

**COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE**  
Inter-Office Communication

Date: August 12, 2022  
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks  
Subject: Reforestation Update  
File Type: Informational Report

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**REQUEST**

At the December 7, 2021 Parks, Energy, and Environment Committee meeting, a verbal request was made for an update on Milwaukee County Parks' reforestation efforts.

**POLICY**

Wisconsin State Statutes:	
Milwaukee County Code of General Ordinances:	Ch. 108 – Achieving Racial Equity and Health
Specific Adopted Budget:	
Specific Adopted Budget Amendment:	
Specific Adopted Capital Project:	

**BACKGROUND**

Related File No's:	22-384, 22-780
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	

For the past ten years, Milwaukee County Parks Forestry Division has devoted significant resources to addressing the impact of the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB). The EAB, or *Agrius planipennis*, is an invasive, wood boring beetle that kills ash trees by eating the tissue under the bark. A tree that has been attacked by EAB often dies within four years. EAB was first observed in 2002, and aggressively spread, due often to inadvertent human actions. Over the past decade, thousands of ash trees in Milwaukee County Parks, and millions across the Midwest, have been infested/killed by Emerald Ash Borer.

Milwaukee County Parks (MCP) is responsible for 15,000 acres of land that have an estimated 1.5 million trees. Before the EAB's infestation, the Forestry Division was focused on tree planting and trimming. However, with the arrival of EAB in Milwaukee County in 2011, the work focus changed. Within a few years, there was a staggering rise

in infested and dying ash trees. Infested ash trees provide significant safety concerns to the residents of Milwaukee County. Affected ash trees can lose large limbs, or worse, be subject to a total height, catastrophic failure.

MCP Forestry staff are committed to tree removal in the parks high-use public areas as a safety priority. These areas include areas and facilities that receive a constant to frequent occupancy level, such as playgrounds, paved trails, buildings, parking lots, and picnic areas. Often it is most effective to remove all infested trees in a park at once, rather than coming back and only removing a few at a time. As such, a park may have 50 or more highly visible trees removed in a very short timeframe. Of the past ten years, Forestry has removed about 25,000 trees throughout the parks in Milwaukee County. At current staffing and funding levels, the ash removal efforts should be completed by 2030.

As removal efforts continue, in recent years, MCP has begun replanting trees throughout our system. For example, in 2021 Forestry removed 2,542 trees and planted 1,425. This reforestation work is tempered by a number of challenges. First, after tree removal, the ground is often unsuitable for immediate replanting. In some park locations, additional tree removals are still required, so Forestry are unable to plant new trees as they could be damaged by the removal of nearby trees. Secondly, to align with best practices, forestry professionals recommend staggering tree plantings such that a park would achieve a range of tree species and ages. This may mean only some trees are replanted with additional plantings in the future. Thirdly, some parks were also “over-planted”, meaning that tree density in some locations was more than current best practices recommend. Lastly, budget, staffing, and the seasons do not allow us to replant trees at the same rate of removal.

MCP is several steps to speed up replanting efforts. As stated in the 2022 Budget, Parks will be spending over \$46,000 from the Weigel-Heart trust fund to purchase 450 trees. An estimated 135 trees will be planted this year and next at parks that have had significant tree removals. Many of these parks are in the urban core of the County, and include:

- Dretzka Golf Course (15 trees)
- Harriet Tubman Park (12 trees)
- Indigenous Peoples Park (12 trees)
- Kern Park (30 trees)
- Lincoln Park (40 trees)
- Meaux Park (25 trees)

An additional 315 trees will be purchased and delivered over a three-year period to the MCP nursery. Replenishing our tree selection will allow us to have enough trees on hand for significant tree planting efforts in the coming three years. These estimates reflect our current staffing capacity to oversee planting efforts and will also assist various Friends Groups’ tree replanting efforts. The friends group listed below provide significant support for tree planting efforts:

- Friends of Cooper Park
- Friends of County Grounds Park
- Friends of Estabrook Park

- Humboldt Park Friends
- Lake Park Friends
- Wedgewood Park Friends

MCP has also received grant funding to enhance replanting efforts. Earlier this year, our department received a grant of \$116,269 from the Fund for Lake Michigan to support the Root River Reforestation Phase 2 project. This project will convert three fields (34.4 acres) from agricultural production and convert them to reforestation plantings focusing on native trees/shrubs (typically between 30-50 species) that have heightened value to wildlife and are adaptable to projected future climate change growing conditions. These areas are a SEWRPC designated Natural Areas of Regional Significance (NA-2) and fall within a SEWRPC designated Primary Environmental Corridor. This replanting effort will fill in the wildlife dispersal corridor and expand the size of breeding habitat for numerous species of birds, amphibians, reptiles, and invertebrates while buffering SEWRPC designated Natural Areas and Critical Species Habitat. This will allow for planting of approximately 4,350 trees over a three-year period. A map of the area is attached for your reference.

Finally, the department is working to develop partnerships with other organizations to provide additional reforestation support. MMSD is developing a 10-year program to plant approximately 6,000,000 trees and restore 4,000 acres of wetlands in the Greater Milwaukee watersheds. This program will implement projects on both public and private property in rural, suburban, and urban areas. In urban areas there will be a focus on investments in socially vulnerable communities and utilization of workforce development partners. This program will help reduce flood risk by using large-scale natural flood management strategies as well as sequester carbon, improve habitat and improve quality of life. The project team is currently working on developing the programmatic framework and identifying pilot projects, some which may be located on Milwaukee County owned land. Partners on this team include the DNR, SEWRPC, Milwaukee County Parks, and the City of Milwaukee.

**TERMS**

None

**VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES**

None

**PREPARED BY:**

Peter Bratt, Director of Operations & Skilled Trades

**APPROVED BY:**

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks



**ATTACHMENTS:**

CC:

David Crowley, County Executive  
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office  
Sheldon Wasserman, Supervisor District 3, PEEC Chair  
Steven Shea, Supervisor District 8, PEEC Vice Chair  
Felicia Martin, Supervisor District 7, PEEC Member  
Juan Miguel Martinez, Supervisor District 12, PEEC Member  
Steve Taylor, Supervisor District 17, PEEC Member  
Kelly Bablitch, Chief of Staff, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors  
Janelle M. Jensen, Legislative Services Division Mgr, Office of the County Clerk  
Aaron Hertzberg, Director, Department of Administrative Services  
Joseph Lamers, Fiscal & Budget Director, DAS  
Vince Masterson, Fiscal & Strategic Asset Coordinator, DAS  
Pamela Bryant, Capital Finance Manager, Comptroller's Office  
Justin Rodriguez, Capital Finance Analyst, Comptroller's Office  
Kelsey Evans, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk  
Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller  
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