. In 2017, Boston Consulting Group indicated that the composition of leadership teams matters. Companies with diverse employees but lacked diverse leadership did not see the same benefits as companies that also had diverse leadership and board members.

Research has consistently shown that recruiting, hiring, retaining, and promoting women has the direct ability to increase our industry's bottom line, yet women are still underrepresented in the forestry and utility sectors.

## The Problem and Our Industry

According to the 2023 U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics report, women make up 57% of the U.S. labor force, yet only make up 38% of the forestry workforce and 20% of the utility workforce. While we have seen an increase in the percentage of women in the forestry workforce (up from 25% in 2017), utility employment has remained stagnant during the same time frame.

We know diversity drives results. At an industry level, we need to continue to highlight women in leadership and create spaces that are accessible and welcoming to all. Here are a few simple ways we can implement change:

- Ensure women are represented as main event speakers at industry conferences.
- Continue women in forestry events at conferences and trade shows.



2023 Trees & Utilities Women in Vegetation Management workshop participants



2023 Trees & Utilities presenter Cindy Joseph, founder and CEO of The Cee Suite, LLC



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- Shift away from the traditionally male-dominated networking events (e.g., Asplundh’s shift from a golf outing to a more inclusive Topgolf-style networking event at Trees & Utilities.)
- Highlight women in industry publications (e.g., the *Women in VM* column in the *Newsline*).

In our daily operations, we can create policies that support families and workers with diverse needs. This might look like:

- Supporting flexible work policies
- Establishing a mentorship program that connects women who are new to the industry with women in senior positions
- Offering paid parental and caregiver leave

In our recruiting and training we need to do more to attract female candidates and retain them once they are hired. At a minimum, we need to:

- Ensure women’s clothing sizes are included in uniform and safety offerings
- Include pictures of women in recruiting materials
- Provide on-the-job training to bridge any gaps in experience
- Review job ads and recruiting efforts to



eliminate gender-biased language or practices

Continuing to invest in programs that bring women and other diverse thinkers into our industry is not only the *right* thing to do, but it’s one of the most effective ways for our industry to create lasting change. By planting these seeds of innovation, we have the capacity to grow into a truly sustainable future.

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# TREES & UTILITIES

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## The Power of Preparedness: Gregory Sanchez

**A**t ACRT, nothing is more important than sending people home safely at the end of each day. When people like Gregory Sanchez, a consulting utility forester 4 at ACRT, embody safe practices, it can save lives.

While attending a distribution meeting and appreciation lunch, Sanchez noticed one of his teammates giving the universal choking symbol. When Sanchez asked if his teammate was choking, they gave him a thumbs up, and he immediately sprang into action. Sanchez performed the Heimlich maneuver and quickly dislodged the obstruction from his coworker's airway, allowing them to breathe again.

The teammate whom Sanchez rescued shared that he was blessed and thankful for Sanchez and his quick, heroic actions that saved his life that day.

ACRT Operations Manager Eric Morales awarded Sanchez with a Going the Extra Mile (G.E.M.) Award for his life-saving

actions. He noted, "I am incredibly proud of Greg and believe this is the perfect example of what a G.E.M. Award is intended for."

"It really goes to show this man did not hesitate, sprang into action, and saved his teammate's life. Sanchez is an excellent example of why safety is a core value at ACRT," said ACRT Safety Manager Adrienne Jones.

Sanchez's courageous and decisive actions embody ACRT's culture of safety. His quick thinking not only saved a life but also highlighted the importance of being ready and watching out for each other.

Learn more about ACRT and our safety philosophy at [acrt.com](http://acrt.com). ↗



Gregory Sanchez

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# 2022 PinE Award Recipients

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

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

We want to take this time to congratulate and thank our 2022 PinE Award Recipients.

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

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# SALUTING BRANCHES: A Decade of Dedication

By Renée Bissett, President, Saluting Branches

As someone who has spent years in the marketing and communications realm, I've come to appreciate the power of storytelling and the importance of championing causes that resonate deeply with individuals across the nation—such as honoring our veterans. Our industry is characterized by a multitude of remarkable nonprofit organizations, each driven by passionate individuals who selflessly roll up their sleeves and set aside their company hats to work in unison for a common cause. In other industries, this is not the norm.

Throughout my career, I've had the privilege of being involved with several nonprofit organizations in our industry, witnessing their significant impact firsthand. The Utility Arborist Association and Saluting Branches are two of my favorites. Partners like the UAA help provide a platform to share Saluting Branches' mission with others.

Saluting Branches' mission—honoring American service men and women by organizing volunteer tree and landscape care for property dedicated to our veterans—is not just commendable, it's absolutely critical. Those who have courageously served our nation often find themselves overlooked, as are the properties dedicated to them. Saluting Branches exemplifies this spirit by providing an outlet for individuals from all walks of life to come together and make a tangible difference in the legacy of our veterans.

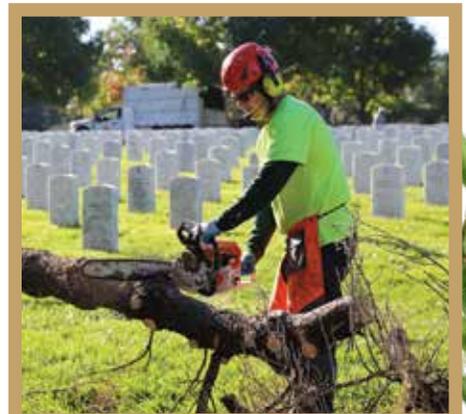
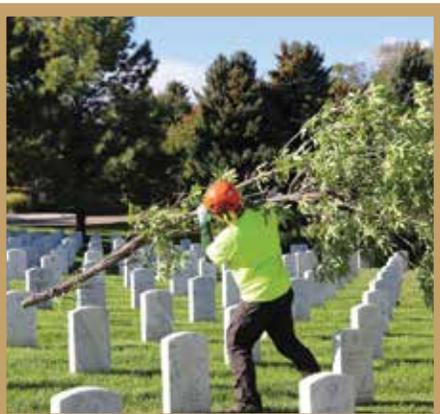
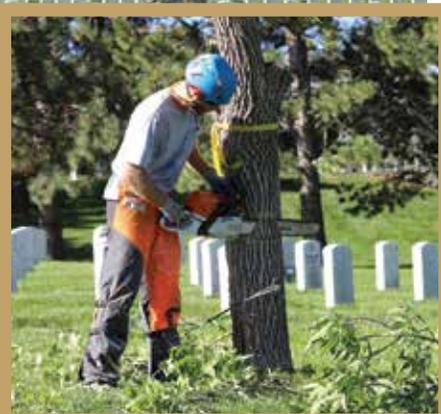
The original team that came up with Saluting Branches includes a few

members whose names you might recognize: UAA Program and Operations Manager Diona Neeser and UAA President Brandon Hughson. They, along with others from Rainbow Treecare, began its noble endeavor in 2015 as a civic project.

As the team was organizing, they reached out to the U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), who recommended starting with only five locations, concerned that most large volunteer projects struggle to get people involved, that not all the agronomists would welcome it, and that the U.S. National Cemetery System is too big for an initiative like this one. Despite this initial skepticism from the VA, the original organizers persisted. They had an internal goal of 25 sites. However, the end result rallied enough volunteers and buy-in to support 27 sites in the inaugural year.

Fast forward to today, as we prepare for our monumental tenth event, we anticipate more than 4,500 volunteers across 100 locations spanning all 50 states, Puerto Rico, and Mexico. The VA now prioritizes Saluting Branches as one of the top five events it hosts annually. Saluting Branches' mission has evolved over the years and now includes not only national cemeteries but also veterans' homes, veterans' monuments and memorials, veterans' parks, and veterans' hospital and healthcare facilities.

The yearlong planning and the Day of Service bring people together, both those with arboriculture experience and folks like me who are not arborists by trade.



ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF SALUTING BRANCHES



There are opportunities for everyone to lend a hand and make a meaningful contribution. Minimally we need to raise \$35 per volunteer to help support \$1,000 of impact. Our fundraising supports our website, database, marketing, and the coveted free commemorative T-shirt. We also have an amazing part-time employee, Babette Hurt, who helps keep the wheels in motion. If you have been a site leader, you likely know the effect she has on our organization. Without raising enough funds, our mission is at stake.

This expected record-breaking year made us recognize the need for greater support and resources to sustain our expanding footprint. We've taken steps to strengthen our infrastructure, but we need additional funding to support our next ten years and beyond. Our dedicated committees work year-round on securing fundraising and sponsorships, expanding industry and veteran outreach, planning the annual Day of Service through enrollment and logistics, building our new tree planting initiatives, and safeguarding communications efforts. We have opportunities for anyone with an interest in helping us. No skills or experience needed.

Of all our volunteers, our site leaders deserve special recognition for their invaluable contributions. They play a crucial role in ensuring the success of our volunteer events. They provide guidance, coordination, and leadership on the ground, ensuring that all tasks are completed safely and efficiently. Their dedication and expertise help to organize and oversee the tree and landscape care activities at each location, ultimately contributing to the overall impact of our mission. Without their leadership and commitment, our volunteer events would not be possible.

We are immensely grateful for

the generosity and support of all our contributors, whose collective efforts enable us to make a meaningful difference in the lives of our veterans and their families. We deeply appreciate every contribution, no matter the size. From individual donors who give what they can to support our cause to large corporations that provide significant financial backing, every contribution plays a vital role in advancing our mission.

As we march forward, let us unite together, donors and volunteers alike, to ensure that Saluting Branches continues to thrive and honor our veterans for generations to come. In my new role as president, my personal goal is to expand the teams of people that help organize yearlong, while increasing the funding to support our cause. We're looking for those amazing people and companies that I know make up our incredible industry to help us build our infrastructure and financial stability.

Please consider how you can contribute to Saluting Branches. If you're not sure, reach out to me ([rbissett@salutingbranches.org](mailto:rbissett@salutingbranches.org)) and we can discuss the possibilities. I'd love to share my passion for our mission with you.



Renée Bissett

**About the Author**

**Renée Bissett** has been in the industry for nearly 20 years and is the Director of Marketing and Communications at ACRT Services. She was the first woman

to receive the UAA Education Award in 2019. Bissett serves as Chair of the UAA Editorial Committee, and is a member of the Trees & Utilities conference planning committee and the UAA Partners in Excellence Committee. She is the President of Saluting Branches. 🌱



**Five Ways to Support Saluting Branches**

- 1. Donate**—Make a direct impact by supporting our mission with a monetary donation. Every dollar counts and helps us continue our vital work in honoring our nation's veterans.
- 2. Sponsor**—Become a sponsor and unlock exclusive benefits based on your level of support. Choose from various sponsorship levels for benefits, such as our social media and newsletter features and your logo placement on our annual T-shirt.
- 3. Donate Merchandise**—Support us by donating merchandise or services from your company. Your contribution can be used as auction items, prizes, or incentives to raise funds for Saluting Branches.
- 4. Volunteer**—Encourage your employees to get involved by volunteering for our planning committees. Their skills and expertise can make a significant impact on the success of our events and initiatives.
- 5. Spread the Word**—Help us raise awareness by promoting Saluting Branches within your organization and to your network. Together, we can inspire others to join our cause and make a difference.



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# Rising Temperatures, Rising Risks:

## The Fight against Heat in Utility Vegetation Management and Beyond

By Amanda D. Raymond, Marketing Specialist, Lewis Services



Amanda D. Raymond

**D**iego Canto Dereza, a divisional supervisor at Lewis Services, knows heat. He works in a division of Lewis that covers Northeast Texas near the border of Arkansas and Louisiana, so he's used to the sweltering summers that are common in those areas. But last year, as soaring temperatures broke records all across the southeast, he received word of an incident that stopped him, the utility he was contracted with, and likely many

others in the utility vegetation management industry who heard about the event, in their tracks.

We all remember the headlines from last summer: "Severe heat wave in southern U.S. remains entrenched as records mount," read *The Washington Post*. "Summer 2023 was hottest on record, scientists say," declared *Reuters*. That summer, Canto Dereza, his general forepersons (GFs), and their crews were working on a job in Shreveport, Louisiana.

"Around 9 or 10 o'clock in the morning, it was already 100-101 degrees," Canto Dereza recalled.

After four consecutive days of record-breaking temperatures, Canto Dereza received concerning news from the utility. An employee under a different company who was also contracted with the utility had almost passed out from the heat. He had stopped sweating altogether, felt fatigued, had dry skin, and experienced a loss of awareness. The employee had come down from the northeast to help with the work and was not used to operating in such heat. Once his team noticed his symptoms, they immediately took him into a cooler environment for him to recover. This event caused everyone to realize that waiting for something to happen was the wrong approach to dealing with sky-high temperatures.

As summers get hotter and hotter, the call for increased protections against heat-related health concerns becomes increasingly urgent. It's what makes heat planning within the UVM industry and in local governments so important. While governments and businesses everywhere talk and debate methods to abate rising temperatures, organizations with workers exposed to extreme heat are taking steps to adapt to this new reality.

### Heat Action Plans

According to the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center, a heat action plan is a road map that outlines how a community will respond to and reduce the impacts of extremely hot weather, which can include health issues (like heat stress and heat stroke), agricultural loss, labor productivity losses, and increased energy demand.

Dr. Ashley Ward, director of the Heat Policy Innovation Hub at Duke University's Nicholas Institute for Energy, Environment & Sustainability, is just one of the many professionals around the world working with communities to develop heat action plans. Her work focuses on the impacts of climate extremes on health and community resilience, according to her biography on the Duke University website.

The incident Canto Dereza remembers from last summer probably wouldn't be too surprising to Dr. Ward.

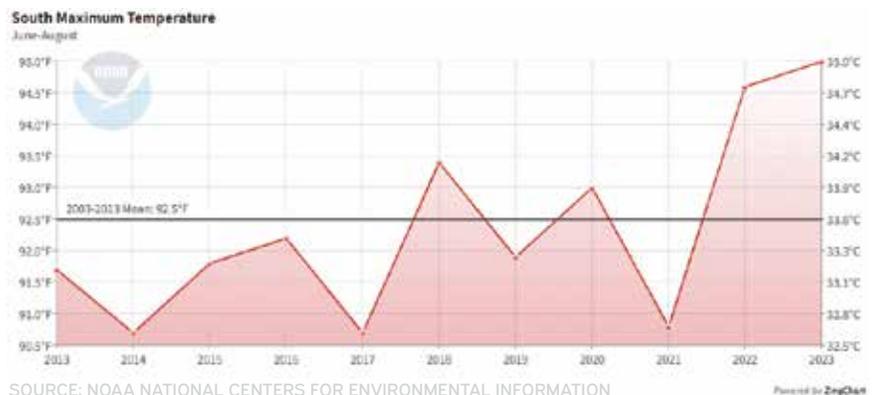
"In the last 30 years, heat has killed more people than any other weather-related event," Ward said.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an average of 658 people die from extreme heat annually, making heat-related deaths "one of the deadliest weather-related outcomes in the United States." In fact, in 2022, the number of heat-related fatalities totaled more than fatalities due to floods, tornados, and hurricanes combined, according to the National Weather Service. Dr. Ward says many fail to recognize heat for the dangerous event it can be partly because of a lack of communication, but also because of general misperceptions.

Currently, extreme weather-related heat events are not defined as disasters in the Stafford Act, a disaster declaration framework that dictates how the federal government responds to disasters. One of the ways this framework classifies disasters is based on the amount of property loss associated with the event, which makes it difficult to incorporate heat-related weather events into the current framework. Additionally, the general public doesn't seem to perceive itself to be at risk when it comes to extreme heat.

"After a hurricane, there's no doubt in anyone's mind what just happened. That's something that captivates the imagination. It's scary to see all the trees down and the power out," Dr. Ward explained. "So, people tend to view that as a riskier situation when, in fact, far more people die from just everyday heat exposure."

Dr. Ward says a significant reason why so many deaths are





## Lewis Services Welcomes New Regional Vice President Aaron Bean

Aaron Bean's impressive career in the electric, natural gas, and fiber-to-the-home utility industries has taken him across the United States and Canada—but Bean is “coming home” to serve as Lewis Services' Regional Vice President in the company's flagship New England Region.



Aaron Bean  
Regional Vice President

As an executive leader with three decades of experience, Bean has successfully managed electrical distribution operations in the northeastern region of the United States and serviced electrical distribution partners in the northeastern U.S. and Ontario, Canada. He has led strategic initiatives that improved productivity and operational efficiencies, while building business resilience and increasing revenue.

Bean joins Lewis as the company continues its yearlong **Leadership in Action** focus—a company-wide initiative, predicated on seven leadership principles, that is being embedded into every facet of the organization and uplifting Leaders at Every Level. Bean is excited to join Lewis during this transformative time and feels special alignment with the Leadership Principle “**What you permit you promote**,” because it speaks to the importance of shared responsibility, safety, and teamwork.

Bean explained, “By setting clear expectations and committing to mutual accountability, we are creating a culture that fosters individual growth, organizational advancement, and exceptional service for our customers.”

That commitment 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' Leadership in Action initiative and the seven leadership principles, visit [www.lewisservices.com/leaders-in-action-page](http://www.lewisservices.com/leaders-in-action-page). 📖



## Heat Illness Signs and Symptoms

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, workers can be at risk of several heat-related illnesses, including:

### Heat Stroke

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Confusion
- Slurred speech
- Unconsciousness
- Seizures
- Heavy sweating or hot, dry skin
- Very high body temperature
- Rapid heart rate

### Heat Exhaustion

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Fatigue
- Irritability
- Thirst
- Nausea or vomiting
- Dizziness or lightheadedness
- Heavy sweating
- Elevated body temperature or fast heart rate

### Heat Cramps

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Muscle spasms or pain, usually in the legs, arms, or torso

### Heat Syncope

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Fainting
- Dizziness

### Heat Rash

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Clusters of red bumps on the skin, often appearing on the neck, upper chest, and skin folds

### Rhabdomyolysis (Muscle Breakdown)

*Signs and Symptoms:*

- Muscle pain
- Dark urine or reduced urine output
- Weakness

Learn more by visiting

OSHA's website:

[www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/illness-first-aid](http://www.osha.gov/heat-exposure/illness-first-aid).

prevented during emergencies like hurricanes is because there are plans in place at every level of government to both prepare for those events and react to the resulting damage. The same cannot be said for heat-related weather events—at least not yet. Dr. Ward and others across the nation and world are making strides to change that.

In North Carolina, Dr. Ward's organization joined forces with the North Carolina Office of Recovery Resiliency, the North Carolina Department of Public Health, and the North Carolina State Climate Office, along with counties across the state, to develop a Heat Action Plan Toolkit, which was released in April of this year with the goal of reducing heat-related health impacts to workers and residents in North Carolina.

“I'm very excited that North Carolina has been such a leader on this,” Dr. Ward said.

In other places around the U.S., communities are recognizing the need to formally address this issue similar to the way North Carolina has. In 2021, the City of Miami, Florida, named Jane Gilbert as the world's first Chief Heat Officer. In this role, Gilbert works with various organizations, including Miami-Dade County, the National Weather Service, and health departments, to “identify ways [to] mitigate the heat through urban development patterns and reduce actual local temperatures and ‘feels like’ temperatures,” according to a profile on Barnard College's website. And the City of Phoenix, which released an updated heat response plan in 2023, created the world's first publicly funded municipal office focused on managing extreme heat in 2021.

“  
 In the last 30 years, heat has killed more people than any other weather-related event.  
 —DR. ASHLEY WARD  
 ”

**Beating the Heat in Utility Vegetation Management**

Heat action plans and general heat policies are just as important in the workplace as they are at the government level, especially for outdoor workers. Alaina Ziegler, director of Safety and Human Performance at Lewis, says heat illness prevention is key

to keeping Lewis’ outdoor workforce safe.

Lewis has a heat stress policy in place and provides training and refreshers to its distributed workforce throughout the summer season. Fortunately, Ziegler says she’s found that Lewis employees take heat very seriously. Part of the reason for that awareness is that UVM contracts can take crews to remote jobsites where emergency services aren’t around the corner, so they need to be prepared to deal with challenges like this in advance.

“One thing I’ve grown to love so much about Lewis is that we say we’re a family. The crews would do anything for each other, and I think that their personal wellness is a high priority for them when they’re out in the field,” said Ziegler.

In Canto Dereza’s division during the summer of 2023, the heat-related incident experienced by the other contractor led to even more communication and reminders to his team. Lewis teams use a variety of tools to beat the heat, including regular drink breaks, cooling towels, sunscreen, protective clothing, and hydration tracking sheets. Canto Dereza also reminds his GFs that a simple visual inspection of their employees goes a long way.

“We encourage GFs to visually inspect everyone and talk to them to make sure everybody is focused in the morning and throughout the day,” Canto Dereza said.

**The Future of Heat Planning**

Dr. Ward says the future of heat planning will depend on the region and area. What works in urban areas may be different from approaches taken in rural areas. There are also socioeconomic factors to consider when developing solutions.

Telling people to get into air conditioning isn’t effective when cost and accessibility are prohibitive. But Dr. Ward is hopeful that more education and outreach will be done to protect workers and the general public from heat-related health risks.

Dr. Ward advised, “The solutions aren’t going to come from looking at just one aspect of the problem. It’s going to have to be a real coordinated and integrated effort.”

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Employees in the field activating heat and hydration plans. Photos courtesy of Lewis Services.



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## SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

# Utility Vegetation Management in a Changing Climate

By John Goodfellow, Principal Consultant, BioCompliance Consulting, Inc.

## Introduction

The overhead T&D system is deployed in a changing environment. Major weather events are becoming more severe and frequent, and changes in the utility forest, such as severe insect infestations, have caused an increase in the likelihood of tree failures. These physical and biological changes impacting the operation and maintenance of electric utility assets are at least partly attributed to a changing climate, as there is more heat energy in earth's atmosphere and the world's oceans. As a result, vegetation managers are increasingly interested in understanding how the changes in the climate will affect their practices in the medium and long term.

## Projections and Observations

The reality is that the impacts of climate change will not be uniformly dispersed across landscapes or power systems. The Fifth National Climate Assessment in 2023 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects the impact of a changing climate at a regional level based on political (state) boundaries as opposed to climate zones. In other words, it is not very granular. The USDA's *Forest Adaptation Resources: Climate Change Tools and Approaches for Land Managers, Second Edition* provides high-level concepts, and the U.S. Forest Service has produced a series of regional forest ecosystem vulnerability assessment and synthesis reports that are also informative.

However, while the confidence in predictions of the likelihood of changes in temperature and precipitation is growing, predictions of severe weather and especially wind are very generalized. Unfortunately, the current state of knowledge, available data, and analytic capabilities do not support a projection of frequency, severity, and location of wind events in a changing climate.

That said, some high-level projections of future conditions are coming into focus:

- Tree failures, and therefore the risk of tree-caused interruptions, often occur in geographical clusters. They are not uniformly distributed across a system. This is a function of target, site, and species, and will continue to be the case.
- Climate change is a "threat multiplier." There are likely to be multiple factors driven by a changing climate with the potential to adversely affect trees in the utility forest.
- A changing climate is being driven by more energy (heat) stored in the atmosphere. That will result in increasingly severe weather, including extreme events. More severe and extreme weather events will increase disturbance in urban and natural forests. Large-scale disturbances, such as floods and windstorms, can lead to catastrophic losses of trees and, of particular concern, tree strikes to overhead lines.
- Four factors influence the severity of damage in severe and extreme weather: (1) meteorological conditions, (2) individual tree and forest stand conditions, (3) site type, and (4) topography. Knowing this can help inform decisions related to risk management.
- A changing climate is likely to create environmental conditions that can produce chronic stress for existing urban and natural forests, and we know this makes trees increasingly vulnerable.
- Temperature and precipitation changes have the potential to increase pest and disease pressure. Pests that are currently limited by cold temperatures may extend into new ecosystems while longer growing seasons may allow a pest to produce multiple generations.
- In most cases, vegetation managers will have time to address climate-driven changes in the makeup and condition of utility forests. Change is more likely to occur sooner in urbanized areas where the lifespan of trees tends to be shorter, and trees are more intensively managed, often on an individual tree basis.

## Risk Mitigation

Good vegetation management practices will continue to be relevant in a changing climate. Practices that minimize adverse impact of vegetation maintenance work on trees in the utility forest will continue to be important. For example, following proper arboricultural techniques when pruning trees reduces wounding and therefore the potential for decay and subsequent structural failure. This preserves the resilience of trees to dynamic wind loading, which is likely to increase. Another example is promoting compatible vegetation in proximity to overhead lines such as with "Right Tree, Right Place" programs and use of integrated vegetation management practices.

Increasing temperatures in urbanized areas may provide an opportunity for utilities to further promote energy-saving tree programs. Increasing temperatures will drive changes in tree conditions and forest composition. The cooling



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benefits of trees will become increasingly important. Energy conservation-driven tree planting can reduce peak loads and drive change in the make-up of the utility forest in urban and residential areas by promoting establishment of species better suited to warmer conditions.

A changing climate will increase stress on the existing population of trees in the utility forest. Stress may be due to a wide range of factors, such as too much or too little precipitation; increased pest and disease pressure; and weather-related factors, such as increased winds or the potential for ice storms and heavy, wet snowstorms. These stressors can increase the rate of decline and death of trees, which increases the risk to overhead T&D systems. An increase in the intensity of Tree Risk Assessment efforts will be an effective response to climate-related risks. Risk assessment criteria informed by interruption histories and shorter condition assessment time frames will help reduce the system's exposure.

It is important to recognize the reality that no amount of line clearance pruning and tree removal—short of removing all trees tall enough to strike—will abate the risk trees pose to overhead lines. It is impractical to attempt to “storm proof” an overhead distribution system. Trees will fail during extreme weather events. Utility vegetation managers will need to determine the level of risk that is tolerable and that cannot be reduced without efforts that are disproportionate to the benefits gained. This isn't a new concept. The “right” balance between cost of risk mitigation and perceived benefit is often implied or established by default. It is uncomfortably difficult to deliberately consider this question, yet it will continue to be relevant into the future.

**Summary**

There is little doubt that conditions are changing, yet uncertainty remains as to how much, where, and what it all means in the context of utility vegetation management. However, some high-level observations can be made to stimulate thought and discussion amongst utility vegetation managers. Forests are dynamic and adaptive systems. The good news is that, over time, forests will adapt naturally, but their time frame may be longer than we would prefer. The question remains: how much can and should vegetation managers be involved in facilitating change in the utility forest as opposed to reacting to it? 🌳



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We look forward to seeing your photos!

# Power and Pipeline Corridors Are Becoming Wildlife Habitat

By Ad Crable, Staff Writer, Bay Journal

**N**o one particularly likes electric transmission lines and gas pipelines marching through communities and fragmenting forests. But some believe these linear strips collectively offer the last best hope for fostering fast-disappearing pollinator insects and grassland birds.

Spurred on by a more environmentally attuned public, as well as stockholders and the promise of saving money, more utilities and pipeline companies are grooming the tens of thousands of miles of rights-of-way in Chesapeake Bay drainage states to benefit wildlife and increase biodiversity.

The conventional practice of maintaining ground under powerlines and over pipelines as close-cropped grass, with weeds controlled by mowing and heavy doses of herbicides, is getting an overhaul.

Federal law has long required controlling vegetation under powerlines, and regulations were tightened further in 2003 after a widespread power failure in the Northeastern U.S. and Canada—at least partly caused, investigators said, by improperly managed tree growth in rights-of-way. Gas pipeline ROW must also have low-growing vegetation to keep an open line of sight for spotting gas leaks.

The easiest—and initially cheapest—method of complying with those laws is to mow and apply herbicides. But now a



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more environmentally friendly approach known as integrated vegetation management, or IVM, is taking root.

First, invasive trees and plants are removed by pulling them up or spot-spraying with a small amount of environmentally safe herbicides. This allows native plants to increase their foothold or clears the way for seeding meadow or prairie plant communities.

For electric transmission lines, plants in the so-called wire zone must be kept low to the ground to avoid interfering with powerlines. But outside of that zone, native tall grasses, shrubs, and small trees can offer different habitat. Together, these types of vegetation provide food for pollinators such as bees and butterflies, egg-laying sites for ground-nesting birds, safe cover for insects and small mammals, basking spots for snakes, habitat for reptiles and amphibians, and a home for rare plants.

What's more, with climate change, scientists say that long, unimpeded corridors of vegetation are important for plants and animals that can only survive by migrating to cooler conditions. The strips can also help rare plant communities from being genetically isolated. They also allow wildlife to travel between otherwise disconnected landscapes, even if they aren't migrating north.

"There are 60 million acres of rights-of-way in the United States. All of it has to be maintained, and all of it is potential pollinator and wildlife habitat. That's bigger than the national

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parcs system,” said Rick Johnstone, president of IVM Partners, a Delaware-based nonprofit that works with utilities and others to adopt IVM practices.

There are 19,647 miles of transmission line ROW in Pennsylvania, 11,727 miles in Virginia, and 4,047 miles in Maryland, according to PJM Interconnection. There are thousands more miles of pipeline corridors in the three states that could be valuable wildlife habitat.

The initiative is still in its infancy. Rights-of-way under mowing and spraying protocols far exceed those that have been converted to managed wildlife habitat—but the idea is gathering steam.

Baltimore Gas and Electric Company (BGE), an Exelon subsidiary, has installed native habitat on 2,800 acres in its service territory so far in Central Maryland. The goal is to convert 400 acres a year from mowing to IVM through 2025. The Maryland sites include Patuxent National Research Refuge in Laurel, South River Greenway Partnership in Davidsonville, Liberty Reservoir in Baltimore County, Flag Ponds in Calvert County, American Chestnut Land Trust in Prince Frederick, Morgan Run Natural Environment Area, Soldiers Delight Natural Environment Area, Patapsco State Park, Gunpowder Falls State Park, and the Torrey C. Brown Trail.

At one revamped corridor in Anne Arundel County, researchers discovered 10 species of bees that had never been recorded in the county before.



*A gas line is buried on state game lands in Pennsylvania.*



*A researcher collects pollinator insects under a transmission line in Centre County, Pennsylvania.*

“This conversion also improves the water quality of the Chesapeake Bay by improving water holding and filtration capacities and reduces our carbon footprint by reducing the need to use fossil fuel-powered tractors in mechanical mowing,” said BGE spokeswoman Stephanie Ann Weaver.

In 2023, the Maryland General Assembly helped advance IVM by passing a law that exempts power companies from local weed-height ordinances.

As forester for Delmarva Power’s properties, Johnstone persuaded the electric and gas utility to adopt IVM on its rights-of-way.

FirstEnergy, which provides power to parts of Maryland, Virginia, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia, has developed its own pollinator-friendly seed mixes, with more than 20 flowering species native to those the states. FirstEnergy is one of eight utilities in the U.S. so far to earn certification from the Right-of-Way Stewardship Council. The nonprofit was created in 2013 by environmental groups, academia, the utility vegetation management industry, utilities, and the federal government to promote IVM and best management practices.

The Central Virginia Electric Cooperative, which serves portions of 14 counties, has adopted IVM for new transmission corridors and is in the process of converting old ones into meadow environments.

The Pennsylvania Game Commission, which owns 1.5 million acres of land that is open to public use, has an estimated 841 miles of powerline ROW and 1,015 miles of gas pipeline swaths. That’s 12,688 acres of potential wildlife habitat for the agency responsible for overseeing the state’s wild birds and mammals, both those hunted and those not.

All disturbances to game lands are required to be managed





for wildlife, said Scott Bearer, the agency's chief land manager.

"What we push for and like to see is as much habitat as possible. These pipeline and power corridors are great habitat for nongame. They are continuous travel corridors for our tree bats, and they can offer woodrat and pollinator habitat that is the basis for the food chain for all our migratory songbirds, and everything in between."

Bearer said the agency's commitment to creating more nongame habitat has evolved over time. For example, in the 1950s, sportsmen became worried that herbicide being applied on game lands under transmission corridors was harming habitat for rabbits, deer, turkeys, grouse, and other game. In response, a study was launched in 1953 on 3.5 miles of ROW through State Game Lands 33 in Centre County. That initial study has turned into 70 years of continuous monitoring and experimentation with IVM practices, providing a knowledge base for managing land for wildlife. Partners include utilities, Asplundh, and nonprofits. Studies there and elsewhere are confirming the benefits of a more holistic approach to vegetation under powerlines and along pipelines.

A 2019 study on the game lands reinforced previous studies that have found that pollinating insects can survive small amounts of herbicides, used to selectively kill invasive and non-native plants.

Another study, published in 2019 in *Biodiversity and Conservation*, compared the presence of pollinator bees on sites where IVM was used in powerline ROW in Maryland's Anne Arundel, Prince George's, and Howard counties. They were compared to 29 sites subject to conventional mowing.

The IVM sites had "significantly higher abundance and species richness," according to the study. The researchers noted that the newly created habitat also benefited butterflies, birds, and small mammals.

"Transmission line easements should stop being viewed solely as scars on the landscape, and instead be viewed as potential linear wildlife preserves," the study concluded.

Still, utilities and IVM advocates sometimes hear complaints when mowing is stopped.

"For every person that's thrilled to see native plants and meadows, there's someone who says it looks messy and our kids are going to be covered in ticks," said Carolyn Mahan, a professor of biology and environmental studies at Penn State Altoona and the current overseer of Game Lands 33 research.

And IVM proponents say they sometimes struggle to convince utilities and companies that IVM saves stockholders and customers money in the long term by cutting back on mowing and herbicides. There is an initial investment to get a new array of plants established. But once the ecosystem takes hold, they say, it protects itself with only occasional maintenance afterward.

"It requires professionalism, dedication, and knowledge of the landscape to do it properly, but it can be done," said Mahan, who would also like to see tax incentives that encourage utilities to participate.

Although use of herbicides in IVM is minimal, some agencies and land managers still are uneasy about using them at all. But Johnstone said it's a necessary evil.

"We can't manage without herbicides," Johnstone said. "We need the conservation and environmental organizations to get over the 'we don't want any [herbicides]!' Make it difficult to use, but don't ban it."

With the growing push for ROW owners to support sustainability, Johnstone and others predict that IVM will continue to spread across the landscape.

"The native stuff is lying there in the soil waiting for the right opportunity. They're there waiting to come back."

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GeoSpatial Innovations, Inc

## Disaster Response and Recording Your Crew Efforts

By Max Cunningham, Forester Program Manager, GeoSpatial Innovations, Inc.

**G**SI Forester is a comprehensive software platform designed to manage, monitor, and track all UVM workflows with remarkable ease. Whether you're a large utility company or a small cooperative, GSI Forester streamlines your vegetation management workflows.

GSI Forester allows IOUs, munis, and co-ops the opportunity to capture their work needs and data during any type of disaster response. Office administrators, utility foresters, and contracted vendors are using GSI Forester to gain real-time insights. Having up-to-date information following storm and disaster events affecting powerlines provides crews with the information needed to ensure proper preparation for equipment and PPE required to support restoration efforts.

Electric utilities are planning their VM efforts within GSI Forester and providing field crews with vital information to ensure the safety of both the crews and their customers. In disaster response situations, utilities track the work performed

by crews and accurately report their efforts to regulatory commissions. Additionally, they inform crews of potential dangers, allowing them to plan accordingly and reduce risks even before arriving on-site.

GSI Forester, developed in partnership with utility vegetation managers, helps utilities maximize the reliability of their network while working to ensure the safety of employees, contractors, and customers. Forester supports the efforts of a utility to protect any sensitive areas as well as provide field crews detailed work plans to further mitigate risks associated with UVM.

GeoSpatial Innovations, Inc. (GSI) is a private, woman-owned company providing software and services to electric and natural gas companies across North America and Australia. Learn more about GSI Forester at [www.gsiforester.com](http://www.gsiforester.com) and talk with our team to understand how GSI Forester can further improve your reliability and environmental stewardship. †

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# Reflecting on COP28 UAE and the Importance of Accelerating Climate Action

By Dan Lambe, CEO, Arbor Day Foundation

**W**e are living in the climate era. It is one of the key messages I was particularly struck by during COP28 UAE. It's the idea that this period in time, defined by the climate crisis and our approach to addressing it, will not go unnoticed. One day, our children will reflect on our decisions, our policies, and our practices and they'll analyze how we combatted these unprecedented challenges. The host of the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference, or Conference of the Parties (COP28), was the UAE (United Arab Emirates). It was held November 30 to December 12, 2023, at Expo City, Dubai, in the United Arab Emirates. After sitting among the countless leaders at COP28, each motivated to accelerate climate action, I'm hopeful for the journey ahead.

It has been encouraging to see so many local government leaders descend on this global gathering. Mayors and city officials are making their voices heard, sharing insights on how climate change is impacting the economy of their cities and the health of their citizens. Thankfully, many of them have already identified trees and forests as a critical piece of their resiliency plan. Their passion and initiative to level up climate action in their cities, big and small, is an incredible reminder that this is everyone's fight. We all have a role to play in battling climate change and its effects.

Of course, many of these local leaders are looking to larger entities for guidance. Federal governments and private corporations are having conversations right now about the pace of progress of climate action. In the last 15 years, we

have undoubtedly taken steps forward in the fight against climate change. But the impact has been largely incremental. I witnessed plenty of frustration during COP28 about the nearly stagnant nature of climate action. More than ever, people are realizing we need large-scale change, and we need it now.

Among the discussions of how we achieve that change, leaders have emphasized the need to reduce the use of fossil fuels and limit carbon emissions. At the Arbor Day Foundation, we believe the voluntary carbon market can play a unique role in this effort, and there has clearly been a refocusing of the mindset of the market and its major players. Discussions at COP28 illuminated that a growing number of governments and private sector leaders are putting a premium on quality. The attention to the credibility of forestry projects is higher than ever. As the world's largest tree planting nonprofit, this shift is exciting for the Arbor Day Foundation. Our organization is deeply rooted in quality and integrity, and we have spent more than 50 years crafting tree planting projects to deliver meaningful change. We are eager to continue meeting and exceeding the increasingly high standards of the voluntary carbon market.

With all the information shared at COP28 UAE, the Arbor Day Foundation team is keenly aware the work doesn't stop there. Attendees

are encouraged to reflect on how to take the learnings we've gleaned and the relationships we've grown to advance our collective goal of fighting climate change. COP28 inspires communication and the expansion of ideas, which we should all bring to our organizations for large-scale change—for the betterment of our children and our planet. 🌳



Dan Lambe (left) with Director of Partnerships and Innovation Ben Wilinsky. Photo courtesy of Dan Lambe.

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# Utility-Caused Fire Mitigation Requires an Ecosystem-Wide Approach

By Randall H. Miller, Director of Research & Development, Eocene Environmental Group

**T**rees contacting powerlines have long been implicated in igniting wildfires across North America and beyond. Some have been catastrophic, resulting in widespread property damage and loss of life. Utilities are easy targets for public criticism and liability for those events, which has prompted litigation ending in punitive judgements.

The magnitude of fires is largely beyond any utility's control. Conditions responsible for the intensity of wildfires have been building for well over a century, to the point they dominate entire ecosystems. Since the threat is a consequence of ecosystem-wide dynamics, it can't be mitigated by vegetation management along rights-of-way corridors alone. Rather, to be effective, response must involve cooperative mobilization of federal, state, county, municipal, and private resources, along with the work of utility vegetation managers.

## Background

Increasing wildfire magnitude is reflected in the expansion of area burned throughout North America in recent decades. The National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) has been tracking acres burned annually in the United States since 1983. The amount of burned acreage has quadrupled since that time, from under two million acres a year to over eight million (NIFC n.d.). More than a century of aggressive fire suppression is one of the reasons for this dramatic increase. Frequent low-intensity fires are part of the ecology of many vegetative communities. Those fires moderated tree populations and reduced fuel loads. In their absence, tree populations in many areas have outstripped the carrying capacity of their sites. Consequently, trees are stressed as they compete for light, water, and essential elements. That leaves them vulnerable to attack by opportunistic pests, like bark beetles. Dense populations of stressed and dying trees, high fuel loads on the forest floor,



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**Figure 1.** Feather River Canyon, Plumas County, 1890. Source: Gruell, G.E. 2001. Gruell, G.E. 2001. *Fire in the Sierra Nevada Forest: A Photographic Interpretation of Ecological Change Since 1849.*



**Figure 2.** Feather River Canyon, Plumas County, 1993. Source: The Beck Group. December 2015. *California Assessment of Wood Business Innovation Opportunities and Markets.* (CAWBIOM). The National Forest Foundation.



**Figure 3.** Feather River Canyon, Plumas County, 2021. © ETHAN SWOPE/AP PHOTO.

hot and windy weather, and drought brought on by climate change conspire to exacerbate the threat. When all this is combined with a growing number of homes built in the urban wildland interface—homes that are served with electricity—the stage is set for the cataclysmic wildfires, with their attendant property damage and loss of life, that have become such a plague.

A remarkable book by George Gruell, *Fire in the Sierra Nevada Forest: A Photographic Interpretation of Ecological Change Since 1849* (2001), insightfully illustrates this dynamic. Gruell collected landscape photos of the Sierra Nevada from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He photographed the sites from the same vantage in the early 1990s, and the comparisons are striking. His study of the Feather River Canyon offers an example. **Figure 1** shows patchy tree cover and a clear understory in 1890. Just over 100 years later in 1993, the photo shows the area to be overgrown (**Figure 2**). Nearly 30 years after that in 2021, the site was decimated by the Dixie Fire (**Figure 3**), which burned close to a million acres and destroyed more than 1,300 structures. The Dixie Fire was ignited by a father and son taking target practice. However, regardless of whether the fire was started by target practice or trees contacting powerlines, the catastrophe it became was more than 130 years in the making.

### A Hopeful Solution

Utilities have responded to the wildfire threat with sophisticated weather modeling, remote sensing, artificial intelligence, public safety power shutoffs, engineering solutions (such as targeting lines for undergrounding), and fuse coordination. This is all in addition to enhanced vegetation management. Yet, the severity of wildfires is largely out of control and cannot be mitigated by utilities acting alone. Since fires are a consequence of broad ecosystem changes that have developed for over a century, the response must also be ecosystem-wide. That requires the cooperation of government, industry, nonprofits, and private landowners. It should also involve homeowners employing fire-wise landscaping with incentives from insurance companies for doing so (or penalties for not). The full suite of integrated vegetation management control options (including prescribed fire) should be employed along with sound silvicultural practices to promote forest health and resilience.

### Tahoe Basin Conservancy

The Tahoe Basin Conservancy (2019) offers a compelling example of the type of cooperative ecosystem-wide approach that is necessary. For more than ten years, the conservancy has employed a multi-jurisdictional strategy involving more than 25 federal, state (both California and Nevada), county, local, and private organizations, agencies, and departments. These include Liberty Utilities and NV Energy, which both expanded their vegetation management and tree risk assessment around powerlines. In turn, the U.S. Forest Service conducted an environmental analysis for hundreds of acres of resilience corridors in 2019. They have formed a partnership where crews treat public lands at the same time as working utility ROW. The conservancy also implements science-based forest health programs, and homeowners are urged to use fire-wise landscaping on their properties.

The efforts paid off in 2021 when the area was threatened by the Caldor Fire. While the fire burned 221,835 acres and destroyed more than 1,000 structures, the Tahoe Basin Conservancy was spared because the fire's intensity diminished to the point it could be controlled as it entered the treated areas (Avitt 2021).

Funding for the project comes from private, local, state, and federal agencies, conservation organizations, foundations, and utility companies. It is expensive, but the money is currently being spent reactively on fire suppression, insurance, and litigation. Better to apply that money proactively



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toward creating healthy forests and safe places with reliable electrical service than to squander it reactively chasing fires and on punitive litigation.

**Conclusion**

Utilities have been held responsible for igniting catastrophic wildfires through tree contact with powerlines. However, wildfire intensity is a consequence of a multitude of factors (including fire suppression and associated forest health deterioration) that have gone on for more than a century. It is largely out of the control of utilities. To be effective, mitigation response must involve ecosystem-wide efforts that require cooperative mobilization of federal, state, county, municipal, and private resources along with the work of utility vegetation managers, as the Tahoe Basin Conservancy has demonstrated. It will be expensive, but as a society, we are spending vast sums on fire suppression, insurance, and litigation as it is. It would be better to use the money proactively for the public good.



Randall H. Miller

**About the Author**

**Randall H. Miller** is Eocene’s Director of Research & Development. Prior to joining Eocene (formerly CNUC), he worked in PacifiCorp’s vegetation management department for more than 23 years. Miller is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist and an ISA Certified Utility Specialist. He has been Chair of the TREE Fund Board of Trustees, President of the Utility Arborist Association, twice Chair of the Edison Electric Institute Vegetation Management Task Force, President of the Oregon Community Forest Council (now Oregon Community Trees), and editor of the ISA Rocky Mountain Chapter newsletter. He has served on the ISA Certification Test Committee and on the Editorial Board of the Journal of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry. Miller is a widely published author, with roughly 80 publications. He received his bachelor’s degree in horticulture and a master’s degree in urban forestry from the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point.

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Dr. Robert Vanderhoof

Vanderhoof is a distinguished recipient of the David H. Nabi Memorial Award for his dedication and service. His academic journey culminated in a PhD from the College of Forest Resources at Mississippi State University in 1995. He holds certifications as an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist, a Utility Specialist, and is TRAQ qualified. A veteran natural resource manager, Vanderhoof spent 15 years as Florida’s deer management program leader, during which time he coordinated range management activities across Florida’s seven-million-acre wildlife management area system.

In 2004, Vanderhoof earned the Florida Chapter of The Wildlife Society’s award for “extraordinary vision, leadership, and dedication.” From 2008–2023, he applied his management experience as a Utility Vegetation Manager for PacifiCorp across Utah, Idaho, and Wyoming, and is currently teaching urban and community forestry at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. Vanderhoof also heads up Tall Tree Learning, LLC, which specializes in preparing students for ISA certification as arborists and utility specialists. Winner of the UAA Education Award in 2023, he currently sits on the UAA Board of Directors, has written several articles on natural resource management, and routinely speaks on UVM issues. ECI eagerly anticipates the valuable expertise and leadership that he will bring to the team, further strengthening our commitment to excellence in utility vegetation management. 🌿

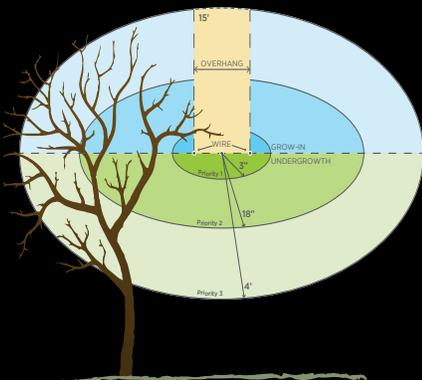




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