

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: November 8, 2023
To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors
From: Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks
Subject: Reforestation Update
File Type: Informational Report

REQUEST

At the December 7, 2021 Parks, Energy, and Environment Committee meeting, a verbal request was made for an annual 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:	22-916, 23-309
Associated File No's (Including Transfer Packets):	
Previous Action Date(s):	September 13, 2022, March 7, 2023

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 *Agrilus 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 EAB.

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 the park system. For example, in 2021 Forestry removed 2,542 trees and planted 1,425. This reforestation work is tempered by several challenges. First, after tree removal, the ground is often unsuitable for immediate replanting. In some park locations, additional tree removals are still required, so the Forestry team is unable to plant new trees as they could be damaged by the removal of nearby trees. Secondly, to align with best practices, tree plantings are diverse and staggered over time in a park to 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, our budget, staffing levels, and the seasons do not allow us to replant trees at the same rate of removal.

In 2023, MCP began several key replanting initiatives. First, the MCP Forestry Team planted over 360 trees (generally ball and burlap sized) throughout the county. Many of these plantings occurred in partnership with Friends and Community groups, including:

- Friends of Gordon Park – 31 trees
- Friends of Pulaski Cudahy Park – 26 trees
- Friends of Humboldt Park – 31 trees
- Komatsu Corporation Partnership at Kosciuszko Park – 20 trees

Secondly, MCP Parks continues to conduct large scale replantings within the park system. In 2023, the following locations were impacted:

- Washington Park – 20 trees (planted north of the Senior Center)
- Kletzsch Park – 25 trees
- Veterans Park – 30 trees
- McKinley Park – 25 trees
- Mitchell Blvd Park – 5 trees transplanted from Milwaukee Medical Center

Thirdly, MCP Parks is proceeding with further restocking efforts of the Forestry nursery at 68th Street and Ryan Road. In 2023, 200 additional trees were received for future

plantings, and 350 more trees were ordered for arrival in 2024.

Finally, MCP Parks' Natural Areas Team continues its restoration efforts throughout our system. These efforts included:

- Replanting over 1,194 trees (from containers or seedlings), and partner organizations and friends groups planting an additional 292 trees
- Removed invasive species on 189 acres of land, and another 144 acres were addressed by contractors hired by MCP
- Planted native plants (including seeds, shrubs, and trees) on 36.9 acres of land.
- Conducted plant surveys on 1,120 acres of land
- Performed wildlife research on 5,000 acres of land
- Identified 47 new populations of state or federally listed/protected species within the MCP system

MCP looks forward to our future Forestry and Natural Areas efforts in 2024. MCP was part of a joint application with the City of Milwaukee for a \$12M United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Urban Reforestation Grant. The grant award is being finalized and this committee should expect to see a request for approving receiving these funds in early 2024. In addition, Parks hired a Reforestation Coordinator through funding provided by the Fund for Lake Michigan, and MCP would like to thank the Board for their support of this program. The Reforestation Coordinator will be working to support MCP's efforts, including implementing the USDA Urban Reforestation Grant.

TERMS

None

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

None

PREPARED BY:

Peter Bratt, Director of Operations & Skilled Trades

APPROVED BY: *Guy Smith*

Guy Smith, Executive Director Milwaukee County Parks

ATTACHMENTS:

Parks Reforestation Update

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
Felesia 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
Allyson Smith, Committee Coordinator, Office of the County Clerk
Ciara Miller, Research & Policy Analyst, Office of the Comptroller
Anthony Rux, Budget & Management Analyst, DAS-PSB