

Key Issue #9: Expanding Public Awareness, Education and Environmental Literacy

Most thought leaders noted the need and opportunity to raise public awareness of UCF and increase UCF educational opportunities at both the community and national level. Urban forests need to be viewed as key infrastructure at the municipal, neighborhood, and home scale across America. A national-level public awareness campaign is needed with celebrity participation, social media, and a strong public relations campaign. A strong “boots on the ground” approach by nonprofit and community groups is also needed to connect communities with their urban forests and to highlight the role and benefits of urban forests. For example, giving away and planting fruit trees has successfully started many UCF programs in places such as Pittsburgh and Los Angeles. Most thought leaders also viewed creating or expanding programs in natural resource education, environmental education, and environmental literacy as a key need at multiple scales – in the home, in all levels of education, with school and community groups, in municipalities, and within the field itself.

IDEAS FOR ACTION - Gaps, Needs, Opportunities

Public Awareness

- Develop a massive collective effort to create a national public awareness/education campaign, re-branding UCF with a pop-culture driven public relations campaign, with social media, radio, TV, billboards, and advertising to significantly increase national awareness of UCF. Develop a catchy campaign title such as “Not Just a Tree Hugger.” Develop a website with celebrities promoting UCF, and pathways for practitioners to collaborate to a greater level. Utilize well known public relations companies to develop this, or potentially USFS public relations staff members.
 - Use an icon like Smoky the Bear or Lorax type of character that speaks to kids and adults alike.
 - Focus on social media to reach a wide audience in a short period of time around key UCF issues.
 - Take advantage of existing networks like SUFC and the Alliance for Community Trees to build a public awareness campaign.
 - Focus on public awareness at the community, state and federal levels.
 - Use multiple avenues to highlight the importance of trees and UCF through ideas such as happy hours to school program education.
 - Market the *benefits* of trees and not just the trees themselves.
 - Increase the focus on climate change in the discussion around UCF and planning for the future of communities. Focus on how UCF and plants create climate resilience at a basic level, which is a strong need in public awareness and communication.
 - Focus public awareness efforts on how urban forests are the habitat for urban citizens. For example, the bald eagle didn’t rebound until its habitat

was restored and protected. Focus on the effects of the destruction or loss of function of our human habitat – urban forests – and how to take action to halt its destruction.

- Engage citizens in UCF awareness and education opportunities with a focus on understanding trees and urban forests as a vital part of a community's health, essential services and infrastructure. Communicate the benefits of trees in health care and energy savings to citizens.
- Translate key UCF documents and resources to other languages so they are accessible to a wider range of citizens and practitioners.
- Develop an urban forestry communication hub (such as the "Eco Piazza" independent web-based communications website under development by Ed Macie of the USFS and others) for practitioners to discuss UCF issues, acquire resources, and where communication and cross-pollination of ideas can take place.
- Focus UCF outreach by theme and by population to increase efficiency of communication.
- Implement fruit tree giveaway and planting programs, potentially with shade trees as well. This has been a highly successful approach in some communities for increasing UCF interest and awareness.
- The Faces of Urban Forestry program from the Arbor Day Foundation is a model resource for public awareness. They are working on telling the story of different individuals whom have benefited from local, state and federal programs and investments.
- Support the professional standards of the International Society of Arboriculture and the Society of Municipal Arborists to increase recognition of these safety and professional standards in the field.
- Create a youth-focused UCF conference with a focus on both raising awareness of UCF, increasing environmental literacy and stewardship, and building awareness for the next generation of UCF leadership.
- Develop environmental literacy programs to create a more informed citizenry who will influence our natural resources in the future. For example, in 2014, the high school Envirothon competition 2014 theme is Urban Forestry. This type of activity helps raise public awareness of the field of urban forestry and with youth.
- Address the misperception of the costs and hazards of urban trees in a public awareness campaign (such as trees falling on top of houses, bikes running into trees); the actual risk of urban trees and urban forests is extremely low.
- Develop a strong public awareness effort around the biophysical needs of trees, geared toward planners, designers and architects, such as creating sufficient space, healthy soil, and efficient watering and maintenance programs for urban trees and community forests.

- Create a UCF public awareness campaign that is specific to policy makers to impart the importance of urban forestry and to make UCF research relevant. Create model ordinances or model legislation to promote UCF and share it with local, state and federal elected officials as they frequently don't have the UCF expertise but do have a design to "green" their cities or focus on sustainability efforts. (*Related to Key Issue 6.*)
- Increase communication opportunities between researchers and policy makers at a local, state, and federal levels. (*Related to Key Issue 6.*)

Educational opportunities and Environmental Literacy

- Develop opportunities for students in schools to utilize urban forest tools in their communities, especially at the middle and high school levels. These opportunities should include learning about the function and design of urban forests. Children will help educate their parents—for example children who grow up in a home without trees are less likely to plant trees around their homes when they are older.
- Develop urban education programs for children where they are already living and learning, with a focus on cities as urban ecosystems, urban and community forestry issues, and environmental educational opportunities in cities. (Thought leaders noted that many children may not ever make it to a national or state park, and will learn about natural resources and stewardship in the urban environment.)
- Develop a dedicated source of federal funding for a national urban and community forestry education program. Extension services could help implement this education program.
- Foster the development of UCF education from the elementary to graduate school level, but especially at the college level within planning, landscape architecture, engineering, and public works fields to ensure UCF literacy.
- Design outreach programs for academics, and for public works managers, to help them understand the function and appropriate design of UCF.
- Implement tree planting programs in schoolyards where children spend most of the day and where there are existing programs for tree care stewardship and maintenance. Connect with SOLs, common core science standards, and other teaching standards around UCF, environmental education, and opportunities to engage youth in UCF.
- Connect UCF with existing educational programming and resources, such as the Children and Nature Network (Richard Louv's organization -- www.childrenandnature.org), and environmental and outdoor education schools.
- Plant urban orchards and urban forests at schools as both demonstration sites, outdoor classroom laboratories for science and environmental education, as a vector for teaching about STEM (science, technology, engineering and math topics), urban ecology, and around urban and community forestry.

- Connect UCF and urban ecosystems educational opportunities to the new Next Generation Science Standards (national teaching standards), Standards of Learning, and other national school testing focus areas.
- Connect UCF issues and ideas for the next Ten-Year Urban Forestry Action Plan with educational leaders at events such as the Children and Nature Network 2015 conference.