

# Washington County Water Consortium

June 4, 2025

2 to 3 pm

Remote meeting - Zoom

(If you are not on the Consortium listserv, please email

[Adriana.Atcheson@washingcountymn.gov](mailto:Adriana.Atcheson@washingcountymn.gov) for the Zoom link and access code)

## Agenda

2:00 - 2:05

### **Welcome**

Introductions, Announcements

2:05 - 2:30

### **Minnesota Water Policy Update**

*Topic:* Explore water policy and funding outcomes from the 2025 Minnesota legislative session.

*Presenter:* Chris O'Brien - Public Affairs Director, Freshwater

2:30 - 2:45

### **Washington Conservation District's Urban Forestry Efforts**

*Topic:* The Washington Conservation District provides technical assistance for private residents and municipalities in Washington County. A recent partnership with the University of Minnesota's Tree Steward Program is one of the new efforts to support urban forestry in the County, with 39 volunteers recruited and trained spring 2025.

*Presenter:* Cameron Blake - Natural Resource Specialist, Washington Conservation District

2:45 - 3:00

### **City of Stillwater's Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) Management**

*Topic:* Hear about EAB status in Washington County, what Stillwater has done for EAB management and urban forestry so far, grant programs they utilized, and replacement options.

*Presenter:* Andrew Coyne - Natural Resources Technician, City of Stillwater

The background of the slide is a photograph of the Minnesota State Capitol building, a grand neoclassical structure with a prominent central dome and multiple wings. The building is set against a clear blue sky. An American flag is visible on a tall pole to the left of the building. The entire image has a light blue tint.

# Minnesota Water Policy Update

June 4, 2025

FRESHWATER



## **Our mission**

**To inspire and empower people  
to value and protect water.**



# About Freshwater

- Founded in 1968 as the Freshwater Biological Research Foundation.
- Program areas include water research, policy, education and engagement.
- Non-partisan, science-based approach to water policy.
- Focus on collaboration between communities, governments and researchers.

FRESH  
WATER



# Water Policy

- **Goal:** Advance sound water policy in Minnesota.
- **Team:** Chris O'Brien, Carrie Jennings, Michelle Stockness, Chyann Erickson, Alyssa Fabia, Park Street Public (Joe Birkholz and Molly Jansen)
- **Partners:** Elected officials, state agencies, Clean Water Council, local governments, engineering firms, other nonprofits.
- **Updates:** <https://freshwater.org/policy/>



# Timeline for 2025 session



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

- **Passage of 2025 bonding bill to fund urgent water infrastructure needs.**
- **Siting and development of water-intensive industry.**
- **Safe drinking water for all: Support for private well owners and continued nitrate contamination mitigation.**
- **Increased soil and water conservation district funding.**



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

## ➤ Passage of 2025 bonding bill to fund urgent water infrastructure needs.

- Last bonding bill was in 2023.
- Backlog of deferred projects.
- Minnesota received “C” grade on [ASCE Infrastructure Report Card](#).
- Proposed federal cuts to EPA’s Clean and Drinking Water State Revolving Funds ([\\$2.46 billion reduction in FY26](#)).



# Bonding bill

## Policy efforts

- **Water infrastructure funding proposal** - [HF724/SF862](#) proposed \$299 million for clean water appropriations to the [Public Facilities Authority](#), plus an increased cap on maximum grant awards from \$5 million to \$10 million.
- **CREP funding** – Gov. proposed \$9.3 million to BWSR for the state match of the [Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program](#) (CREP).



# Bonding bill

## Outcomes (pending)

- **Negotiations** – Senate and House chairs and minority leads have been meeting and negotiating since the regular session ended.
- **Best case** – If a bonding bill is passed, expect range of \$700 million with emphasis on water infrastructure.



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

- **Siting and development of water-intensive industry.**
  - At least 10 hyperscale data centers proposed in Minnesota.
  - Can use 1 to 5 million gallons of water per day.
  - Not always subject to environmental review.





# Data centers and large water users

## Outcomes (pending)

- **Data center tax incentives (Tax bill)** – Current agreement on sales tax exemption would no longer apply to electricity, but would be extended for equipment.
- **Working group proposals (Tax or Energy bill)** – Proposals being considered include:
  - Requiring pre-application filings for large water appropriation projects whose proposed consumptive use exceeds 100 million gallons per year or 250,000 gallons per day.
  - Environmental review required for hyperscale data centers (Environmental Impact Statement).



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

- **Safe drinking water for all: Support for private well owners and continued nitrate contamination mitigation.**
  - Private well testing; treatment or mitigation for contaminated wells.
  - Prevention of groundwater contamination by incentivizing conservation practices.



# Private wells and nitrate contamination

## Policy efforts

- **Call for nitrate mitigation funding** – [HF821/SF1183](#) proposed a \$3.866 million appropriation in FY26 and FY27 for reverse osmosis, well repair and well reconstruction of private drinking water wells with nitrate levels above 10 milligrams per liter. *This was not included in the Omnibus Agriculture bill.*

## Outcomes

- **Study of Olmsted County soil health program** – The Omnibus Agriculture bill ([HF2446](#)), includes a \$75,000 appropriation to conduct a study of the [Olmsted County groundwater protection and soil health](#) initiative.
- **Biofertilizer innovation program** – The Omnibus Ag bill also includes \$250,000 in FY26 and FY27 for a Biofertilizer Innovation and Efficiency pilot program.



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

## ➤ **Increased soil and water conservation district funding.**

- Frontline partners in delivering soil health programs
- Historically underfunded; shift from Clean Water Fund to General Fund in 2023
- Significant operational shortage (at least \$7 million per year)



# Private wells and nitrate contamination

## Policy efforts

- **Proposed funding restoration** – [HF1066/SF1089](#) would have restored SWCD funding to \$20 million per year permanently.

## Outcomes (pending)

- **Tax bill negotiations** – A tax bill has not yet been agreed to by the taxes working group, and it is unclear if SWCD funding will be included in a final agreement. Senate version of an Omnibus Tax bill included up to \$14 million per year.



# 2025 Legislative Agenda

## ➤ Maintaining integrity of state environmental funds.

- Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund (Lottery)
  - LCCMR recommendations
- Clean Water Fund
  - Clean Water Council recommendations
- Advocate for established recommendation processes.



# State environmental funds

## Policy efforts

- **Clean Water Council** – Released [FY26-27 funding recommendations](#) after a 6-month review process. Key items include:
  - Private wells initiative (MDH)
  - Aquifer monitoring (DNR)
  - Conservation equipment assistance (MDA)
  - Chloride reduction (MPCA)
  - Accelerated implementation of watershed plans (BWSR)
- **Community Grants Program** – 1.5 percent of the ENRTF to be annually directed to new and smaller organizations; House proposal would have redirected 95 percent of this funding to other projects.



# State environmental funds

## Outcomes

- **Legacy Omnibus bill** – Clean Water Council recommendations passed with no changes.
- **Environment bill agreement** – Includes LCCMR recommendations and Community Grants program funding fully at \$28.18 million.
  - Advisory council to oversee the Community Grant Program funds; University of Minnesota is not eligible for these funds; DNR is required to report back to the Legislature.



# Additional policy items

- **Chloride/smart salting legislation:** [HF793/SF492](#) would have provided limited liability protection for certified applicators who complete MPCA smart salt training. *Did not receive a hearing this session.*
- **St. Anthony Falls Cutoff Wall Study extension** – An extension of this study to 2026 was included in the State Government Omnibus bill, [SF3045](#).
- **Infrastructure Advisory Council repealed** – SF 3045 also repealed the new Infrastructure Advisory Council.



# Additional policy items

- **Minnesota Geological Survey funding intact** – Earlier in session, the Senate Higher Education Omnibus bill zeroed out the Minnesota Geological Survey's base funding. Freshwater engaged with committee members, and funding for the program remains intact.
- **Sustainable aviation fuel:** Tax bill (under negotiation) will likely increase tax credit for sustainable aviation fuels and update policies on eligible feedstocks and lifecycle emissions.
- **Environmental permitting reform:** A permitting reform package is listed in Article 6 on page 156 of the [Environment Omnibus agreement](#). Of note, it narrows the eligibility of who can petition for an Environmental Assessment Worksheet to residents/property owners in the county or adjoining county.



# Additional policy items

- **PFAS:** Environment Omnibus agreement includes a few minor changes to [PFAS policy](#), including extensions for Class B firefighting foam, exempting internal components in existing banned products until 2032, and exempting juvenile ATVs/OHVs from the “juvenile products” category.
- **Water use and permitting fees:** The Environment Omnibus agreement includes increases to DNR water use fees, along with an increase in the permit application fee from \$150 to \$600.



**Thank you!**





# Washington Conservation District's Urban Forestry Efforts

June 4, 2025

Cameron Blake, Natural Resource Specialist

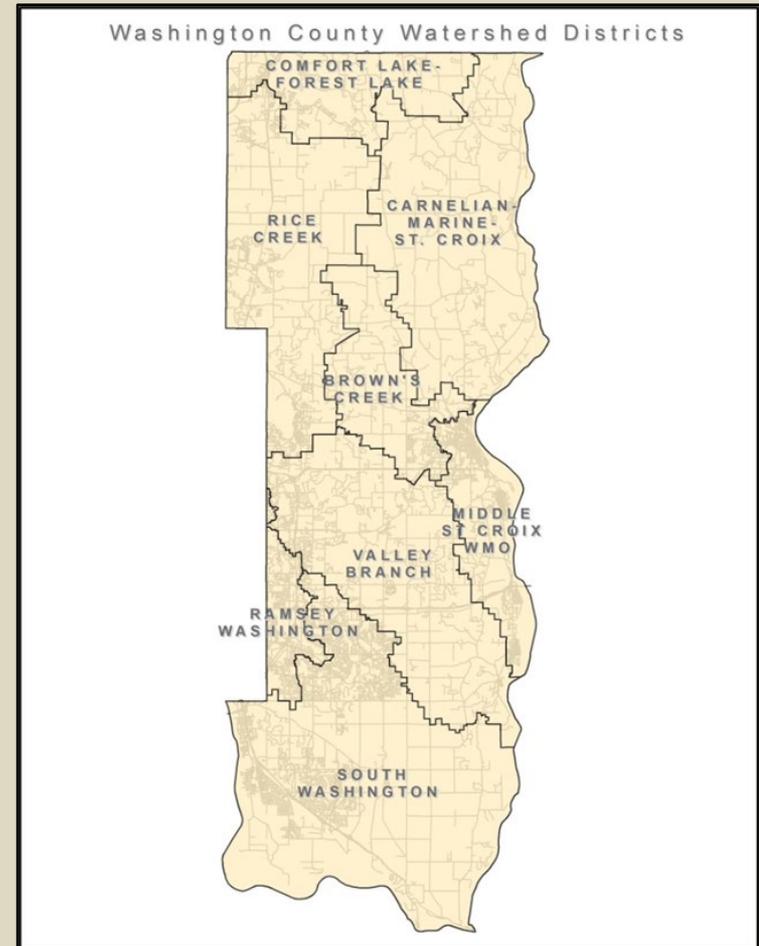
Lori Maxfield, Climate Impact Project Coordinator



WASHINGTON  
CONSERVATION  
DISTRICT

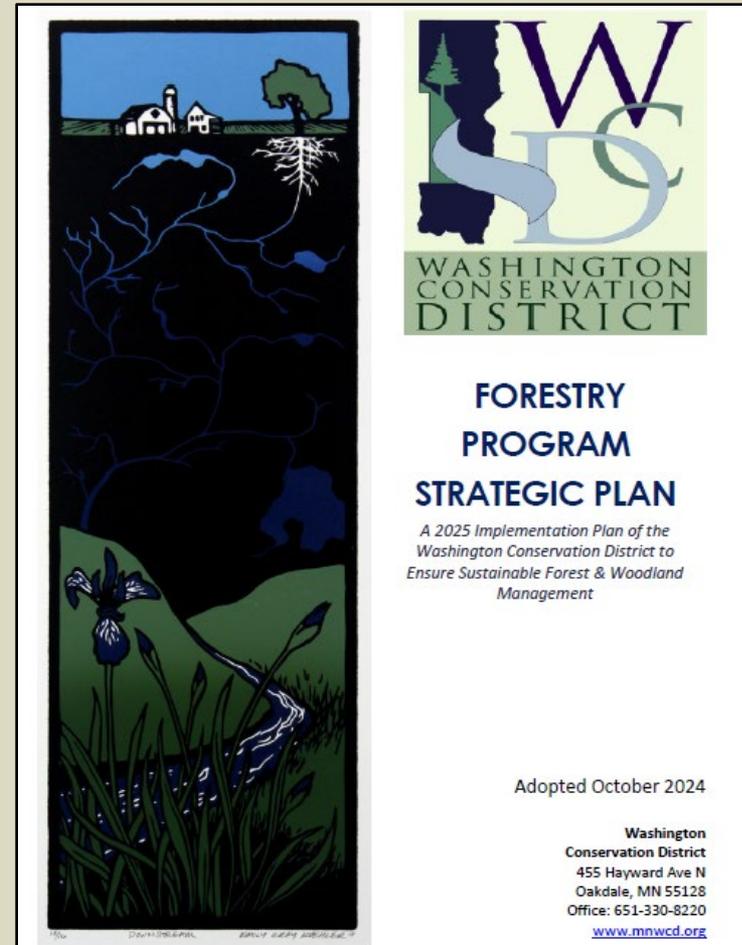
# Washington Conservation District

- An SWCD that houses a Watershed District, a Watershed Management Organization, and the East Metro Water Resources Education Program among other county wide programs
- The Washington Conservation District provides technical assistance for private residents and municipalities in the county



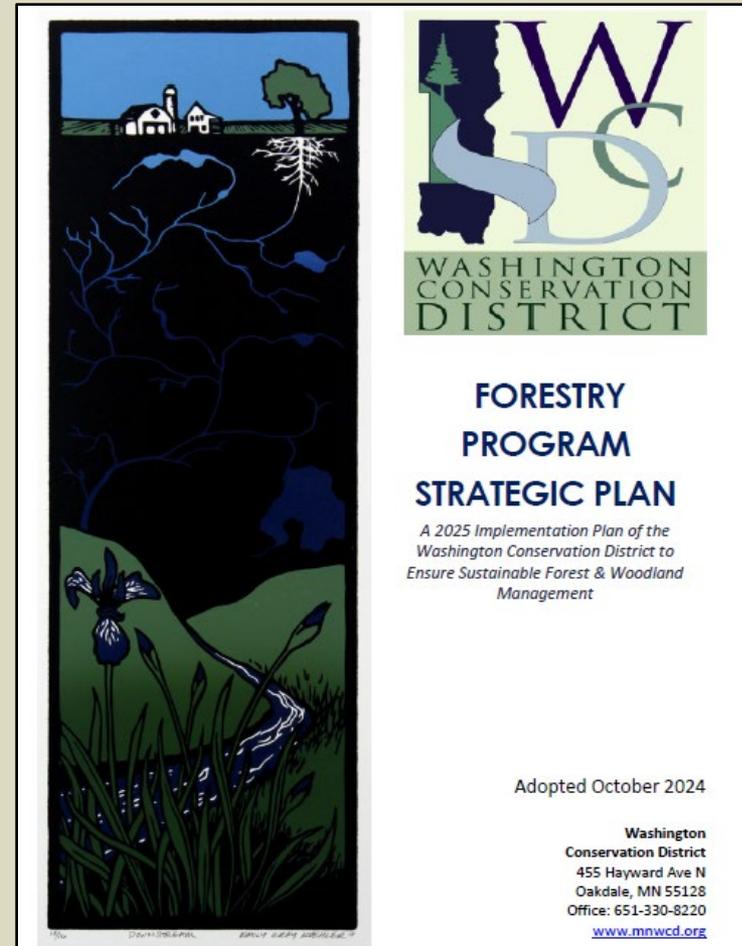
# 2025 Forestry Program Strategic Plan

- Resulted from a Forestry Strategic Planning Meeting in 2024
  - Stakeholders included: city and regional foresters, park managers, watershed district staff, and representatives of local non-profits and volunteer organizations
- Identified challenges and strategies to address those challenges



# 2025 Forestry Program Strategic Plan

- Goal 1: Plant, diversify, and maintain trees throughout Washington County
- Goal 2: Increase the resiliency of Washington County's woodlands and forests
- Goal 3: Engage stakeholders, partners, and residents to promote local forestry programs
- Goal 4: Provide forestry-related technical assistance and implementation support to partners, landowners and residents.



# Urban Forestry Efforts



- Tree inventories, tree inspections, tree plantings and maintenance, site visits for urban tree questions and considerations, gravel bed nurseries, support for tree ordinance development etc.
- Rural/large lot forestry:  
Josh Tank



## Minnesota Tree Steward Community Volunteer Program

- 39 volunteers recruited and trained this spring
- Tree Stewards are expected to complete 25 hours of service during the year
- Planting, establishment, pruning
- Current participating communities include Bayport, Birchwood, Cottage Grove, Hastings, Lake Elmo, Landfall, Mahtomedi, Marine on St. Croix, Newport, St. Mary's Point, Stillwater, and Woodbury



Washington Conservation District

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### TREE STEWARDS IN ACTION! 🌳

Our newly trained Washington Conservation District Tree Stewards will be busy at the following locations in June:

Cottage Grove - June 3, 10, and 17 (Noon-3:30pm)

- o June 3 - Woodridge Park. Tree Stewards will be pruning crabapples, removing undergrowth, and lightly pruning shade trees.

- o June 10 - Kingston Park. The work identified for this park focuses on Crabapple and Oak Grove management and is similar to the work identified for Woodridge Park.

- o June 17 - Highlands Park. The trees identified in the park are in need of pruning and staking.

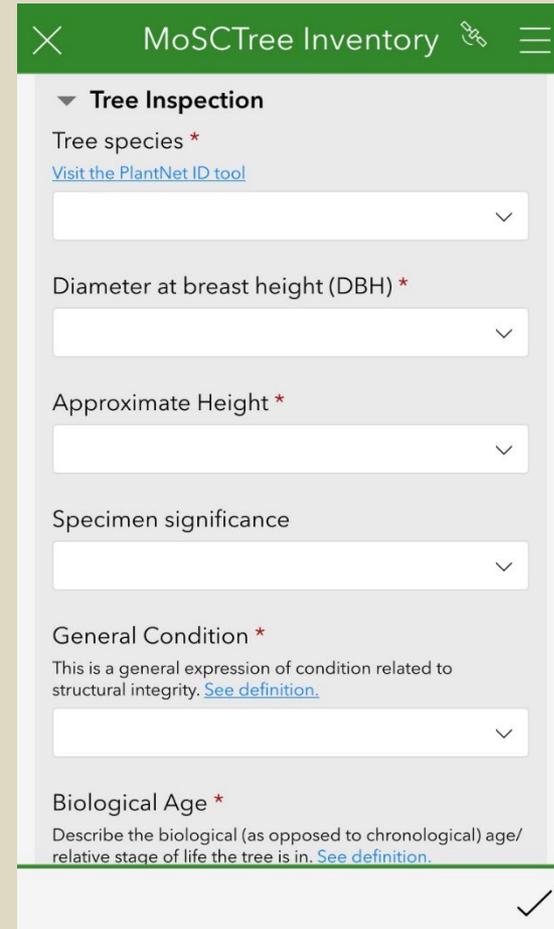
Bayport - June 4, 11, 18, and 25 (8am-noon)

- o Tree Stewards will be doing quick health checks and routine care for public trees planted within the last five years

If you'd like to learn more, Lori Maxfield is the lead staff for this program - [lmaxfield@mnwcd.org](mailto:lmaxfield@mnwcd.org)

# Marine on St. Croix

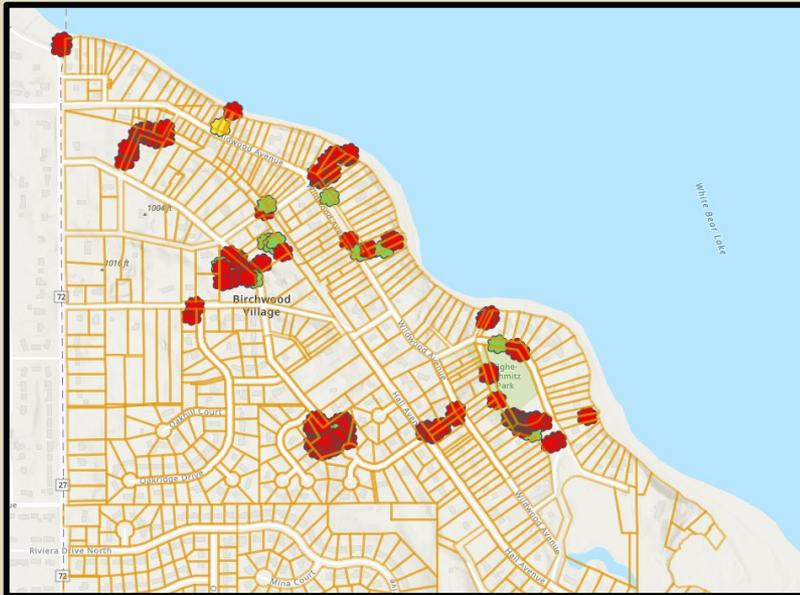
- Tree inventory support: creation of a tree inventory form for use on mobile devices
- Adopt-a-tree program
- Gravel bed nursery



The screenshot shows a mobile application interface for 'MoSCTree Inventory'. The title bar is green with a white 'X' icon on the left, the text 'MoSCTree Inventory' in the center, and a white 'info' icon and a white hamburger menu icon on the right. Below the title bar, there is a section titled 'Tree Inspection' with a downward arrow icon. The form contains several fields, each with a white input box and a downward arrow icon on the right side: 'Tree species \*' with a link '[Visit the PlantNet ID tool](#)' below it; 'Diameter at breast height (DBH) \*'; 'Approximate Height \*'; 'Specimen significance'; 'General Condition \*' with a descriptive text below it: 'This is a general expression of condition related to structural integrity. [See definition.](#)'; and 'Biological Age \*' with a descriptive text below it: 'Describe the biological (as opposed to chronological) age/ relative stage of life the tree is in. [See definition.](#)'. At the bottom right of the form, there is a white checkmark icon.

# Birchwood Village

- Tree disease inspections
  - Completed parks, easements, and trail corridors
  - Next up ROW

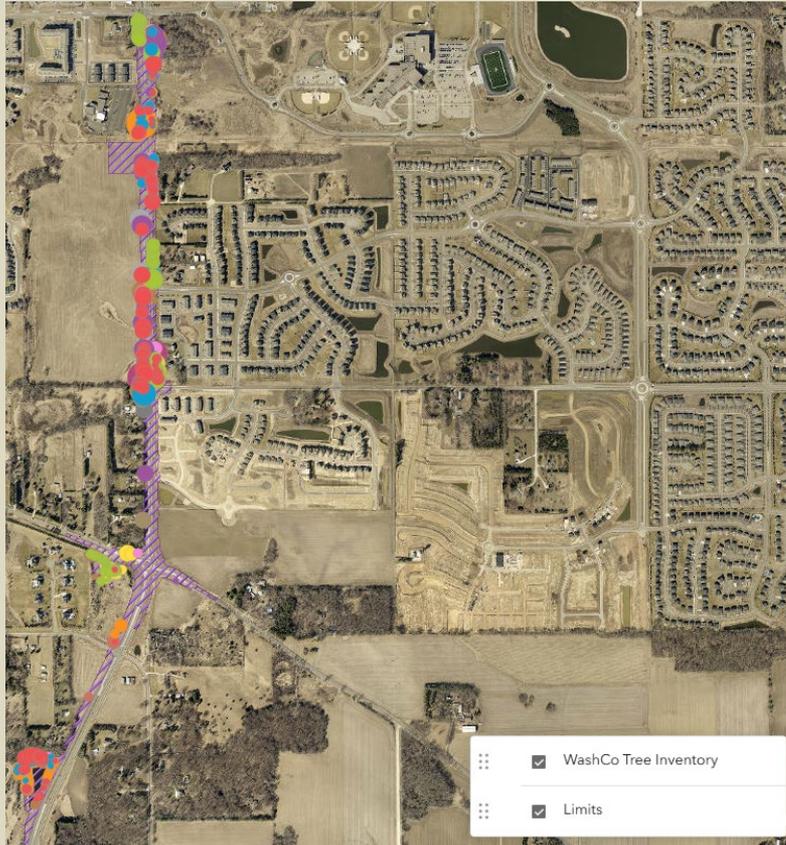


# Other Gravel Bed Nurseries

- Scandia
- Washington County Fairgrounds



# Washington County



- Tree inventories along county ROW projects
- Potential work involving identification of hazard trees in the future
- Potential partnering on biochar and kiln availability for projects

# Stillwater

- Upcoming assistance with tree inventories
  - Andrew to speak more on the City of Stillwater's work



# Emerald Ash Borer in the City of Stillwater

By Andrew Coyne - Natural Resources Technician

# EAB - Status in Washington County

- ▶ Emerald Ash Borer is fully established in Washington County
  - ▶ Urban areas (Oakdale, Woodbury, Stillwater) have seen major urban canopy loss - ash accounted for ~15% of canopy in most cities before EAB
  - ▶ Rural areas & smaller townships have huge swaths of ash forest in decline
- ▶ Private Landowners own the majority of all infested ash trees
  - ▶ Unable or unwilling to pay removal costs
- ▶ Thousands of dead ash trees visible from roadsides
  - ▶ Public Safety Risk
    - ▶ Falling limbs and debris create severe overhead hazards
    - ▶ Fire risk is increasing
      - ▶ Mass amounts of dead dry ash wood on forest floor and in canopies (Fuel)
      - ▶ Drought conditions & severe thunderstorms both common in summer (Heat)
      - ▶ Forests with dead ash have less wind resistance due to loss of foliage (Oxygen)

# EAB - Status in Stillwater

- ▶ Stillwater is a HEAVILY INFESTED AREA, as determined by the MN DNR.
- ▶ As of 2025, nearly all ash trees in the city of Stillwater are either treated, infested or dead.
  - ▶ No viable candidates for injection treatment since summer 2023.
- ▶ Tens of thousands of private ash trees are dying or dead.
- ▶ Neighbor complaint calls about dead trees are becoming more frequent
- ▶ After EAB has run its initial course, the city will have lost approximately 15% of all canopy cover.

# Management of Public Trees

## Three Options

- ▶ Treatment - City is treating healthy park trees, residents have option to treat blvd trees.
  - ▶ Rainbow Treecare - city wide discount for EAB injection treatments
- ▶ Removal & Replacement - if public safety risk, remove hazard and replace if feasible
- ▶ No Action - if in wild area, no impacts to private property etc, no action is taken

# Financial Considerations

- ▶ This can get very costly, bundling removals together can help get pricing down
- ▶ Cost of waiting:
  - ▶ Hazard potential - injury, fatality & property damage risks increase as the tree dies
  - ▶ Dead trees *may* get quoted higher than live trees
  - ▶ Time required for establishment of new tree - 3-5 years
  - ▶ Contractor timelines increase as more removals come in: 2+ months in some cases
- ▶ Weigh your options
  - ▶ Removal + replacement VS perpetual treatment + mature tree benefits
- ▶ Seek out Grants - MN DNR, USFS, non-profits

# Grants Utilized for EAB Projects

- ▶ Preparing for EAB 2023 - \$28,820, 10% match required (in-kind)
  - ▶ Removed and replaced 52 trees
  - ▶ Residents only got a replacement if they agreed to watering for three years
  - ▶ Residents who opted out of replacement had their trees planted in parks
- ▶ Shade Tree Bonding grant 2024 - \$389,000, no match required
  - ▶ Removed and replaced 466 trees
  - ▶ All trees were replaced in situ - unless the resident opted out
  - ▶ City is paying for watering/maintenance and warranty for 3 years
    - ▶ \$ per tree per year = total of \$93 per tree per year = total of \$130,014 in watering/maintenance costs - costs were worked into city budget

# Removal & Replacement

- ▶ Total of 518 ashes removed
  - ▶ Avg DBH: 15.8 inches
  - ▶ Largest tree removed: 40” diameter green ash
  - ▶ Areas most affected: Croixwood, North Hill, South Hill - older neighborhoods with mature canopy
  - ▶ Avg cost per removal & stump grind: \$543
  - ▶ Avg cost per #15 tree planted: \$306

# Replacement

- ▶ Diversity - aiming for less than 10% any 1 genus
- ▶ 20 species planted from 15 different Genera
- ▶ 82% native or hybridized native - 425 trees
  - ▶ Oaks, hackberry, elm, honeylocust, Kentucky coffeetree, linden, serviceberry, ironwood, hornbeam, cherry
- ▶ 18% exotic/nonnative species - London planetree, American yellowwood, Chinkapin oak, ginkgo, Manchurian alder and dawn redwood - tough urban trees, adds variety & boosts resiliency

# Treatment

- ▶ Perpetual treatment, every 2 years for the life of the tree.
  - ▶ Emamectin Benzoate injections by professionals only
    - ▶ City no longer allows residents to treat their own trees, and does not allow the use of imidacloprid soil drenches for EAB treatment
- ▶ City wide discount program w/ Rainbow Treecare
- ▶ City treating 78 trees on public property
- ▶ Private treatment quantities are unknown
- ▶ Need to have approx. 70% live canopy for effective uptake
- ▶ Most trees in Stillwater are too far gone - very few viable untreated trees remain
- ▶ Treated trees remain mostly healthy, but EAB populations have peaked, putting extra pest pressure on remaining healthy ashes

# No Action

- ▶ When ash trees die in public forests and wild areas, they will be left as standing dead trees
- ▶ Removal is often more damaging to the forest
  - ▶ Requires cutting of large number of live trees for equipment access & landing zones
  - ▶ Machinery can cause severe soil compaction & root damage in healthy trees
  - ▶ Machinery can introduce new invasive species to sites
  - ▶ Not financially feasible - hard to justify hundreds of thousands in removal costs for unmaintained areas.

# Private Trees

- ▶ New nuisance category in City Ordinance - Diseased Trees
  - ▶ Allows city to condemn diseased trees and enforce timely removal
  - ▶ New ordinance
    - ▶ Still learning about implications
    - ▶ Potential for mass influx of nuisance tree calls - there are thousands of dead ashes across the city
  - ▶ Reactive basis -responding to calls as they come in -not currently pursuing enforcement of all EAB-killed trees - not possible with staff time

# Lessons Learned

- ▶ Keep an up-to-date public tree inventory. Ashes - once per year after leaf out. Tree inventory is invaluable when it comes time to apply for new grant opportunities
- ▶ Diversify your canopy - a lesson learned twice now - don't rely too heavily on any one genus
- ▶ In 50 years, we've witnessed 2 functional extinctions of major native tree genera: elm (*Ulmus*) and ash (*Fraxinus*). Both instances had a similar outcome: complete wipeout of all mature elm/ash on the landscape.
  - ▶ Elms and ashes both accounted for 15%-20% of urban canopies before their pests arrived.
  - ▶ One thing in common - not species specific - EAB attacks all ash, DED attacks all elm.
  - ▶ Diversifying the canopy with several native and non-native tree genera can help prevent mass tree death events in the future
- ▶ Some day we may see ash again - Survivor Ash is project in the works