

# COMMUNITY AND URBAN FORESTRY 2024 End of Year Report

## Introduction

This was a special year for many reasons. We added a new position, urban forestry specialist, to our program and awarded more than \$3 million in grants to municipalities and nonprofits. We also hosted six Tree Steward events, the 2024 Indiana Community and Urban Forestry Symposium, the annual Arbor Day poster contest, a Big Tree Tour, and two Tree City forums. We accomplished a lot in 2024, and we're excited to keep growing in 2025. Here's a look at everything we achieved together in the past year.

## CUF Staff



**Jacob Roos**  
*Community & Urban  
Forestry Director*



**Racheal Stenger**  
*Community & Urban Forestry  
Outreach Coordinator*



**Madeline Gullion**  
*Urban Forestry Specialist*



Tree Steward Workshop in Portage, IN

## Grants & Funding

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### Inflation Reduction Act Funding

In 2023, our program was awarded *\$4.125 million in federal funding* in addition to our annual allocation. With those funds, we have awarded \$3.6 million to municipalities and nonprofits in areas that have been determined to be disadvantaged/underserved and hired an additional staff member, Madeline Gullion, as urban forestry specialist. Below is the list of IRA grant recipients from 2024.

#### ***First Round of Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) Funding***

Indiana Arborist Association: \$250,000	City of Noblesville: \$106,150
City of New Albany: \$250,000	Trees Inc.: \$75,000
Evansville Forest Alliance: \$249,616	City of Jeffersonville: \$63,500
Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Inc.: \$239,457	Regreening Greenfield: \$50,000
CanopyBloomington: \$239,399	

#### ***Second Round of IRA Funding***

City of Mount Vernon: \$212,800	City of Terre Haute: \$152,622
Unity Gardens: \$200,000	The Nature Conservancy/City of Gary: \$125,180
Delta Institute/City of Hammond: \$198,587	Town of Clarksville: \$122,000
Save Maumee: \$177,823	City of Shelbyville: \$110,600
City of Elwood: \$169,500	City of Beech Grove: \$103,500
City of Richmond: \$159,789	Northwest Landing: \$74,940
Rensselaer Urban Forestry Council/ Jasper Newton Foundation: \$157,945	City of Kendallville: \$63,845
	City of Madison: \$47,725

### Grant Recipient Testimonials

#### ***Keep Indianapolis Beautiful Inc.***

The program enabled us to hire three additional young adults to learn and carry out tree care, preparing them for jobs in forestry or other environmental fields. In addition to helping them make connections and transition from college to career, this program is increasing the number of potential future employees for departments of Natural Resources, Environmental Management, and Public Works. It is also improving the accuracy and usefulness of our tree database and helping direct our planting and maintenance programs in the future.

#### ***CanopyBloomington***

We would not be able to prepare to have larger community engagement and equitable maintenance plans without first receiving funding from this grant program. Community engagement and maintenance are highly important aspects of Canopy's mission, and without funding to support Canopy, we cannot support our community in an equitable manner.



*Urban Naturalists take a group selfie on KIB's green roof, Summer 2024*



*Volunteers plant a tree during CanopyBloomington's Broadview Neighborhood tree planting, April 2024*

## Community & Urban Forestry Annual Funding Opportunities

In July, we announced the return of our CUFA grants as well as additional funding called the State Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) grant and Natural Disaster Recovery (NDR) grant. Through these three grants, we awarded more than a combined \$200,000 to nine communities.

### **Community & Urban Forestry Assistance (CUFA) Funding:**

Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation: \$25,000

Town of Nashville: \$20,000

City of Plainfield: \$25,000

Indiana Arborist Association: \$14,650

TREES Inc.: \$25,000

IU-Indianapolis: \$13,800

City of West Lafayette: \$24,557

### **State Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) Funding**

City of New Albany: \$50,000

### **Natural Disaster Recovery (NDR) Funding**

IU-Bloomington and Southeast Campuses: \$20,000

## Tree City Forums

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The Arbor Day Foundation's Tree City USA program recognizes and supports cities that create and maintain canopy cover because a city that takes care of its trees also takes care of its people. There are 65 communities in Indiana that have met the four standards in people, policy, investment, and celebration to earn the designation as Tree City USA. Communities must reapply every year, showing proof that they still meet the four standards and sometimes are working toward a Growth Award, which recognizes efforts to go above and beyond the four standards.

Some communities, like Bloomington (40 years) and Noblesville (34 years) are seasoned members of the program. Others, like North Liberty and Seymour (two years) are relatively new. On either end of the spectrum, great things are happening in the urban forestry world. As the program grows, we wanted to create a space for representatives from all our Tree City USA communities to meet, network, and learn from each other.

This year, we hosted two Tree City forums. Communities in central and southern Indiana met at Morgan-Monroe State Forest in Martinsville. Northern communities were invited to our second forum in Elkhart. At both forums, we left plenty of time for roundtable discussion during which participants could talk and ask questions of everyone in attendance. Great conversation took place, and we look forward to hosting more forums next year.

## Hello from the Urban Forestry Specialist

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With all the federal funding coming to communities across the country, it's an exciting time to be in urban forestry. My position is new to the DNR Community and Urban Forestry program. It was created to support communities across Indiana that have been identified as disadvantaged/underserved by the Climate and Economic Justice Screening Tool as they steward their urban forests. I've worked with dozens of communities this year, and I am grateful for their hard work and dedication. Here's a glimpse of what we've accomplished together so far:

### **Community Engagement**

Community engagement (CE) is the intentional process of cultivating meaningful, two-way relationships between organizations and community members. It fosters a sense of ownership, belonging, and support, and this empowers individuals to act and to care for their collective resources. We prioritize CE in our work because it leads to better outcomes for trees and people.

Historically, communities have not been included in the decision-making process regarding their urban forests. We want to work toward a future with a diverse, resilient urban forest that is co-created *with* com-

munities instead of being something that is done *to* communities without their input or permission.

The current spotlight on the importance of community engagement allows us to connect with new communities, build relationships, and ultimately increase the equitable distribution of benefits associated with urban forestry.

We awarded two rounds of extra federal funding this year, totaling \$3.6 million to 24 communities. All of these communities contain CEJST census tracts, and all on-the-ground work (like tree planting) must take place directly within those census tracts. (Other activities like education can benefit everyone in the community.)

As of March 2024, all tree plantings funded through CUF must be paired with community engagement. This entails working closely with me to create a unique strategy for engagement in your community. Because there is no one-size-fits-all when it comes to CE, and because this structure is new, we are still developing a framework of specific requirements for future grant recipients.

### **Species Selection Guide**

All trees planted with CUF funding must be species native to Indiana. In the past, the only resource we provided grant recipients was a list of acceptable species. This list had no information about size, sunlight requirements, or any of the other considerations necessary for successful species selection. In order to make this process more accessible for communities with less tree planting experience, I created the Tree Species List and a comprehensive Species Selection Guide.

The Tree Species List includes all tree species native to Indiana that we currently recommend for planting. Not included are species like maple, which are vastly overplanted, and ash, which are susceptible to emerald ash borer. For each species, there is information about growth, suitable planting locations, and tolerance to environmental conditions. These categories are based on visual site conditions and do not require special tests or advanced knowledge of arboriculture.

The Species Selection Guide talks about why we encourage planting native, the importance of “Right Tree, Right Place,” and shares some resources to consider as we plant for the future.

Together, these resources will give communities a strong foundation for their tree planting decisions.

## **Outreach and Education Overview**

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### **Thoughts on the 2024 Year from the CUF Outreach Coordinator**

Special thanks to all of our partners who put a lot of work into making these events happen, including the Northwest Indiana Regional Planning Commission (NIRPC), Great Lakes Urban Forestry Management, CommuniTree, Great Scott Trees, Trees Indiana, West Lafayette Parks and Recreation, Auburn Parks and Recreation, Indy Parks and Recreation, City of Evansville, and Wesselman Woods. A special thanks also to those who serve on the IN-CFC working group to make our statewide urban forestry symposium a success: Zach Garcia, Lori Perdue, Kyle Daniel, Aren Flint, Carrie Tauscher, and Laura Karnes.

### **Tree Stewards**

Our Tree Stewards program continues to be popular and in high demand throughout the state. We started the year off with an advanced Tree Stewards workshop at the NIRPC campus, where about 20 participants learned about some of the newest technologies emerging out of the urban forestry field. Thanks to Steve Lane from Great Lakes Urban Forestry for sharing his expertise.

In the spring, we hosted Tree Steward workshops in Scottsburg, West Lafayette, and Auburn, with a combined attendance of around 70 participants. Some of the most notable moments included finding a spongy moth caterpillar in Auburn with the DNR nursery inspector and pausing for an impromptu group picture after pruning several trees around the West Lafayette city hall.

This fall, we hosted general Tree Stewards workshops in Portage and Indianapolis. We also held a separate one-day “refresh course” in Indianapolis for those who had previously attended a Tree Stewards workshop and wanted to brush up on their skills and knowledge. We had 56 total people for the general workshops, and we had 13 returning participants join for their second Tree Stewards workshop. It is always a joy to connect with folks who have a passion for trees.



## Big Tree Tour

The Big Tree Register is a list of the largest known specimen of each native tree species in Indiana, maintained by the CUF program. This year I expanded this program by beginning to host “Big Tree Tours” celebrating large heritage trees around the state. Eighteen people from southern Indiana got to see some state champions as well as plenty of Vanderburgh County champions around Evansville. We also got to see some massive trees on a hike through Wesselman Woods, which is the nation’s largest urban old-growth forest. One of the most notable trees on the tour was the previous state champion cherrybark oak (*Quercus pagoda*). This tree is on the Evansville State Hospital grounds and has a circumference of more than 21 feet.

## Arbor Day Poster Contest

“Oak Trees: Superheroes of the Forest” was this year’s theme for our 5th Grade Arbor Day Poster Contest. Fifth graders from 17 schools around the state were tasked with artfully representing oak trees and their “superpower” adaptations in the natural world. Thanks to the Indiana Tree Farm, the top three student winners received a Witness Trees informational book, and the top three teachers received a nature-themed teacher toolkit. We planted a lovely Shumard oak (nicknamed ‘Sh-Amelia’) at a park in Ferdinand in honor of the winner. The tree planting just so happened to fall on the winner’s 11<sup>th</sup> birthday, making it a memorable tree planting, indeed.



## 2024 Indiana Community and Urban Forestry Symposium

The 2024 Community and Urban Forestry Symposium was held in Indianapolis at Crown Hill Cemetery and Arboretum on Dec. 3–4, 2024. Overall, around 130 people attended over the two day event (including in-person and virtual). 24 speakers talked about a wide variety of urban forestry subjects. Special thanks to everyone in the IN-CFC executive committee and board of directors for volunteering their time and expertise. This event was important for connecting folks from across the state with a vested interest in urban forestry. We learned, we networked, and we ate. This event was one for the books.

*Special thanks to our sponsors for making this event possible:*



Also special thanks to the Community Canopy Alliance and Wabash Riverkeeper Network!