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March/April 2026

Magazine of the Urban & Community Forestry Society





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Features

- 10** UCFS News: Year in Review, Conference Recap, Awards and Recognitions by Leslie Berckes
- 22** NYC Parks' Comprehensive New Tree Planting Approach with Ben Osborne
- 29** **The Resilient Canopy** Calgary, Alberta: Urban Forestry between the Rocky Mountain Foothills and the Canadian Prairies with Jody Lewis

Departments

- 4** President and Executive Director Messages
David Lefcourt and Leslie Berckes
- 6** UCFS Membership Information
- 8** Contributors to This Issue

Cover: Autumn in Calgary, Alberta's Edworthy Park.
Photo Courtesy of the City of Calgary



22



10



29

President's Message

David Lefcourt



Spring is always a powerful reminder of why urban and community forestry matters. As trees reawaken across our cities and towns, so too does the essential work of those who plan, plant, protect, and advocate for the urban forest. This season invites both reflection and action—on where our profession has been and where it is headed.

Urban and community forestry continues to expand beyond traditional tree care into resilience planning, climate adaptation, equity-centered greening, and meaningful community engagement. These shifts are not departures from our roots; they are expressions of them. Trees remain at the center of our work, but the ways we serve communities through them are broader and more impactful than ever.

With the Society's restructuring three years ago, the Board set ambitious goals. At our January 2026 retreat, we revisited the UCFS Strategic Plan and agreed it was time to build on key operational priorities. UCFS is in a strong position, and we want to ensure we are supporting our members today while preparing for the next generation of urban and community foresters.

One of our most important efforts this year is the UCFS Accreditation Program. We know there are many outstanding forestry programs across North America and beyond, and this program is designed to recognize that excellence. If your community or organization is eligible, I encourage you to apply and share your accomplishments widely.

This year also marked a major milestone—our 20th Municipal Forestry Institute. With more than 1,000 graduates, MFI remains one of UCFS's flagship programs and a cornerstone of leadership development in our profession. We are excited for the next 20 years and the leaders it will continue to inspire.

To help grow that future, I also encourage you to consider supporting the Urban Forest Foundation. Once our scholarship is endowed through the Tree Fund, we will be able to provide expanded resources for members and colleagues to attend MFI and other leadership opportunities.

As we move into the growing season, I encourage you to take a moment to look up—at the canopy you help sustain—and forward, toward the future we are shaping together. Thank you for your dedication to urban and community forestry and for the many ways you contribute to healthier, more resilient communities.



Executive Director's Message

Leslie Berckes



As I write this, it should be a cold February day here in the Midwest United States. Instead, we have record-breaking temperatures of 64° Fahrenheit (17° Celsius). Average temperatures should be 30° Fahrenheit. We haven't had snow since December. The cold, snowy—and I think, beautiful!—winters

that so many people grew up knowing seem to be slipping away. Instead of reveling in the warm temperatures, it makes me anxious to think about a changing climate.

I worry about what I can do to change our course. The problem is so large, it feels nearly impossible to tackle. Then, I think about something I read when faced with such overwhelming odds that challenges us to focus on the things we can do in the body we occupy and the position we hold. This line of thinking immediately brings it to scale and forces me to think about the many trees I've planted and nurtured over the years (including the seven I've added to my very small yard). In a nutshell, control what you can control.

From there, I think about you. How in the work you do each day, you plant and nurture trees as well. I envision your trees growing vigorously, along with the UCFS Member in the next town over, the next state over, the next country over, until each of us has done what we can, in the position we hold, to create a green canopy to cover us all. With that, we each are doing our part to tackle this large problem.

In this issue, you can read about the bold and hopeful work your colleagues in Calgary, Alberta are doing, with UCFS Member Jody Lewis at the helm. Located between the Rocky Mountain Foothills and the Canadian Prairies, Calgary has a unique ecosystem with both early cold snaps and drought as major factors, making the need for very specific tree selection. Jody and her team are doing what they can in the face of a changing climate and are managing an extensive municipal nursery to grow the species they need. It's a fascinating account, and we thank Jody and team.

As David mentions here, take a moment to look up at what you've done. Then, pick up that shovel and keep going. We need you! The 2,100 members of UCFS are making positive change each and every day, and we're here for you every step of the way.



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Peter Ceren	CO	USA
Preeya Lofgren-Boll	CA	USA
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Richard Halverson	MN	USA
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Robert Morris	MA	USA
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Ruby Neighman	UT	USA
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 Urban Wood Network
 Unified Wood Economy
 Town of Greensburgh, New York
 City of South Salt Lake, Nevada

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In This Issue: Contributors



Leslie Berckes is the Executive Director of UCFS. She has nearly 15 years of urban forestry experience that includes actively managing urban tree canopy as well as helping people grow trees where they are needed the most.



Ben Osborne is the Assistant Commissioner of Forestry & Horticulture at New York City Parks, where he oversees tree planting and preservation, tree care operations, and related safety and training programs. Ben has a bachelor's degree in Biology and Spanish from New York University and a master's degree in Botany from the University of Vermont. He is an ISA Board-Certified Master Arborist and Qualified Tree Risk Assessor, a member of the Urban and Community Forestry Society, and a Regional Governor for the NY State Arborists Association ISA Chapter.



Jody Lewis is the City of Calgary, Alberta Urban Forestry Superintendent. She is an ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional bringing more than 15 years of experience in municipal urban forestry planning to her work. Jody leads a dynamic team responsible for nursery production, tree procurement, public tree planting initiatives, and citywide tree watering programs. A graduate of Olds College and a certified Landscape Horticulturalist, Jody blends deep operational expertise with a lifelong commitment to public service.

City Trees is the online, bimonthly magazine produced by the Urban & Community Forestry Society. The UCFS is a Professional Affiliate of the International Society of Arboriculture.

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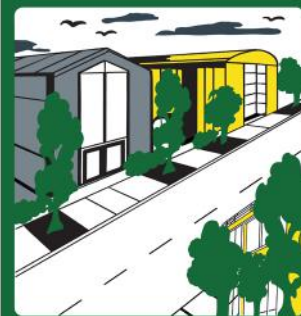
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UCFS News



- 2025 Year in Review
- Recognition of Sponsors, Committee Members, and City TREES Advertisers and Contributors
- Henderson, Nevada Conference Recap
- UCFS Award Winners

By Leslie Berckes, UCFS Executive Director



Shown here are UCFS Members who attended the pre-conference tour focused on climate resilience through smarter landscapes, led by City of Henderson, Nevada Parks and Recreation staff.

As we continue to move into 2026, it's important to take some time to reflect on UCFS accomplishments, which are made possible by members, volunteers, and sponsors. We thank each person who has provided their time and expertise to advance the mission of UCFS, helping to grow this global community of urban and community foresters.

Here, we'll highlight the year in review and recognize the many different folks who make UCFS as dynamic as it is. If you recognize a name on the committee list and you're wondering how you can join in, reach out! It will be a great opportunity to reconnect with a friend and find out how you can help grow UCFS.

As we look forward to the rest of 2026, you'll be hearing much more about UCFS Accreditation, the study prep courses for the ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional credential, and how you can support the Urban Forest Foundation, now hosted by TREE Fund. We'll look forward to reporting the accomplishments we achieve together!

2025 Year in Review

Thanks to you, the members of UCFS, we're making a big impact and reaching more people than ever.

2,100+ UCFS Members

1,700+ People Engaged in UCFS Education or Presentations

12,000+ City Trees Readers

9 UCFS Regional or National Members and Friends Meet-ups



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Celebrating our Committee Members



UCFS committees are made up of urban foresters representing a wide range of perspectives. Through the expertise of committee members, UCFS is able to better meet the needs of its members and the urban forestry profession on the whole. The committees achieved many things in 2025 including launching the Career Compass series, gathering information and representing your interests around trees and insurance conflicts, relaunching the UCFS Accreditation program, and creating a welcoming conference experience that prioritized learning and networking. Thank you to all of our committee members!

2025 UCFS Committee Members

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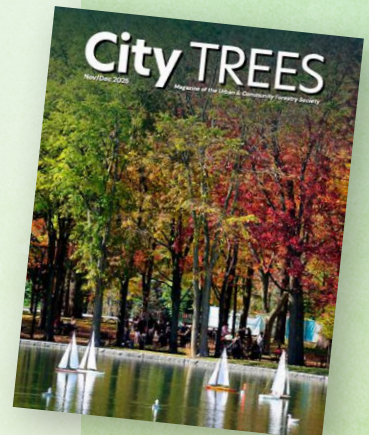
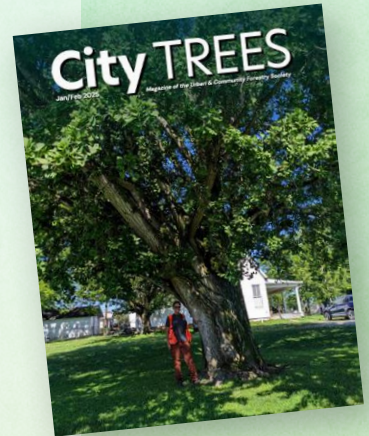
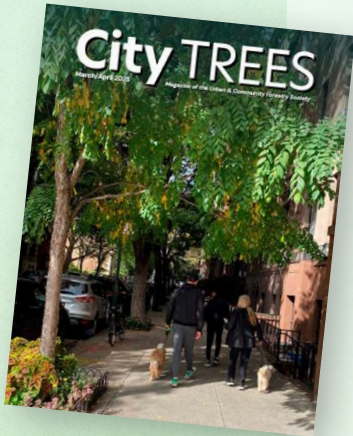
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Hunter Goan	Ed Mejia	
Darren Green		

Henderson Conference Recap

In November 2025, UCFS held its annual conference and tradeshow with an agenda that prioritized networking and peer-to-peer learning. Nearly 200 members, friends, and partners attended the conference. On the main stage, attendees heard from speakers who covered how to strengthen tree ordinances, how to encourage friendly construction practices around trees, and how to prepare the urban forest for a changing climate. One of the highlights for many was the Canopy Conversation roundtables where people had an opportunity to join three different conversations for more dedicated time around one topic. Topics ranged from urban wood reuse to navigating your urban forestry career to starting a tree nursery.

Of course, no conference is complete without plenty of networking opportunities, and UCFS provided two opportunities for members and friends to mix and mingle. The annual MFI Alumni Networking Reception—sponsored by Davey Resource Group—was attended by graduates of nearly every MFI class! The next evening was the annual networking reception for all members; it was held in the tradeshow space so that attendees and vendors could connect over delicious nibbles and a drink or two.

The photos that follow highlight just a few of the amazing events and connections made at the conference!



Lunchtime breakout conversations are popular with attendees.



Pre-conference tour-goers get to know each other as they visit the Henderson Bird Viewing Preserve.



Fun Run, Walk, or Watch participants gather for the early evening event in Henderson.



UCFS conference attendees.



Portland, Oregon City Forester and UCFS Board Member Jenn Cairo enjoys the pre-conference tour. Photo by Ed Mejia



erson.



Outgoing UCFS President Jamie King passes the torch to incoming President David Lefcourt. This is David's second time in the role.

Save the Date!

UCFS Annual
Conference and
Tradeshow

**November
16-17 2026**

We look forward to seeing you in
St. Louis, Missouri!



UCFS Recognizes *2025 Awardees* at Henderson Conference

The UCFS Annual Awards ceremony is an opportunity to shine light on the great work happening in urban forestry today—and to honor some of our most outstanding members, colleagues, and collaborators.

City of North Las Vegas Legacy Project Award

The 2025 honoree for the UCFS Legacy Project of the Year Award was the City of North Las Vegas and its Kiel Ranch Historic Park. The Park is the site of a restored community orchard led by the city’s urban forester, Eddie Rodriguez, the mayor, and many dedicated city staff. This project reestablishes Southern Nevada’s only municipality-managed orchard, featuring 36 fruit and nut trees—citrus, fig, almond, apple, and pistachio—alongside community garden beds. This \$150,000 initiative addresses urgent urban challenges: mitigating urban heat, enhancing food security, and fostering community connection. It now serves as an inclusive gathering space where residents can access fresh produce, attend gardening classes, and participate in seasonal harvesting events.



Congratulations! AWARD OF ACHIEVEMENT



Meg Hanna

Meg Hanna Award of Achievement

The 2025 UCFS Award of Achievement went to Meg Hanna, a cherished member of ISA and UCFS committees. Meg has been instrumental in helping UCFS develop its new prep course for the ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional credential, providing in-depth insight from her current and former vantage points working for a municipality and serving in roles at non-profits, and for her Canadian perspective on urban forestry. Meg serves as the Director of Urban and Community Forestry for the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI)-Canada and she teaches at the University of British Columbia as part of the Master of Urban Forestry Leadership program. Meg works tirelessly to promote the SFI Urban and Community Forest Sustainability Standard; in 2025, she stewarded the first municipality to achieve the SFI certification—the Regional Municipality of York.

Dr. Anand Kumar i-Tree Innovation Award

The 2025 i-Tree Innovation Award went to Dr. Anand Kumar. Dr. Kumar holds a Ph.D. in Ecosystem Sciences, specializing in Urban and Community Forestry and carbon sequestration. His doctoral research focused on the ecosystem services provided by green spaces in Delhi, India. Dr. Kumar has served as a mentor and guide for many students as they furthered their urban forestry studies and i-Tree knowledge. He is a true champion of urban forestry and has implemented a variety of trainings and projects with i-Tree as a central component. He served with the U.S. Forest Service's Office of International Programs and Trade, where he completed a long list of trainings including i-Tree Eco trainings with students, MyTree orientations, and many volunteer engagements with partners in India, such as the "Know Your Campus Trees Program" with Bharati College, University of Delhi. Dr. Kumar is currently working as an Urban and Community Forestry Consultant for Fair Forests Consulting, LLC. >>

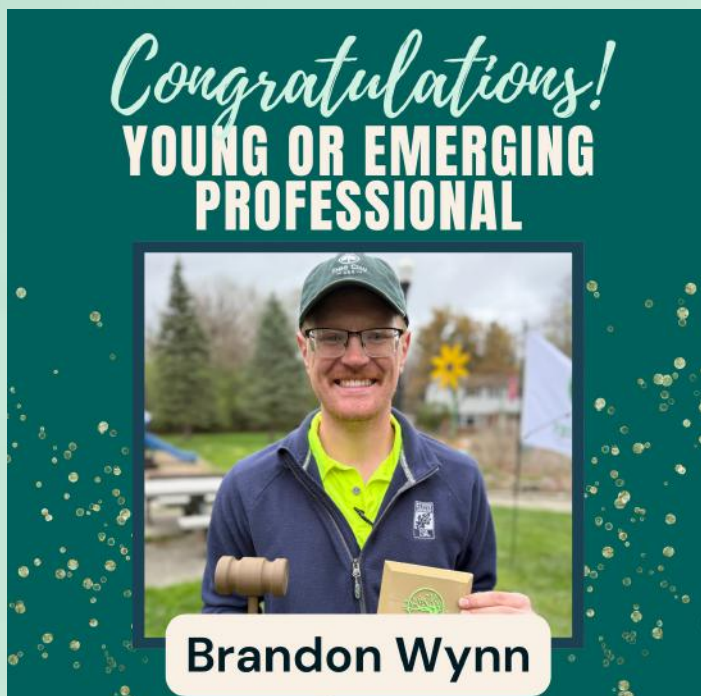
Congratulations! i-Tree Innovation



Dr. Anand Kumar

William “Willie” Park and Brandon Wynn Young or Emerging Professional Award

Two people were honored with the 2025 Young or Emerging Professional Award: William “Willie” Park and Brandon Wynn. Willie Park is the Urban Forester for the City of Sandy Springs, Georgia. Over the past three years, he has led the planting of nearly 1,000 trees across the city, with a remarkably low overall mortality rate of 2%. His strategic planting approach prioritizes species diversity, soil compatibility, and long-term survivability. A core strength of Willie’s leadership is his application of soil science principles in all planting and restoration efforts and in his establishment of the City’s first Plant Health Care program. Willie has built strong public-private partnerships with organizations like ReForest ATL, EcoAddendum, and Environment Sandy Springs. He launched the Sandy Springs Eco-Stewards, a city-led volunteer program that promotes environmental education, stewardship, and civic participation in urban forestry. Willie has positioned Sandy Springs as a training hub for professional development in arboriculture through a partnership with the Georgia Arborist Association. He is also an active member of the ISA Credentialing Council.



Brandon Wynn has made major strides in his young urban forestry career, filling the role of Lead Arborist for the City of Birmingham, Michigan. There, he has led efforts to revamp the department to one that is centered on community engagement and stewardship initiatives. Notably, Brandon was elected to the Board of Directors for the ISA Michigan Chapter and as the municipality representative on the host committee for the ISA International Conference in Detroit in 2026. Brandon works to connect municipalities and urban foresters statewide with the benefits ISA Michigan can offer. Brandon chairs the tree committee for the City of Lathrup Village. There he reinstated the city as a Tree City USA and assisted the community in obtaining a tree planting grant, which led to the first community-wide planting event in the city’s recent history.

Jenny Gulick Award of Merit



The UCFS Award of Merit was given posthumously to Jenny Gulick. Jenny passed away in early 2025, having only recently retired from a long and dedicated career in the field of urban forestry. Jenny progressed through multiple leadership positions at the City of Cincinnati Park Board, including City Forester, Greenspace Manager, Natural Resource Manager, and Assistant Superintendent of Parks. In 1999, she joined Davey Resource Group as a Senior Consulting Urban Forester working on urban forestry projects across the U.S. She was a leading expert on tree risk, city code and policy, and tree protection during construction. In 2018, Jenny co-founded Urban Canopy Works with Rachel Comte, serving as Principal and Senior Consulting Urban Forester of a women-owned small business dedicated to providing customized solutions for tree management needs. Jenny's work personified the UCFS mission of building the confidence, competence, and camaraderie of professionals who manage trees and forests.

Jamie King to Scott Altenhoff The President's Award of Appreciation

I bet many of you feel the same way I do about Scott; indeed, whenever I mention him, I always see a smile of recognition. Scott's energy, intellect, and passion are inspiring! His work as Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program Manager at Oregon Department of Forestry and for the City of Eugene, Oregon prior to that is highly esteemed.

Scott invited me right out of MFI to serve on the Accreditation Committee and it was then that I saw how his leadership shines. He made time for calls, he navigated complex processes, and most notably—as UCFS (then-SMA) Past President, he set the stage for one of the most transformational moments in the history of this Society, all with the full backing of the Board.

Throughout this difficult year for our field, Scott and I checked in with each other. True to his personality, Scott showed me that with creativity and dedication there is always a path forward. For that I am grateful and to him I express my gratitude and appreciation for his service. Thank you, Scott. —**Jamie King, UCFS Past President** 🍀



Bees, Zoos, and Everything In-Between:

Full Collection of UCFS Case Studies Available on the Website!

[UCFS Case Studies](#)—all 37 of them—are an enduring, excellent resource! Each case study contains detailed advice and anecdotes from an average of 7 or 8 urban and community forestry professionals.

The case study themes to date are:

Bees, Bioswales, Building Bridges Between LAs and MAs, Building Bridges with City Depts, Cemeteries, Climate Change, Conifers, Consulting, Contract Growing Partnerships, Drought, EAB, Fall Planting, Flooding, Gas Lines and Trees, Historic Trees, Invasives, Large Tree Relocation, Medians, Memorial Trees, Natural Areas in the Urban Forest, Palms, Pruning Cycles, Pyrus We Have a Problem, Retired from the Municipality, Sewer Lines, Slopes, Social Networking, Stormwater and Watersheds, Teaching, Tree Boards, Tree Lights, Urban Forestry's Location in City Departments, Urban Fruit Trees, Urban Wood (x 2), Zoos.



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UCFS Recommended Reading

Jackhammers, the Right Trees, and Partnerships in Every Direction

An Urban Forest Ecosystem is Taking Shape in the Formerly Treeless and Industrial Kansas City Crossroads Arts District

By Michelle Sutton

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NYC Parks staff member checks on trees post-planting

NYC Parks Transitions to a New Approach to Tree Planting

with Ben Osborne All Images Courtesy of NYC Parks



In 2024, NYC Parks centralized its Forestry units, combining Forestry Operations (formerly in Maintenance & Operations) with Forestry Programs (under Environment and Planning) to create a unified, cohesive Forestry team. Another big change: transitioning to a Neighborhood Tree Planting approach. Traditionally, Parks responded to planting requests submitted via 311 while also fulfilling mayoral and other elected priorities. To streamline the process and make the planting schedule more efficient and predictable, Parks' new Neighborhood Tree Planting Program aims to plant every available planting location in the entire city on a nine-year cycle.

In addition to planting new trees in each focus neighborhood, as part of this new program, Parks will remove dead trees and stumps and close unplantable empty tree beds—a truly comprehensive approach. Ben Osborne is the Assistant Commissioner of Forestry & Horticulture at New York City Parks; here, he graciously fields our questions.

How and who determines a space is unplantable?

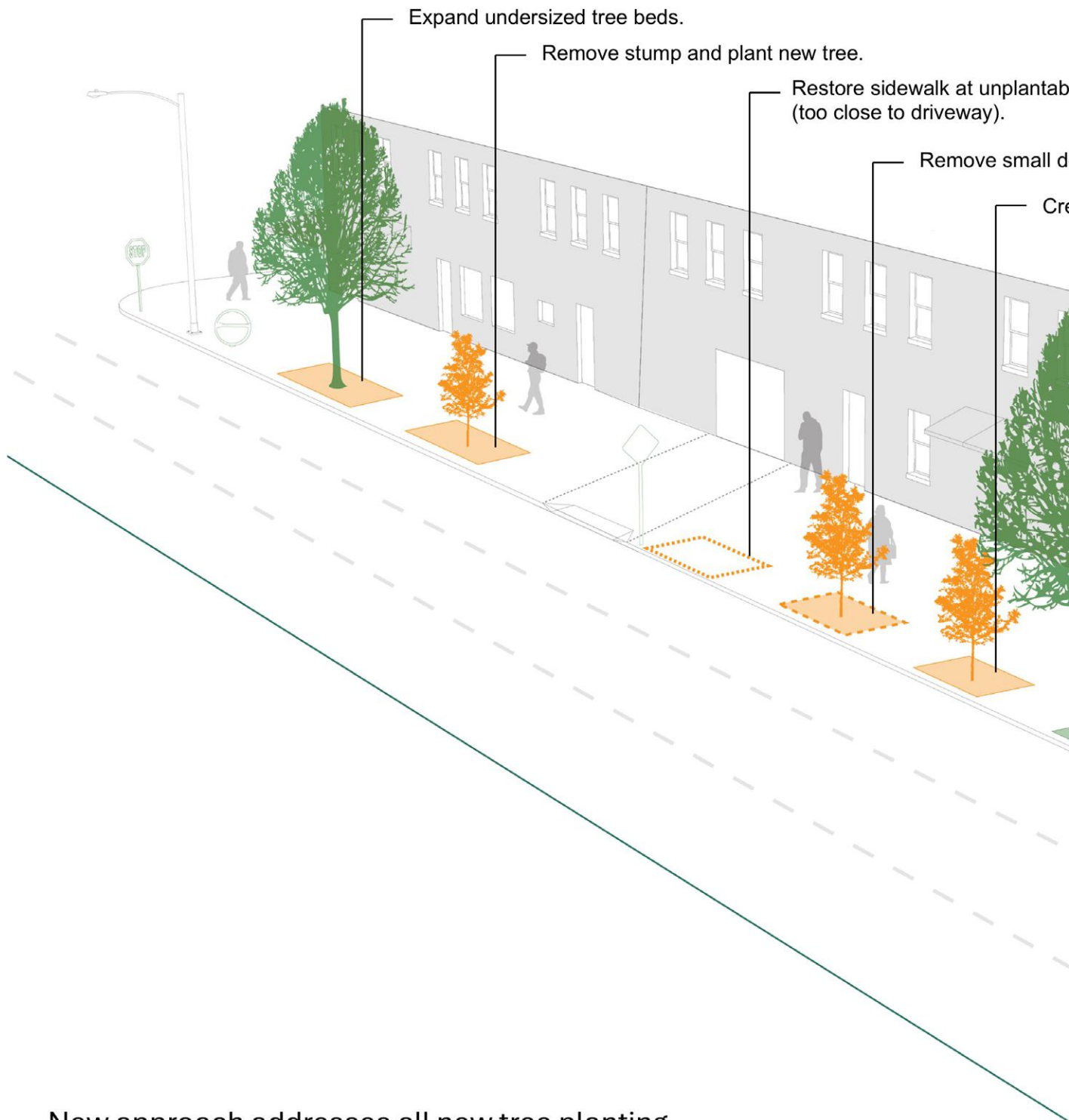
All trees within the public right-of-way are under the jurisdiction of NYC Parks. Our Tree Planting Foresters determine if a particular location can receive a new tree in accordance with the agency's current [street tree planting standards](#), which account for above- and below-ground space and other standards and regulations.

To choose the right tree for the right location, Parks foresters consider many factors, including the sidewalk width, surrounding tree canopy, flood and drought conditions, and how the tree's growth may impact buildings, utilities, and other nearby infrastructure. A site can be considered unplantable based on a variety of factors, such as distance from an intersection, streetlight, fire hydrant, or driveway; presence of underground utilities; bus stops; sidewalk

width; or any other conflicts that might interfere with public safety or the healthy growth of a tree.

Sometimes, sites that previously hosted a tree are no longer suitable for planting, based on our updated planting standards or changes in the surrounding infrastructure. In some locations that are otherwise appropriate for trees, the size of the hole that can be excavated for planting is limited by underground utilities. To address these situations, we have been purchasing and contract-growing "grow bag trees." These trees are grown to size in lightweight growing medium in above-ground, porous bags. As the roots grow to the edges of the bags, they are naturally air-pruned, resulting in a dense, fibrous root system. >>

Neighborhood Tree Planting – New Approach



New approach addresses all new tree planting opportunities block-by-block.



NYC Parks

le site

lead tree and replace with new tree.

reate new tree bed and plant new tree.



Keep community-maintained greenery
(unplantable due to proximity to intersection).



Contractors move large B&B stock toward a park planting site.

In contrast to traditional balled-and-burlapped trees, grow bag trees do not require harvesting, so roots are not cut before planting. The compact, lightweight grow bag package can be easily handled by one or two people without the need for a machine and allows trees to be planted in spaces that were previously considered unplantable due to limitations on the width or depth of excavation. While grow bag trees provide opportunities to plant spaces that were previously unplantable, we still encounter pre-existing tree beds that do not meet our current standards. To address these unplantable sites, through our Neighborhood Tree Planting Program we repave unplantable tree beds that are not otherwise being maintained as ornamental planters by community members.

How do you handle situations where residents are opposed to having a tree?

We encourage residents to inform us when there are legitimate conflicts with planting locations across the city. When we receive a complaint about a planned tree planting, we look into the reasons for opposition, and we reinspect sites. Sometimes, small considerations such as shifting a planned planting location by a few feet can make a big difference for a resident to feel acknowledged and to accept the new tree.

However, when residents oppose trees without justifiable concerns, we carefully continue with our planting

plans and inform them of the importance of street trees as critical, living infrastructure that provide benefits to all New Yorkers. We want New Yorkers to understand that trees are city infrastructure—just as traffic lights, bus stops, and fire hydrants are.

How are you assured that mayoral and other elected priorities won't come into play?

While priorities of mayoral administrations and other elected officials can change, in 2023, the New York City Council passed Local Law 148, which requires the City to create its first ever Urban Forest Plan. This plan will codify and support the equitable expansion of the urban forest canopy to cover 30 percent of land within the city. Based on a report by the Nature Conservancy ([The State of the Urban Forest in NYC](#)), we can get only about halfway to the 30 percent goal by adding trees within Parks' jurisdiction alone, so there is an urgent need to utilize every possible planting space in addition to applying many other strategies. Under our new Neighborhood Tree Planting strategy, we are able to maximize street tree planting opportunities by ensuring that every plantable space gets a tree, including by removing dead, dying, or hazardous trees for immediate replacement. On blocks where we are planting, we also expand and add mulch to improve growing conditions for existing trees. The additional maintenance that this program provides is especially important because 90% of the increase in NYC's tree canopy from 2017 to 2021 came from the growth of existing trees ([The State of the Urban Forest in NYC](#)).

How did you determine which areas receive trees first?

Every tree is valuable, and we are excited to plant trees in every neighborhood in New York City through this new program, but we cannot plant every deserving location at once, so we are prioritizing the neighborhoods with the highest heat index and the fewest trees. Neighborhood Tree Planting locations are prioritized based on the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's (DOHMH) [Heat Vulnerability Index \(HVI\)](#), a tool developed by DOHMH and Columbia University that identifies which communities are most at risk from extreme heat. High-HVI neighborhoods experience the highest rates of

heat-related illnesses and death, so we have designed the program to service these crucial areas first.

What long-term maintenance strategies are in place for newly planted trees?

Parks and our contractors are responsible for all basic maintenance, including watering, weeding, and replacement (if the latter is necessary) for at least one year after the tree is planted. As trees mature, we maintain them under our Tree Risk Management program.

Parks performs routine maintenance on our street trees every seven years (as funding allows) through our Block Pruning Program. Outside of that cycle, we rely on New Yorkers to report conditions of concern so we can maintain a healthy and safe urban forest. Parks responds to requests to remove dead, damaged, and fallen trees and limbs and concerns about illegal tree damage by sending an inspector to determine the appropriate action and level of priority based on a standardized tree risk assessment. Parks also operates a Trees and Sidewalks Program to repair sidewalks damaged by the roots of city trees at smaller, residential properties.

How does Parks determine which tree beds to enlarge?

Parks enlarges tree beds when planting new trees through our Neighborhood Tree Planting Program and when repairing sidewalks damaged from tree roots through the Trees and Sidewalks Program. Parks aims for the largest size tree beds appropriate for each site to allow as much space as possible for tree roots to expand and to minimize future conflicts as newly planted trees mature. To determine the size of the tree bed and if it can be expanded, we consider the available sidewalk width—always making sure the remaining sidewalk complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards—and the proximity of the tree bed to adjacent infrastructure. 🌳



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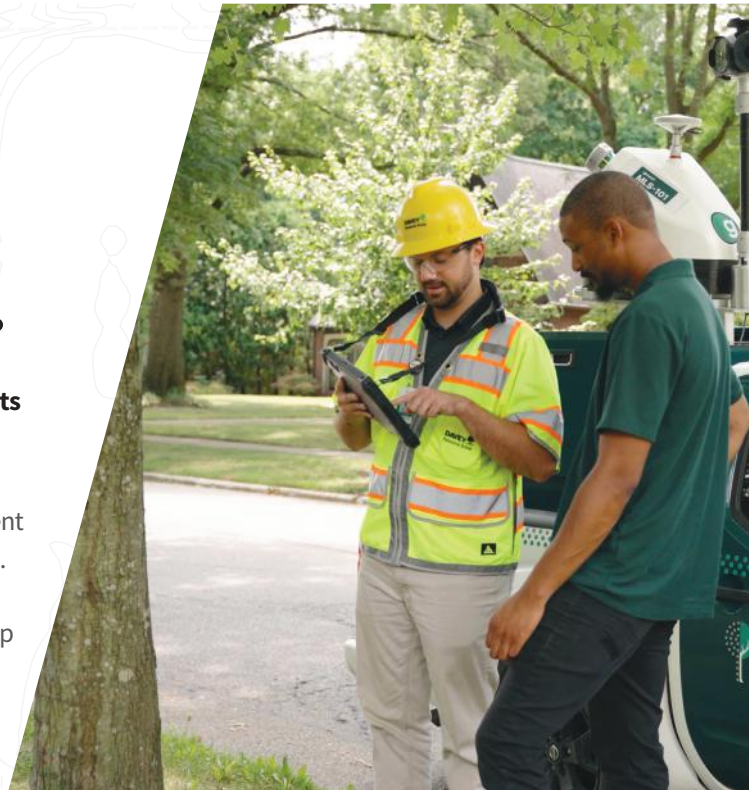
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The Resilient Canopy

It's Often Sunny in Calgary ... and its Semi-arid Climate Poses Challenges for Growing City Trees. UCFS Member Jody Lewis Tells the Story of Urban Forestry in Alberta's Most Populous City.

All Photos Courtesy of the City of Calgary



The City of Calgary (The City) Urban Forestry Superintendent Jody Lewis is an ISA Certified Urban Forest Professional bringing more than 15 years of experience in municipal urban forestry planning. She leads a dynamic team responsible for nursery production, tree procurement, public tree planting initiatives, and citywide tree watering programs.

A graduate of Olds College and a certified Landscape Horticulturalist, Lewis blends deep operational expertise with a lifelong commitment to public service. Her background in urban forestry operations, paired with her dedication to community stewardship, enhances her ability to build resilient teams, contribute meaningfully to municipal green infrastructure planning, and support the advancement of Calgary's canopy goals.

Calgary is located in southern Alberta, Canada, just east of the Rocky Mountains. Indigenous peoples have their own names for this area that have been in use long before settlers named this place Calgary. In the Blackfoot language, it is called **Moh-kins-tsis**. The Îlethka Nakoda Wîcastabi First Nations refer to this place as **Wicispa Oyade** and the people of the Tsuut'ina Nation call it **Guts-ists-I**. The Métis call the Calgary area **Otos-kwunee**. Calgary occupies a distinctive transition zone between the Rocky Mountain Foothills and the Canadian Prairies, a position that strongly influences its ecology, climate, and urban forest management priorities.

Established as a city in 1894, Calgary has grown to a population of approximately 1.8 million, making it the fourth largest municipality in Canada. Its public tree inventory includes nearly 500,000 trees representing

a wide range of genera and species. This urban forest forms a vital component of Calgary's green infrastructure, contributing to ecological resilience, climate adaptation, and community well-being.

Calgary's geography produces highly localized and often demanding environmental conditions. In the northwest, where the city meets the Foothills, Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) occurs naturally along sections of the Bow River corridor—one of the few places on the Canadian Prairies where this species persists. Moving eastward, the landscape shifts into semi-arid prairie, reflecting Calgary's position on the western edge of Palliser's Triangle, a region historically characterized by low precipitation, drought stress, and limited natural tree cover, creating a complex environment for urban forestry. >>



Members of Calgary's Urban Forestry team show off healthy plant stock at Pine Creek Nursery.

How do you procure nursery stock for Calgary's challenging growing conditions?

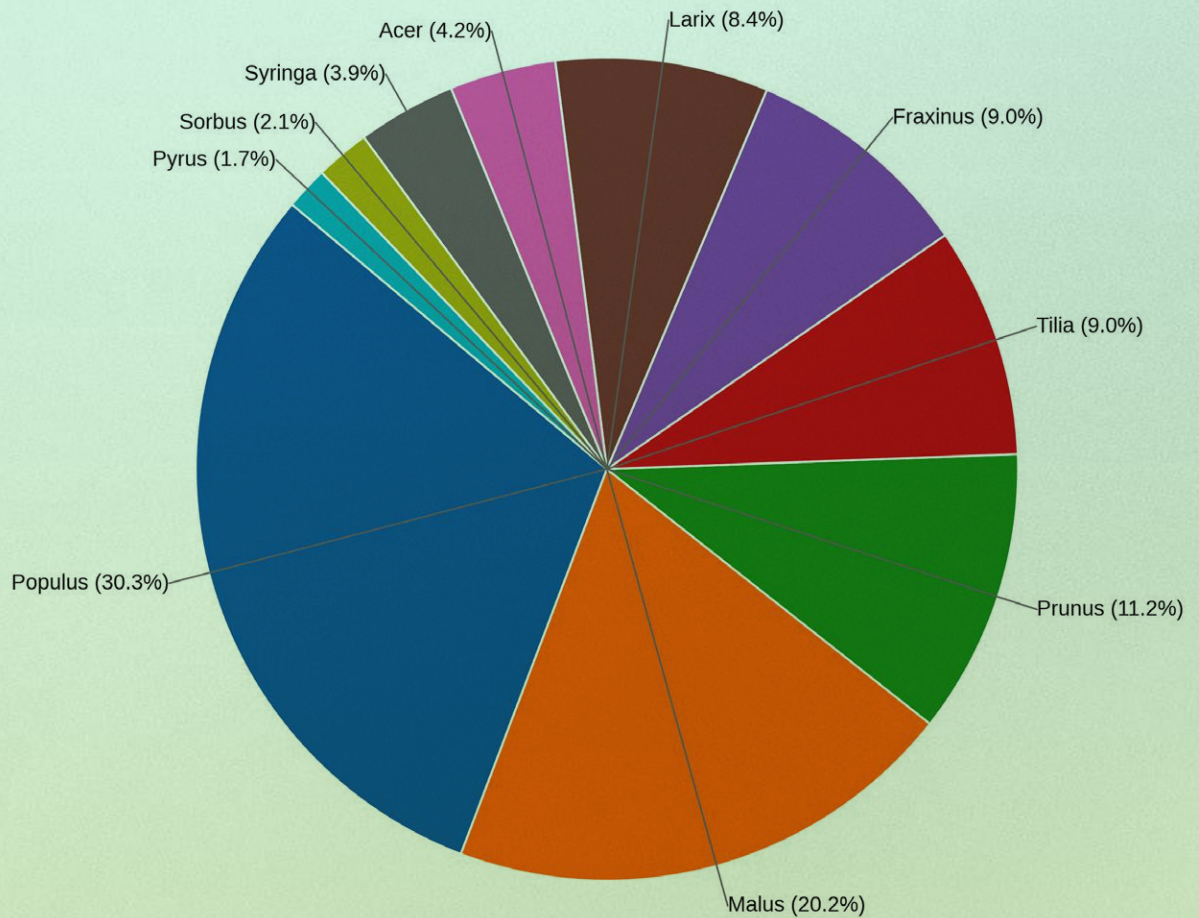
The City has a long-standing history of operating civic nurseries and tree farms to support municipal tree production and to supply plant material for parks, boulevards, natural areas, and the broader urban forest. Over time, some of these nurseries have been decommissioned. Prior to 1972, the primary facility was the Glenmore Civic Nursery, a 9.3-hectare (23-acre) site located near what is now part of Heritage Park on the Glenmore Reservoir in southwest Calgary.

In 2004, the expansion of Heritage Park required the relocation of the Glenmore nursery. A business case was developed to support this transition, resulting in the establishment of Pine Creek Nursery in 2006. This civic facility was constructed adjacent to the Pine Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant

in the Legacy–Pine Creek area and was designed to serve as The City's primary nursery operation.

Pine Creek Nursery continues to operate at full capacity and remains a cornerstone of Calgary's urban forest program. Our facility spans 13.8 hectares (34 acres), with more than 10 hectares (25 acres) dedicated to active tree production. At any given time, we maintain an inventory of roughly 8,500 trees and we harvest approximately 2,000 balled & burlap/wire basket trees annually to support municipal planting initiatives across the city.

In addition to the trees grown at Pine Creek Nursery, The City purchases nursery stock from a variety of professional growers across Alberta and British Columbia. The City partners with growers who, like our Nursery, participate in the Canadian Nursery Landscape Association (CNLA) Clean Plants certification program, which promotes strong plant health standards and reduces the



Top 10 Tree Genera Grown at Pine Creek Nursery.

risk of introducing pests and diseases into Calgary’s urban forest. Through its collaboration with the Western Nursery Growers Group (WNGG), The City also has the opportunity to trial new and promising species, support innovation within the nursery industry, and access stock that is specifically grown and tested for Calgary’s unique climate conditions.

For more than a decade, our team has partnered closely with Calgary’s IT department to build a robust digital inventory system that tracks each tree from the moment it’s planted as a liner through its entire life cycle. Every tree receives a unique “phytosanitary number,” scanned and recorded at planting. That identifier stays with the tree for life—from field production to shipment, to planting in its permanent location, and even through future inspections. This level of traceability helps us monitor health, manage pests and diseases, forecast harvests, and ensure we’re delivering high-quality plant material to Calgary communities.

How is Calgary’s residential street tree planting program funded?

The City of Calgary operates a street tree planting program primarily funded through a Council-approved four-year capital budget, with investments directed toward both tree replacement and new tree planting. These efforts contribute to The City’s climate goal of increasing canopy cover from 9.62 percent (as measured in 2024) to 16 percent by 2060.

Up until the 2028 growing season, The City will receive additional support through the Government of Canada’s 2 Billion Trees Program to help expand planting capacity, improve species diversity, and support green infrastructure initiatives across all communities in Calgary. >>

Do residents have a choice of species? Can residents decline a street tree?

The City's Urban Forestry team delivers two community tree planting programs designed for planting on public land—the School Planting Program and the Neighbourhood Trees Program. These initiatives provide opportunities for public involvement in tree planting by working directly with an Urban Forestry professional to determine the most suitable tree for each location.

If requested during the planning stage, Urban Forestry staff collaborate closely with residents or students to ensure the selected tree is the right fit for the location. Each assessment follows the “Calgary Parks and

Open Spaces 2024 - Development Guidelines and Standard Specifications: Landscape Construction” document and considers factors such as nearby utilities, soil conditions, space for planting, watering, long-term maintenance, sightlines and visibility, stock availability, and species suitability and diversity requirements.

Residents and students are encouraged to share concerns or site-specific considerations; however, declining a public tree outright is generally not supported unless there is a clear operational or safety constraint. The goal is always to find an appropriate solution that supports both community needs and the long-term health of Calgary's urban forest. >>



Young Calgarians take part in one of The City's volunteer tree planting events.



Calgary Parks staff at a Branching Out event; The City provides trees to Calgarians who plant and care for them on their own property, helping grow Calgary's tree canopy on private land.



Autumn foliage invites a stroll through Calgary's Edworthy Park.

How does your watering program/cycle for newly planted trees work?

Once a new tree is planted, it is added to a multi-year watering program designed to help trees through establishment and healthy root system development so they can adapt to Calgary's climate. Before planting, trees are added to our Esri GIS online map application and are assigned a unique identification number. This number includes planting date, tree source, stock type, trunk diameter, condition rating, watering year, and the tree's phytosanitary number. When a tree is planted in its designated location, the planting supplier updates its status from "planned" to "active" and the tree is automatically added to a watering schedule based on its installation date. Every City-planted tree receives water on the day it is installed.

Calgary's Urban Forestry watering program is delivered through a combination of contracted water trucks (32 at peak season) and City-operated trucks

(2). Each supplier manages 11 routes per/day, watering approximately 125–150 trees per route during the growing season. Eight hourly trucks are also utilized to facilitate watering hard-to-access tree assets.

Each truck is equipped with a Centralized Fleet Operations System unit and a specialized flow meter that dispenses a predetermined volume of water based on the tree's stock type: 40 litres (10.6 gal) for container stock and 60 litres (16 gal) for wire basket stock. Operators receive their routes through an Esri GIS application and record each watering event using Esri's Survey123. The system logs the exact volume of water used for each tree, and weekly reports compare assigned trees with recorded water transactions to verify supplier invoices.

To ensure quality and accuracy, Urban Forestry staff conduct regular spot checks using soil moisture meters, and they record their findings using Survey123. The moisture meters indicate how much water trees need

at that location, allowing us to measure and apply a specific volume to newly planted trees through establishment. This helps reduce water waste and improve efficiency, while confirming that trees are being watered as scheduled and receiving the care they need.

Calgary's establishment watering program runs from May to October and follows this schedule:

- 1st year: watered once per week
- 2nd year: watered every two weeks
- 3rd year: watered every two weeks
- 4th year: watered five times per season
- 5th year: watered five times per season

How does Calgary deal with invasive forest pests?

Urban Forestry's best defense against invasive forest pests is prevention and early detection. We prioritize monitoring for pests such as Dutch elm disease (DED) and emerald ash borer (EAB)—neither of which have yet been found in Calgary. We collaborate with Federal and Provincial partners in our public education and monitoring efforts for EAB, DED, and other forest invasives, such as spongy moth.

Our monitoring and early detection efforts for EAB include putting up sticky traps baited with pheromone lures in spring and summer, sampling ash branches, training staff to detect the signs and symptoms of EAB, and having staff and volunteers conduct visual surveys of ash trees for any signs of EAB. >>

Golfers at The City of Calgary's Shaganappi Point Golf Course get a dramatic view of the cityscape and tree canopy, including Calgary's Douglas Fir Trail.



We prioritize prevention and early detection of DED by promoting elm health and disease awareness and by monitoring elm beetle populations with sticky traps. Urban Forestry staff interact with thousands of elm trees annually. Throughout the summer, they watch for symptoms of DED and will collect and submit samples of any suspect trees for Provincial testing.

We also promote awareness through public education on EAB, DED, and other pests and diseases through seasonal workshops at info booths set up at various city parks in spring and summer, in pest profiles on *calgary.ca*, and via social media. A large part of our public education focuses on preventing human-assisted spread by sharing the messages “Don’t Move Firewood” and “Burn it Where You Buy It.”

Pine Creek Nursery maintains rigorous phytosanitary and pest management standards through close collaboration

with Parks-Internal Pest Management and active participation in the aforementioned CNLA Clean Plants Certification program. Lures and sticky traps are installed throughout field production areas to support early detection of invasive or regulated pests, and all incoming plant shipments are thoroughly inspected by the crop protection manager or a trained delegate before being released into the holding area. In alignment with Section 3.8 of the Pine Creek Clean Plant Manual, any pest observed by staff or contractors is immediately reported, with identification verified either in-house or by IPM specialists.

Plant material found with regulated pests is isolated off-site pending Canadian Food Inspection Agency (CFIA) investigation, and any affected production areas are roped off and restricted until the issue is resolved. Pine Creek Nursery will contact CFIA and/or the Canadian Nursery Certification Institute (CNCI) immediately if any regulated pests are detected. These measures



collectively ensure that The City minimizes the risk of introducing or spreading harmful pests and continues to uphold best management practices that protect the urban forest and surrounding natural environments.

How has the City adapted its tree selection, planting, and maintenance standards to improve resilience to future extreme weather events?

Calgary's urban forest operates under a unique climatic regime shaped by its Plant Hardiness Zone 4a classification and the strong influence of Chinook events, which can produce rapid midwinter temperature fluctuations exceeding 20°C (68°F). These abrupt warm periods frequently induce premature budbreak initiation, followed by terminal bud mortality when temperatures return to baseline. Combined with the region's cold semi-arid

conditions, low annual precipitation, and high evapotranspiration rates, these factors create significant establishment and long-term survivability challenges for municipal trees.

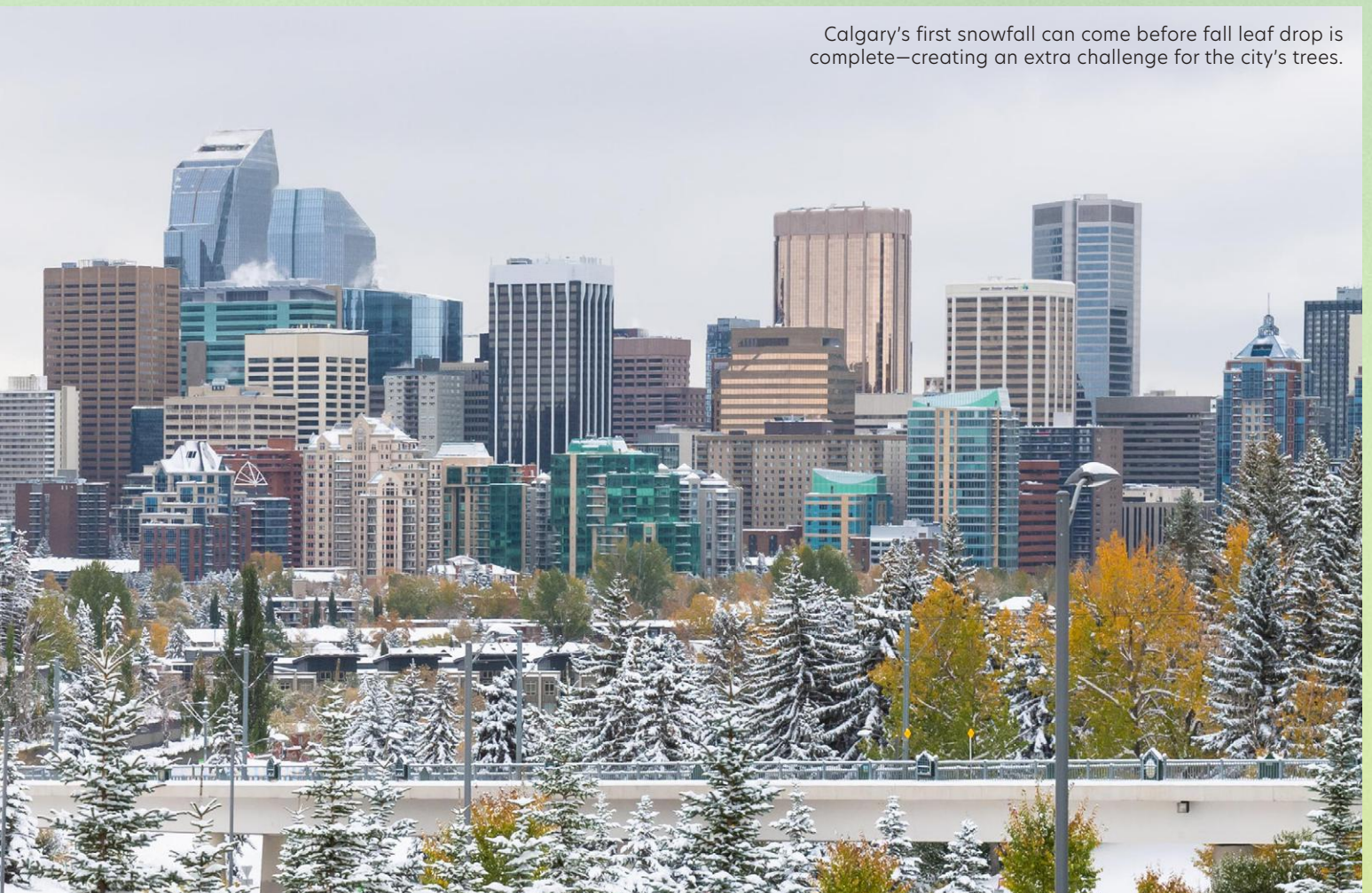
To address these constraints, our Urban Forestry team focuses on species diversification, improved production standards, and enhanced establishment techniques.

1. Species Selection and Genetic Adaptation

Through ongoing collaboration with the Western Nursery Growers Group (WNGG), Calgary is able to:

- trial new and underutilized taxa with improved cold hardiness, pest and disease resistance, and drought tolerance
- evaluate performance of stock sourced from regions with similar freeze-thaw dynamics, and
- encourage nursery partners to develop climate-resilient cultivars. >>

Calgary's first snowfall can come before fall leaf drop is complete—creating an extra challenge for the city's trees.



2. Production Innovations

To improve root structure and transplant success, The City is actively trialing:

- airpot and air pruning systems to reduce circling roots and enhance fibrous root development
- soil amendments such as compost and biochar to increase porosity, cation exchange capacity, and water holding potential, and
- modified irrigation regimes during production to promote deeper rooting and hardening off.

3. Planting Standards and Site Preparation

Calgary has refined its planting specifications to mitigate transplant stress by:

- planting at grade to reduce stem girdling root formation and improve gas exchange
- providing rootzone protection using a 150-mm (6-inch) layer of recycled mulch applied to the dripline to moderate soil temperature, suppress weeds, reduce moisture loss, and reduce mechanical damage to trunk and root zone, and
- adjusting planting depths to accommodate variable soil textures and prevent crown rot in poorly drained sites.

4. Establishment Watering Enhancements

Given Calgary's drought-prone environment, The City continues to optimize its establishment watering program by:

- implementing precision watering technologies, including water bags and water retention systems
- using GIS-integrated scheduling to ensure consistent application during the critical first five years, and
- monitoring soil moisture and tree response to refine watering frequency and volume.

What can you tell us about the current and future tree taxa picture?

Calgary's public urban forest comprises approximately 500,000 trees representing 44 distinct genera, with *Picea*, *Populus*, *Fraxinus*, *Ulmus*, and *Prunus* forming the predominant canopy structure.

As both *Fraxinus* and *Ulmus* are now considered species at risk in our region, the Pine Creek Nursery team is proactively expanding species- and genus-level diversity to enhance long-term urban forest resilience. Current initiatives include the trial and production of *Ulmus davidiana* var. *japonica*, a DED-resistant elm demonstrating strong drought tolerance and proven adaptability to Calgary's heavy clay soils. The cultivars *Acer saccharinum* 'Silver Cloud' and *Tilia cordata* 'BySkinner' also tolerate drought and difficult soils and are noted for their strong central leaders and reliable structural form. They tolerate the removal of lower branches to meet required urban clearances—4.6 m (15 ft) over streets and 2.4 m (8 ft) over sidewalks—making them suitable for boulevard and streetscape applications. All three taxa are in production at Pine Creek Nursery and/or are being procured for tree planting programs. Increased emphasis on *Acer* and *Quercus* taxa will further support our diversification objectives going forward.

Would you like to share some career highlights?

Jody Lewis: I am most proud of the strong relationships I've built throughout my career—both within the Urban Forestry team and with our many partners. These relationships are the foundation of my work, enabling me to grow a program that is collaborative, innovative, and deeply committed to Calgary's urban forest. My leadership is rooted in the belief that strong relationships are the foundation of meaningful, lasting impact. Whether working within the Urban Forestry team or alongside our many partners, I strive to cultivate an environment where every voice is valued, and every contribution strengthens our shared purpose.

Recently, I had the opportunity to highlight the efforts, accomplishments, and innovations of our Nursery, Planting, and Watering teams during a Parks Director ride-along. Our team walked the Director through our operational processes and showcased both planting and watering activities in the field. The event was very well received, and I felt truly honoured to represent and lead such a dedicated and dynamic team. I truly believe leadership is an act of service. My role is to remove barriers, empower others, and create clarity so teams can do their best work. I champion innovation and continuous improvement, encouraging curiosity, and supporting new approaches. >>

Acer saccharinum 'Silver Cloud' highlighted at the Prairie Tree Trial Field Day at Eagle Lake Nurseries in Strathmore (east of Calgary) in August, 2024. The event was hosted by Landscape Alberta Nursery Producers (LANP) and Western Nursery Growers Group (WNGG).



My career with Parks-Urban Forestry has taken me through every part of the operation. I started as a seasonal employee updating inventory records, supporting tree planting programs, pruning trees, coordinating contractor work, and helping with nursery production. Over time, I've had the opportunity to lead process improvements, conduct tree risk evaluations for poplar (*Populus* spp.) removals, and contribute to major changes in how we grow, plant, and care for trees across Calgary.

Today, I'm proud to support a dynamic team that is constantly pushing for innovation—whether that's improving nursery production methods, refining planting operations, or enhancing our citywide watering program. Seeing how far we've come, and knowing how committed our team is to continuous improvement gives me a great deal of pride. At its core, our program is built on people who care deeply about Calgary's trees and the communities they support. That shared commitment is what makes our work meaningful and keeps it moving forward. 🌳

The 2025 UCFS conference in Henderson, Nevada was my first, and it made a lasting impression. I was struck by the professionalism of the attendees and the breadth of experience represented across the group. The breakout sessions were well run by knowledgeable experts, the guest speakers added meaningful depth to the program, and the exhibitors found creative ways to connect with participants.

—Jody Lewis

Located in a region with limited natural tree cover, most of Calgary's urban canopy has grown through dedicated planting over a hundred-plus years. Here, one can see the Bow River meandering towards Calgary's downtown.

