

COMMUNITY AND URBAN FORESTRY 2025 End of Year Report

Introduction

2025 was an eventful year for the Community and Urban Forestry program, with a new round of grants and several “tree-mendous” outreach events. We awarded more than \$300,000 in grants to 21 communities, nonprofits, and schools. We hosted three Tree Stewards and one advanced Tree Stewards, the annual Arbor Day Poster Contest, another Big Tree Tour, and the 2025 Indiana Community and Urban Forestry Symposium. Looking toward 2026, we are grateful to have the opportunity to continue supporting communities across Indiana in their urban forestry work.

While we are proud of our accomplishments, our work is meaningless without the passion and drive of every Hoosier doing work in urban forestry. To all in the urban forestry community, please know that we see you, and we thank you for all your energy, creativity, enthusiasm, and compassion for trees and your communities.

Grants & Funding Overview

2025 Grants Awarded

In an effort to get smaller communities involved in our grants program, we announced this year a new grant opportunity called “Small Town Big Trees.” This opportunity is available only to communities whose population is 10,000 or less. In the inaugural round for this grant, we awarded tree planting funds to three communities. All three are first-time participants in our grants program. They are Rising Sun, Charlestown and Wakarusa.

A returning grant opportunity this year was the State Urban Forest Resilience (SUFR) Grant. This grant provides funding for treatment and/or removal of ash trees as well as replanting in areas impacted by emerald ash borer. Groups awarded funding were City of Bloomington, Indiana University (Multiple campuses), and Regreening Greenfield.

Our traditional Community & Urban Forestry Assistance (CUFA) Grant awarded 15 organizations with funds to conduct tree inventories, create a workforce development program, plant trees, invasive species removal and replacement, creation of urban orchards/foraging forests, and more. Groups awarded funding are City of Jeffersonville, Carmel Clay Parks and Recreation, City of Kendallville, Bethany Christian School, Ivy Tech, City of Richmond, City of Noblesville, TREES Inc., Minnetrista Museum and Gardens, Hamilton County Parks and Recreation, City of Huntington, IU-Kokomo, Unity Gardens, Whitko Community School, and Bartholomew County SWCD.

Grant Trainings

As part of our technical assistance for our 2024 grant recipients, we hosted two different grant trainings this year. Street and parks staff in the city of Elwood learned about proper tree planting and mainte-

CUF STAFF



Jacob Roos
Program Director



Racheal Stenger
Outreach Coordinator

nance, while IU students and staff from five different campuses came together to learn about tree biology, tree ID, and proper tree planting and maintenance.

Special thanks to staff from the city of Elwood and IU for helping coordinate these trainings to ensure our grant-funded trees are cared for with the highest standards.

Intern Work

Over the summer we welcomed Madeline Brinker to our team while she took a break from studying Environmental Studies at the University of Cincinnati. In her time with us, she helped with monitoring past tree planting projects, measuring current and newly nominated Big Trees, digitizing all past Big Tree Register booklets plus many other projects. She was a great addition to our team, and we wish her luck as she works toward graduation this spring.



IDNR CUF Outreach & Education Overview

General Outreach

We love to assist with urban forestry projects across the state, whether that be with tree planting coordination, advising newly formed nonprofits on next steps, attending career fairs, or presenting about the benefits of trees. Here are a few pictures showcasing our travels around Indiana this year.



Tree Stewards

We had a total of 54 new Tree Stewards attend workshops in Goshen, Muncie, and Evansville. Special thanks to our hosting partners for this year – Goshen Department of Environmental Resilience, Minnetrista Museum & Gardens, and Wesselman Woods.

We also had 67 people attend an advanced Tree Stewards webinar about community orchards and food forests, presented by Josh David from Bloomington Community Orchard, Chris Smyth from Common Orchard Project, and Katie Lane from Unity Gardens. Special thanks for their expertise and collaboration on this.

We encourage anyone who is interested in starting a community orchard or food forest or who has plans to integrate fruit trees as a part of a larger project to watch the recording of this webinar on the Indiana DNR YouTube channel.



Big Tree Register & Tour

We hosted our second Big Tree Tour in northwest Indiana, with 15 participants attending a bus tour to explore and celebrate heritage trees and landscapes around the region. Stops on the tour included the state champion Northern pin oak at Gabis Arboretum, state champion Northern catalpa at Chellberg Farm at Indiana Dunes National Park, and an old-growth forest at Moraine Nature Preserve.

Special thanks to our partners for their support of the tour—Gabis Arboretum, DNR Division Fish, Wildlife & Nature Preserves, Indiana Dunes National Park, NIPSCO, Great Lakes Urban Forestry, and Communi-Tree.

Let it be known that Indiana now has a national champion tree. Owned by Richard and Kris Schepman, the national champion swamp chestnut oak is located in Jennings County.



Arbor Day Poster Contest

Our Arbor Day Poster Contest theme for the 2024-2025 season was “Healthy Trees, Healthy Me!”, with 17 schools submitting fantastic artwork centered around the health benefits of trees.

Congratulations to Jaxon Cadden from St. John the Baptist Catholic School in Newburgh, who won first place and received a tree planting at his school.

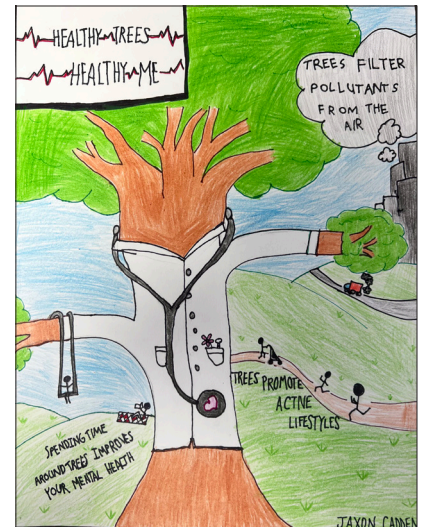
Symposium

This year we partnered with Bloomington Parks and Recreation to host the 2025 Indiana Community and Urban Forestry Symposium at Switchyard Pavillion in Bloomington.

We had 130 people in attendance from across Indiana. The conference focused on issues regarding urban forest preservation through ordinances and planning, best management practices regarding tree care and placement, urban forestry advocacy, and communication improvement between nursery growers and buyers.

Special thanks to the IN-CFC Education and Events committee, Bloomington Parks and Recreation, and the organizations who helped support this event to make it a success.

Recordings of sessions from this year’s symposium can be found on the DNR Youtube channel.



Final Thoughts

A word of encouragement to everyone in the urban forestry community unknown source quote: “In the presence of trees, we find strength, resilience, and a reminder of our own capacity for growth.” Just as trees are resilient, so are we. As we continue our work, here’s to a brighter, leafier 2026.

