

Urban forest restoration is on the rise

- March 4, 2023



The Nature Areas Conservancy, dedicated to the preservation of 7,500 acres of New York City natural areas forest, relies almost entirely on forest natural succession for management decisions. They are dedicated to preserving the forests that they have.

Urban forests are extremely valuable, said Dr. Clara Pregitzer, Natural Areas Conservancy deputy director of conservation science at her Friends of White's Woods-sponsored Feb. 23 webinar. Urban forests not only provide wildlife habitat, cooling, carbon storage, and stormwater management, they also provide many human mental and physical health benefits, as well. Forests make cities more livable and provide the opportunity for stress relief, solitude, social bonding and physical exercise.

Public access to natural area forests is particularly important for citizens who don't have the resources, including time, to travel to find experiences in nature.

In 2018, Dr. Pregitzer helped to lead a nationwide survey of urban forest managers. The top management priorities reported by 111 urban forest managers were preservation of native species, control of invasive species and public safety. Also of concern were maintenance of trails and paths, increasing tree canopy closure, public engagement, protection of animal habitat, climate change projections and forest fragmentation. Controlling invasive vines, in particular, is a primary focus for the Natural Areas Conservancy.

The 2018 survey respondents have formed the Forests in Cities Network to advance urban forest preservation, including the promotion of increased funding for urban forest care. Although urban forests comprise nearly 70 percent of most cities' parklands, one of the biggest problems that these natural areas face, according to nationwide data, is inadequate funding and protection.

Whereas natural areas are a very important part of an urban area infrastructure, they typically receive only an extremely small fraction of municipal budgetary support.

Pregitzer also invited webinar participants to take advantages of resources made available by the Natural Areas Conservancy, including a “Forest Patch First Aid Kit” designed to help communities organize volunteers to participate in forest management and care. The conservancy plays a major role in forest management decisions and management projects in their city’s urban forests.

To view this webinar, visit friendsofwhiteswoods.org.

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