

New Dimensions for the New Millennium: Urban Forestry Training Via Satellite

Bill Hubbard, Southern Regional Extension Forester

A changing southern landscape

The South has, almost overnight gone from a region predominantly populated by rural residents to one that is profoundly urban. From Texas and Oklahoma to Kentucky, Virginia and states all states in between urban residents make up perhaps as much as 85% of the state's population. Even in rural towns and communities, the pressures of growth and sprawl are having tremendous impacts on our forests and natural resources. Trees and natural features of the landscape play important economic, social and environmental roles. These features of the landscape reduce cooling, increase property values, decrease air and water pollution and have soothing social and public health benefits. Trees and natural resources in urban and community areas are worth billions across the South; an asset that we can't afford to lose.

Responding to the drastic growth and sprawl, a regional, multi-agency team led by Cooperative Extension Service foresters, USDA Forest Service and state forestry personnel developed a satellite short course for county agents, field foresters, municipal workers and private and non-government organization personnel that focuses on urban and community forestry issues and solutions. The program "New Dimension for the New Millennium: An Urban & Community Forestry Update" was broadcast to over 100 sites across the Southern region in October of 2001. Close to 500 people participated in the live downlink version with countless others viewing the sessions later on online via streamed media.

The nine-hour professional development course focused on the current situation as it relates to sprawl and uncontrolled growth in the South, changing roles and responsibilities of natural resource specialists, extension agents, and others, urban and community forestry solutions, new training technologies available on the internet and forest health, tree ordinances and public policy solutions.

This course, the first ever of its kind in the country was received well. Examples of comments include:

"I thought the sessions were excellent. The last one was particularly useful as it covered how-tos and tools that anybody can use."
Kacey Ratteree, Executive Director, Georgia Urban Forest Council

"This program was well organized, professionally delivered (it had technology bells and whistles) and extremely pertinent. The subject matter is exactly what people are clamoring for – proactive activities regarding tree ordinances, collaboration building in communities and access to resources."
Ellen Struther, Environmental Landscape Specialist.

Regional collaboration a key to success

State extension foresters, state forestry agency urban forestry coordinators, and USDA Forest Service personnel formed the steering and implementation committees. All thirteen southern states



were invited to participate and 7 chose to do so live. One other utilized the program using their in-house distance delivery system shortly after the live broadcast. The other states were provided videotapes and will utilize when/where needed.

Another useful aspect of the training involved introduction of an online urban forestry field manual. This 16-chapter guide for foresters, extension agents and others is being developed by the USDA Forest Service in collaboration with the University of Georgia and other experts from land-grant, Forest Service, state forestry and other agencies. Chapters include information on urban forest benefits, health, wildlife, policy, tree identification, urban soils, tree biology culture and protection, roles of state agencies and others. The online manual is an excellent source of professional development and reference for county extension agents and others.

The courses' success has led to discussions to hold another training dealing with urban-wildland interface issues, needs and opportunities.

For more information on the satellite course and the online urban forestry field manual see www.urbanforestrysatellite.net