Conserve. Protect. Enhance.

Urban and Community Forestry Success in Wisconsin: Trees First, Wood Next

Wisconsin's urban wood utilization program started with a small group of Madison residents intent on making use of their neighborhood trees killed by emerald ash borer. Wisconsin Urban Wood, supported by a Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources grant, brought their vision into focus by helping local arborists, sawyers, mills, makers and retailers work together to convert downed street and park trees into beautiful urban wood products.

Three years later in 2017, the Urban Wood Network (UWN) was launched with help from Wisconsin Urban Wood and a USDA Forest Service State and Private Forestry grant. The UWN began partnering with urban wood experts in Michigan, Illinois, and Missouri, and soon a UWN-Western Region chapter was established. By 2020, the UWN was awarded a National Urban and Community Forestry Challenge grant to help it create and expand local urban wood programs "coast to coast" in five additional states.

Network-wide, the UWN works to ensure urban trees can "live on" after being removed due to death, disease, pests, or other circumstances in the utilization of their wood. The wise use of urban forest resources—from seed to sawdust—can mitigate the costs of tree removal and planting for municipalities and enhance the health, diversity, and resilience of urban forests in the long run (McPherson, 1994; Stai, Wiseman & Fernholz, 2017). Additionally, local urban wood programs:

- Reduce the amount of woody material going to landfills or being stored in municipal yards,
- Stimulate private sector innovation and investment to create local jobs, goods, services, as well as workforce development programs targeting at-risk youth and adult populations,
- Provide incentives to maintain a stable, productive urban forest resource base,
- Conserve non-urban forestland resources through increased urban tree utilization, and
- Demonstrate the environmental benefits of urban wood utilization including sustainability, carbon sequestration, and reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

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