

33rd Annual

New York ReLeaf Conference

July 15–17, 2026
Manhattan University
Bronx, NY



**New York
ReLeaf**



**Department of
Environmental
Conservation**



**NEW YORK STATE
URBAN FORESTRY COUNCIL**

Welcome to the 2026 ReLeaf Conference!

Caring for Trees in a Changing City

We are pleased to welcome you to the 33rd Annual New York ReLeaf Conference, where you'll look at some of the "Great Trees of New York City," discuss how arborists can adapt to meet current and future challenges, and hear about grant projects and training programs that will move us toward achieving our shared goal of greening our communities for the benefit of all. You'll also have the opportunity to network and exchange ideas with leading urban forestry specialists and professionals.

Sustainability

We encourage you to bring a reusable water bottle to the conference. You are also welcome to bring a reusable coffee mug.

Our food vendors have supplied paper and compostable supplies or reusable silverware when possible. We also encourage you to utilize our transportation options or walk when attending the tours and dinner.

Continuing Education Credits

Continuing education credits are available for International Society of Arboriculture (ISA), Certified Nursery & Landscape Professional (CNLP), Society of American Foresters (SAF), and New York State (NYS) Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Pesticide Applicators, as noted in this program. Please check with the registration desk or presentation moderators for details.

We can also provide certificates of attendance for those who need proof of attendance for planning and zoning boards or other programs.

Session moderators will have sign-in sheets for credits available at the end of each session. Attendees must sign in on those sheets to receive credits.

Hotel Information

- Manhattan University's address:
4513 Manhattan College Parkway
Bronx, NY 10471
- Free parking is available in the college's parking garage for attendees and overnight guests. Attendees must obtain a parking pass at check-in to keep in their car.
- Dorm rooms are in Horan Hall. Room keys and Jasper cards (for access to Locke's Dining Hall) can be obtained in the Horan Hall Lobby.
- For those staying in the dorms, breakfast will be in Locke's Dining Hall within Thomas Hall.

Thanks to Our Conference Sponsors:

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Natural Areas Conservancy

The Nature Conservancy

New York State Arborists

Rare Earth Nursery

Roots:

Excelsior Urban Forestry

Local Nature Lab

2026 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

Please see the presentation details section for more information on each session, including available continuing education credits.

All conference events are in the Kelly Commons on the fourth and fifth floors.

Wednesday, July 15	
1:00–3:00 p.m.	Sponsor and vendor exhibit setup (<i>Room 5AB</i>)
1:00–3:30 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council (NYSUFC) board meeting (<i>Room 5C</i>)
1:00–5:00 p.m.	Preconference activity: “Community Reforestation (CoRe) Community of Practice,” Clara Pregitzer – Natural Areas Conservancy (<i>Room 4C</i>)
3:00–5:30 p.m.	Attendee check-in opens (<i>fifth floor lobby</i>)
4:00 p.m.	Preconference activity: “NYC Great Tree 5K Run Through Van Cortlandt Park,” John Kilcullen – New York City Department of Parks & Recreation (NYC Parks) Preregistration required. (<i>Entrance to Kelly Commons on Waldo Ave.</i>)
6:00–7:00 p.m.	NYSUFC member meeting (<i>Room 4C</i>)
7:00–9:00 p.m.	Conference reception (<i>Room 5AB</i>)
Thursday, July 16 – Morning	
7:30 a.m.	Attendee check-in opens (<i>fifth floor lobby</i>)
8:30–9:15 a.m.	Welcome to ReLeaf 2026! (<i>Room 5AB</i>) • Gloria Van Duyne – DEC Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator • Fiona Watt – New York’s State Forester and DEC Division of Lands and Forests Director • Tricia Shimamura – NYC Parks Commissioner • Vanessa L. Gibson – Bronx Borough President • Lori Brockelbank – NYSUFC Board President

2026 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

9:15–10:00 a.m.	Keynote (<i>Room 5AB</i>) “Take to the Trees,” Marguerite Holloway – Professor and Director of Science and Environmental Journalism at Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, and author of <i>Take to the Trees: A Story of Hope, Science, and Self-Discovery in America’s Imperiled Forests</i>
10:00–10:20 a.m.	Awards and exhibitor introductions (<i>Room 5AB</i>)
10:20–10:45 a.m.	Break – please visit our exhibitors and sponsors (<i>Room 5AB</i>)
10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Concurrent sessions Session A: (<i>Room 5AB</i>) “From Canopy to Craft: Reimagining Urban Wood Waste as a City Resource,” Chris Borman – NYC Parks; and Liz Zink and Itai Jaffe – Tri-Lox Session B: (<i>Room 5C</i>) “Urban Forest Plans for Changing Cities,” Emily Nobel Maxwell – Nobel Cause Consulting; Julia Eiferman – NYC Mayor’s Office of Climate & Environmental Justice; and Stephen Harris and Clare Carney – City of Syracuse Department of Parks, Recreation & Youth Programs (Syracuse Parks & Rec) Session C: (<i>Room 4C</i>) “NYC Parks Climber Pruner Training Program,” Ben Osborne and Ducep Moreno – NYC Parks “Veterans Green Career Landscape Program,” Helen Thurston – Evergreens Cemetery Preservation Foundation
12:00 p.m.	Lunch (<i>Room 5AB</i>) Attendee check-in closes
Thursday, July 16 – Afternoon	
1:15–2:00 p.m.	Leave for tours. Please see map provided at check-in for meeting locations. The bus for the Inwood Hill Park tour leaves at 1:30 p.m. The bus for the Woodlawn Cemetery tour leaves at 2:00 p.m. Please see the full presentation and tour details section for more information. If you wish to change your tour or sign up for one at the conference, stop by the registration table to see if space is available.

2026 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

1:30–4:00 p.m.	Concurrent local tours and sessions: Tour 1: “Inwood Hill Park Tour,” Tim Wenskus – DEC. Preregistration required.
1:30–4:00 p.m.	Tour 2: “Van Cortlandt Park Tour,” John Kilcullen – NYC Parks
2:00–4:30 p.m.	Tour 3: “Woodlawn Cemetery Tour,” Elizabeth Hunter, Jonathan Clemente, and Meg Ventrudo – Woodlawn Cemetery and Conservancy; and Herb Landmann – Davey Tree Expert Company. Preregistration required. Session D: (Room 4C) “Increasing Capacity for Just Language: Reflecting on Histories of Native, Non-Native, and Invasive Species Language and Frameworks,” Tina Cuevas, Lea Thali, and Neha Savant – NYC Parks
2:00–3:30 p.m.	
3:30–4:00 p.m.	“Distributed Restoration of the American Chestnut in New York City: Challenges, Opportunities, Uncertainty,” Jason Smith – New York Restoration Project (NYRP)
4:30–5:15 p.m.	Return from tours and break
5:15–8:00 p.m.	Dinner for all attendees at Bronx Alehouse, 216 W. 238th Street, Bronx, NY, 718-601-0204. Bus transportation from the college will be available starting at 5:15 p.m. Final return trip will leave Bronx Alehouse at 7:45 p.m.
Friday, July 17 – Morning	
8:00–9:00 a.m.	Attendee check-in (<i>fifth floor lobby</i>)
9:00–9:45 a.m.	Concurrent sessions Session E: (Room 4C) “What Do I Do with All This Public Tree Data? Using Syracuse’s TreeKeeper Data to Inform Future Urban Forest Management Decisions,” Jude May – SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) master’s student Session F: (Room 5C) “Community Reforestation (CoRe) Grant Panel Discussion,” Brent Knepper – City of Kingston; Martin Larocca – Binghamton University; and John Zeiger – New York Botanical Garden; moderated by Clara Pregitzer – Natural Areas Conservancy Session G: (Room 5AB) “Advancing Tree Equity in New York: Catalyzing Community-Driven Impact and Statewide Collaboration,” Becky Schwartz and Christina McLaughlin – American Forests “Growing Roots Together: Participatory Action Research, Reciprocity, and Transformation in Urban Forestry,” Dr. Mayra Rodríguez González – University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension

2026 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

9:45–10:15 a.m.	Break (<i>fifth floor common area</i>) – please visit our exhibitors and sponsors (<i>Room 5AB</i>)
10:15–11:00 a.m.	Concurrent sessions Session H: (<i>Room 5C</i>) “The Future Urban Arborist: Skills, Tools, & Technologies Cities Need for the Next Five Years,” Shravya Peddigari – SavATree Session I: (<i>Room 5AB</i>) “Preserving Trees During Construction in an Evolving City,” Ariane Trani – NYC Parks Session J: (<i>Room 4C</i>) “Resilience in Action: Green-Wood’s Stormwater Strategy,” Joe Charap – Green-Wood Cemetery
11:10 a.m.–12:15 p.m.	Closing session (<i>Room 5AB</i>) “The Arboreal Dimensions of Black New Yorkers,” Georgia Silvera Seamans – Local Nature Lab
12:15 p.m.	Grab-and-go lunch available (<i>fifth floor common area</i>)
1:00 p.m.	Conference ends



**Please complete the conference evaluation
to share your thoughts with us!**

Thank You!

Regional Conference Partners



NYC Parks

2026 Conference Planning Committee

Rachel Grum, Gloria Van Duyne
(Committee Co-Chairs)

Lori Brockelbank, Joseph Charap,
Helen Forgione, Donna Gurnett, Daniel
Hickey, Christina McLaughlin, Chris Neuber,
Leanna Nugent, Andrew Neuman,
Clara Pregitzer, Kip Stein, Meg Ventrudo,
Timothy Wenskus, Simone White

Presentation and Tour Details

Wednesday, July 15

1:00–5 p.m. | Preconference Activity (Room 4C)

“Community Reforestation (CoRe) Community of Practice”

Clara Pregitzer – *Deputy Director of Conservation Science, Natural Areas Conservancy*

This interactive workshop will provide attendees with the opportunity to network with people who are involved in restoration and reforestation efforts across the state. Information will be provided on urban natural areas and the CoRe grant program, and attendees will have a chance to ask questions and discuss key challenges to restoring and reforesting natural areas. Topics to be discussed include invasive species and deer browse mitigation, tree healthcare, tree installation, tree protection, and nursery stock inspection.

Credits available: CNLP: 4; SAF: 3.0 Category 1; ISA Certified Arborist: 4; ISA BCMA – Practice: 2; ISA BCMA – Management: 2; ISA Urban Forestry: 2

4:00 p.m. | Preconference Activity (Entrance to Kelly Commons on Waldo Ave.)

“NYC Great Tree 5K Run Through Van Cortlandt Park”

John Kilcullen – *Administrator of Staten Island’s South Shore Parks, NYC Parks*

Join John for an easy run/walk around Manhattan University’s neighborhood and Van Cortlandt Park to visit and learn about a few of the Great Trees of New York City. Be sure to wear comfortable running shoes and appropriate clothing and bring a water bottle. Meet on street level outside Kelly Commons.

Credits available: CNLP: 2

Thursday, July 16

8:30–9:15 a.m. | Welcome to ReLeaf 2026!

Gloria Van Duyne – DEC Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator

Fiona Watt – New York’s State Forester and DEC Division of Lands and Forests Director

Tricia Shimamura – NYC Parks Commissioner

Vanessa L. Gibson – Bronx Borough President

Lori Brockelbank – NYSUFC Board President

Credits available: CNLP .25

Presentation and Tour Details

KEYNOTE

9:15–10:00 a.m. | Keynote Address (Room 5AB)

“Take to the Trees”

Marguerite Holloway – *Professor and Director of Science and Environmental Journalism, Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism, and author of “Take to the Trees”*

Marguerite will talk about her recent book, *Take to the Trees: A Story of Hope, Science, and Self-Discovery in America’s Imperiled Forests*, named one of *Scientific American’s* top 10 books of 2025. A work of memoir and science reportage, *Take to the Trees* sounds the alarm about rapid arboreal decline while also offering hope about how we might care for our forests and ourselves.

Keynote credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: .5; ISA BCMA – Science: .25; ISA Practice: .25; SAF: .5 Category 1

CONCURRENT SESSIONS A, B, AND C

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Session A (Room 5AB)

“From Canopy to Craft: Reimagining Urban Wood Waste as a City Resource”

Chris Borman – *Director of Tree Preservation, NYC Parks*; and **Liz Zink** – *Creative Director*, and **Itai Jaffe** – *Operation Director, Tri-Lox*

NYC trees play a critical role in our health and well-being, providing cleaner air, a cooler city, lower energy costs, reduced stormwater runoff, and recreational opportunities. But what happens when a tree is removed? Too often, city trees are chipped and used as mulch or disposed of in landfills. Join us to learn how evaluating and salvaging trees that need to be removed extends their value beyond their life cycle. This presentation will cover operational strategies, coordination efforts, and opportunities for milling, reuse, and material tracking. Also learn how Tri-Lox is working with NYC Parks and others to chart a path toward a system that turns what was once considered waste into a local resource that contributes to a city-based circular economy.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: 1.25; SAF: 1 Category 1

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Session B (Room 5C)

“Urban Forest Plans for Changing Cities”

Emily Nobel Maxwell – *Principal, Nobel Cause Consulting*; **Julia Eiferman** – *Senior Advisor, NYC Mayor’s Office of Climate & Environmental Justice*; and **Stephen Harris** – *City Forester*, and **Clare Carney** – *Community Forester and Planting Plan Manager, Syracuse Parks & Rec*

Join us to learn about NYC’s first *Urban Forest Plan*, including an overview of the plan, how it was developed, the role of partnerships and collaboration, implementation plans, and lessons from our experience. You will also hear about the progress of the City of Syracuse’s *Urban Forest Master Plan*, which was released February 2020. The *Master Plan* identifies three primary goals: Grow canopy equitably by 7%, improve forest health and resiliency through proactive management, and connect the entire community to the urban forest through education and workforce programming. The *Master Plan* includes 12 strategies to achieve these goals.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: 1.25; SAF: 1 Category 1

Presentation and Tour Details

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Session C (Room 4C)

“NYC Parks Climber Pruner Training Program”

Ducep Moreno – *Climber Pruner Training Program Manager*, and **Ben Osborne** – *Assistant Commissioner of Forestry and Horticulture, NYC Parks*

In this presentation, we will be talking about NYC Parks’s need for climbers and pruners and how we solved the problem.

“Veterans Green Career Landscape Program”

Helen Thurston – *Institutional Advancement Consultant, Evergreens Cemetery Preservation Foundation*

The Evergreens Veterans Green Careers Training Program provides hands-on support in the form of landscape training, college-level horticultural education, safety certifications, and career advice to veterans as they transition from military to civilian employment. This presentation will review the creation of the program and discuss the benefits, challenges, and opportunities for veterans working in landscape restoration.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and BCMA – Management: 1.25; SAF: 1 Category 1

AFTERNOON TOURS AND SESSION D

Tour groups 1 and 3 will meet just north of Kelly Commons on Manhattan College Parkway. Please see map provided at check-in. We recommend attendees bring a full water bottle, sunscreen, and other comfort items for being outside for the duration of each tour.

If you did not sign up for a tour in advance or if you want to change or drop your tour, please check with the registration table.

Space for Tour 1 and Tour 3 is limited to 55 people. All buses for the tours leave and depart promptly at the start and end times listed below.

1:30–4:00 p.m. | Tour 1: Inwood Hill Park

Tim Wenskus – *Regional Forester, DEC*

Inwood Hill Park is a 196-acre park at the northern tip of Manhattan, containing the last natural forest and salt marsh in Manhattan. On this tour, attendees will see a grove of 200-year-old tulip trees, enjoy spectacular views of the Hudson River, learn about the impact and management of invasive plants and forest pests such as hemlock wooly adelgid, and learn about 35 years of urban forest management and restoration.

Accessibility: While much of the tour will be on paved trails, there will be some stretches with uneven, rocky terrain. Participants will be hiking/walking more than a mile with approximately 100 feet of grade change.

Credits available: CNLP: 3; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: 2; ISA BCMA – Science and ISA BCMA – Practice: .75; ISA BCMA – Management: .5; SAF: 2 Category 1; DEC Pesticide Credits: 1

Presentation and Tour Details

1:30–4:00 p.m. | Tour 2: Van Cortlandt Park

John Kilcullen – *Administrator of Staten Island’s South Shore Parks, NYC Parks*

Tour starts across from Horan Hall near the public restroom within the park. **To follow a guide to the location, meet on Waldo Avenue outside Kelly Commons at 1:15 p.m.**

Van Cortlandt Park is one of NYC’s largest urban forests. Attendees will hear about the forest reforestation efforts and invasive species management activities that have occurred within the park; see some of the larger trees within the park, including a few New York City Great Trees; and hear how the Bronx’s unique “mainland” topography has influenced its natural and human growth. Attendees will also hear about the wetland restorations occurring along the former Van Cortlandt Lake, recently renamed Hester and Piero’s Mill Pond.

Accessibility: Information will be available at the check-in table.

Credits available: CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: 2.5; ISA BCMA – Science and ISA BCMA – Management: .75; ISA BCMA – Practice: 1

2:00–4:30 p.m. | Tour 3: Woodlawn Cemetery

Elizabeth Hunter – *Coordinator of Public Programs*, **Jonathan Clemente** – *Preservation Program Manager*, and **Meg Ventrudo** – *Executive Director, Woodlawn Conservancy*; and **Herb Landmann** – *Project Manager, Davey Tree Expert Company*

The Woodlawn Cemetery is a 400-acre Level II Arboretum and a National Historic Landmark. Woodlawn is the final resting place of musicians, Gilded Age tycoons and society members, suffragists, authors, and notable citizens of the Harlem Renaissance. Woodlawn has more than 6,000 trees, including eight New York City Great Trees. This is a part walking, part trolley tour. The group will visit Woodlawn’s famed jazz corner—the final resting place of Miles Davis and Duke Ellington—and the weeping beech at the mausoleum of Jay Gould.

Accessibility: Much of the walking portion (approximately a mile) of the tour is on paved surfaces or relatively flat, grassy surfaces. If needed, a golf cart can be available for the walking portion of the tour.

Credits available: CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Science: 1; SAF: 2 Category 1

Presentation and Tour Details

2:00–4:00 p.m. | Session D (Room 4C)

“Increasing Capacity for Just Language: Reflecting on Histories of Native, Non-Native, and Invasive Species Language and Frameworks”

Tina Cuevas – *Natural Areas Outreach Coordinator*, **Lea Thali** – *Deputy Director of Natural Resources Training*, and **Neha Savant** – *Wildlife and Fisheries Ecologist, NYC Parks*

Introduced species can bring up a variety of strong emotions for land managers, environmental educators, restoration practitioners, and more. This workshop will explore how words like “invasive” convey cultural concepts that can be unintentionally off-putting depending on one’s lived experiences. This session will pair a presentation with engaging exercises and interactive activities that will challenge accepted language and perspectives to create new frameworks for talking about invasive species and what it takes to maintain biodiversity. We aim to provide an open and well-facilitated learning space for participants to be vulnerable and honest about their own experience.

“Distributed Restoration of the American Chestnut in New York City: Challenges, Opportunities, Uncertainty”

Jason Smith – *Director of Northern Manhattan Parks for NYRP*

Join us for an overview of NYRP’s Thousand Chestnut Challenge, a collaborative, grassroots effort to distribute and grow disease-resistant hybrid American chestnuts throughout NYC; we’ll also give an update on the largest urban planting of potentially disease-resistant American chestnuts in northern Manhattan’s Highbridge Park. This talk will explore urban chestnut restoration as an example of pragmatic conservation in the face of rapid environmental change and uncertainty. We’ll share social media and narrative approaches that have been effective in developing a distribution network of tree growers and in galvanizing strong public interest in urban biodiversity.

Credits available: CNLP: 2; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: 2; SAF: 2 Category 1

Friday, July 17

CONCURRENT SESSIONS E, F, AND G

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session E (Room 4C)

“What Do I Do with All This Public Tree Data? Using Syracuse’s TreeKeeper Data to Inform Future Urban Forest Management Decisions”

Jude May – *Master’s Student in Natural Resources Management, SUNY ESF*

Does your city have public tree data that has yet to be used to its full potential? Tree inventory and work-order history data can be utilized to calculate tree survival rates, assess planting initiative success, and identify potential management improvements that support tree and community growth. Drawing on research from their master’s thesis work on public tree survival in Syracuse, Jude will highlight some of the ways that survival analyses based on public tree data can lead to the creation of targeted tree-management priorities for municipalities and streamlining methods for field-data collection.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: .75; SAF: .5 Category 1

Presentation and Tour Details

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session F (Room 5C)

“Community Reforestation (CoRe) Grant Panel Discussion”

Moderated by Clara Pregitzer – *Deputy Director of Conservation Science, Natural Areas Conservancy*; this panel discussion features CoRe grantees Brent Knepper – *Forester, City of Kingston*; Martin Larocca – *Deputy Chief Sustainability Officer, Binghamton University*; and John Zeiger – *Thain Family Forest Manager, New York Botanical Garden*.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: .75; SAF: .5 Category 1

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session G (Room 5AB)

“Advancing Tree Equity in New York: Catalyzing Community-Driven Impact and Statewide Collaboration”

Becky Schwartz – *Director of Urban Forestry Innovation*, and **Christina McLaughlin** – *Director of Northeast Urban Forestry, American Forests*

This presentation will introduce how American Forests, through its Tree Equity program, is advancing community-driven urban forestry efforts across the state. Drawing on partnerships with local governments and frontline organizations (including providing community capital directly through our Catalyst Fund), we showcase how equitable investment in tree canopy can drive climate resilience, public health, and economic opportunity. We'll also highlight how this approach can help you achieve your urban and community forestry goals in your community. The session will invite attendees to explore opportunities for deeper collaboration and help seed a coordinated, statewide coalition to accelerate Tree Equity outcomes across diverse communities.

“Growing Roots Together: Participatory Action Research, Reciprocity, and Transformation in Urban Forestry”

Dr. Mayra Rodríguez González – *Extension Urban Forester, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension*

This talk explores how partnerships among state and municipal agencies, university researchers, Extension agents, and community leaders can support forestry practitioners in increasing participation from underserved communities through intentional relationship building, co-learning, and shared decision-making. Grounded in real-world urban forestry initiatives, this talk offers practical strategies for program design; technical assistance; and grant processes that expand access, strengthen trust, and deliver measurable impacts. Participants will leave with actionable insights for advancing equitable, community-centered urban forestry.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and BCMA – Management: .75; SAF: .5 Category 1

Presentation and Tour Details

CONCURRENT SESSIONS H, I, AND J

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session H (Room 5C)

“The Future Urban Arborist: Skills, Tools, & Technologies Cities Need for the Next Five Years”

Shravya Peddigari – *General Manager/Market Leader, SavATree*

In this session, we will explore what the next five years will require from urban arborists. By the end of this session, attendees will learn the five essential new competencies urban arborists must develop, how artificial intelligence and digital tools can enhance but not replace the arborist expertise, and practical communication strategies.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: .75; ISA BCMA – Practice: .25; ISA BCMA – Management: .5; SAF: .5 Category 1

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session I (Room 5AB)

“Preserving Trees During Construction in an Evolving City”

Ariane Trani – *Deputy Director for Permits and Plan Review, NYC Parks*

How do private and public development impact and mold the urban tree canopy, what role does an urban forestry professional play, and how can trees best be preserved on land where development projects are taking place? This presentation will be guided by these questions and will provide an overview of NYC Parks tree preservation policies, standards, plan review, and permitting of tree work around new development.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: .75; ISA BCMA – Practice: .25; ISA BCMA – Management: .5; SAF: .5 Category 1

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session J (Room 4C)

“Resilience in Action: Green-Wood’s Stormwater Strategy”

Joseph Charap – *Vice President of Landscape, The Green-Wood Cemetery*

The Green-Wood Cemetery in Brooklyn shows how urban arboreums can move beyond tree care to become critical infrastructure for climate adaptation. As a 478-acre accredited arboretum managing nearly 8,000 trees, Green-Wood developed a stormwater system that diverts 51 million gallons annually from NYC’s combined sewers—directly advancing municipal flood mitigation and water quality goals.

Credits available: CNLP: .75; ISA Certified Arborist and Urban Forestry: .75; ISA BCMA – Science: .5; ISA BCMA – Management: .25; SAF: .5 Category 1

CLOSING SESSION

11:10 a.m.–12:15 p.m. | (Room 5AB)

“The Arboreal Dimensions of Black New Yorkers”

Georgia Silvera Seamans – *Executive Director, Local Nature Lab*

A dominant narrative about the relationship between African and African-descended people and the land is told through the lens of enslaved labor and the production of export crops, such as rice, cotton, and tobacco, primarily in Southern states. While these histories are fundamental parts of the American story, there are other ways and places that Africans and African Americans engaged with natural resources. In this talk, Georgia will share Black New Yorkers’ connections with trees and forested areas between the Dutch period and the second half of the 20th century.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forestry, and ISA BCMA – Management: 1; SAF: 1 Category 1

Speaker Bios

Thank you to all our speakers who make the conference possible by sharing their knowledge with us!

Keynote

Marguerite Holloway
– Professor and
Director of Science and
Environmental Journalism,
Columbia University's
Graduate School of
Journalism



Photo: Alex Hodor-Lee

Marguerite Holloway has written about the environment and science for several publications, including *The New York Times*; *The New Yorker*; *Audubon*; *Wired*; and *Scientific American*, where she was a longtime writer and editor. She is a professor and the Director of Science and Environmental Journalism at the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University. For more about Marguerite's work, visit margueriteholloway.com.

Closing Presenter

Georgia Silvera Seamans – Executive Director,
Local Nature Lab

Georgia Silvera Seamans is an urban community forester living and working in NYC. She is passionate about exploring the connections and interactions among people and plants—and birds, too. Georgia teaches environmental studies at the college level and is the Executive Director of Local Nature Lab. She has bylines in *Urban Forestry & Urban Greening*, *City Trees*, *Birding Magazine*, and *American Gardener*. For more about Georgia's work, visit georgiasilveraseamans.com/.

Speakers

Chris Borman – Director of Tree Preservation,
NYC Parks

Chris Borman began his career at NYC Parks in 2015 as a Forester at the Manhattan Forestry office, where he inspected trees and managed tree maintenance contracts. He was promoted to Senior Forester in 2016 and Deputy Director in 2020, contributing to the borough's tree preservation and risk management efforts. Chris is particularly passionate about insects and plant disease identification and has led numerous trainings for NYC Parks Forestry staff on pest identification and management. In 2023, Chris became Director of Tree Preservation, where he oversees the Permits and Plan Review team, the Trees and Sidewalks program, and the citywide Forestry Maintenance Contracts. He holds a Doctor of Plant Health degree from the University of Nebraska, with diagnostic experience through internships at the Bartlett Tree Experts Diagnostic Laboratory in North Carolina and Chicago's Morton Arboretum Diagnostic Laboratory.

Clare Carney – Community Forester and Planting
Plan Manager, Syracuse Parks & Rec

Clare Carney oversees the planting of approximately 1,200 trees annually, provides training and oversight for planting workforce programs, and develops education programs citywide for the community. Clare previously worked for Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County as a community forestry educator and a planting plan manager and educator. During that time, Clare played a supporting role in gathering public input for the *Urban Forest Master Plan*. Clare earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology from SUNY Oneonta and is an ISA Certified Arborist.

Speaker Bios

Joe Charap – Vice President of Landscape, The Green-Wood Cemetery

Joseph Charap leads the care and strategic development of The Green-Wood Cemetery's historic 478 acres.

Overseeing all landscape operations—including arboriculture, meadow and turf management, monument restoration, and historic preservation—he integrates climate-adaptive strategies to enhance biodiversity and sustain Green-Wood's living collection. Since joining Green-Wood in 2014, Charap has advanced resiliency initiatives, elevated the institution's profile as an arboretum, and positioned it as a leader in urban green space management.



Jonathan Clemente – Preservation Program Manager, Woodlawn Cemetery

Jonathan Clemente received his master's degree in Historic Preservation from Columbia University.

Combining his passion for arbor care with his love of historic craftsmanship, he manages the training of over 50 young tradespeople each year. His goal is to restore historic materials and train a new generation of hardworking professionals who care about our natural and historic resources.



Tina Cuevas – Natural Areas Outreach Coordinator, NYC Parks

Tina Cuevas has worked for NYC Parks for four and a half years. Growing up in the San Francisco Bay area, she cultivated her love for the outdoors and urban biodiversity during her formative years and decided to transition to the environmental field a few years after graduating college. After working for a unique urban trail system in the Bay, she moved to NYS to pursue a master's degree in Environmental Education and further her connection to urban biodiversity. Tina loves working to connect all New Yorkers to the unique natural areas in their communities and emphasizing that nature is all around us—even in cities!



Julia Eiferman – Senior Advisor, NYC Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice

In her role at the NYC Mayor's Office of Climate & Environmental Justice, Julia leverages science-based analysis, policy, planning, and program development to help NYC adapt to the multiple impacts of climate change. Her portfolio focuses on mitigating extreme heat and building social resilience, including by leading the creation of NYC's first *Urban Forest Plan*. Previously, Julia worked as an analyst at the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory and as a coordinator for the National Parks Conservation Association in Washington, DC. Julia has a BA from Bates College, and an MPA in Environmental Science and Policy from Columbia University's School for International and Public Affairs.

Speaker Bios

Stephen Harris – City Arborist, Syracuse Parks & Rec

Steve Harris leads the Forestry Division at the Syracuse Parks & Rec which oversees 36,000 street trees, 10,000 parks trees, and 500 acres of forested natural areas. Steve holds an MS in Forest Resource Management from SUNY ESF and is an ISA certified arborist and municipal specialist. Steve has worked in urban forestry for over 20 years with stints in the Cornell Cooperative Extension system and the nursery industry. Steve got his start in forestry while serving in the Peace Corps in The Gambia, West Africa, in the early 1990s.

Liz Hunter – Coordinator of Public Programs, Woodlawn Conservancy

Liz Hunter organizes and conducts historic tours of the cemetery and spearheads the Woodlawn Cemetery and Conservancy's Memorial Day Flagging of Veterans' Graves.

Itai Jaffe – Operations Director, Tri-Lox

Itai Jaffe manages day-to-day operations that bring projects from concept to final product at Tri-Lox, a design, custom fabrication, and millwork practice that works with regional, sustainable wood. Their work includes building the infrastructure that facilitates the company's NYC Tree Salvage and Wood Reuse program and coordinating with key stakeholders, such as NYC Parks, arborists, developers, and regional sawmills to ensure city trees have a pathway to reuse at the end of their life cycle.

Herb Landmann – Project Manager, Davey Business Development Team, The Davey Tree Expert Company

Herb joined Davey in 2002, working as a project manager over multiple landscaping and arboriculture projects from the Chantilly, VA, office through 2008. Most recently, Herb has been a project manager for the Davey Business Development Team in the NYC area, performing the duties of Contract Arborist and Horticulture/Arboriculture Instructor at The Woodlawn Cemetery in the Bronx.



Martin Larocca – Deputy Chief Sustainability Officer, Binghamton University

As the Deputy Chief Sustainability Officer for Binghamton University, Martin is passionate about fostering a sustainable campus culture through a systems-thinking approach—committed to leveraging detailed data tracking to identify trends, inform decision-making, and drive impactful change. He focuses on reinforcing appropriate actions through policy alignment, behavioral incentives, and continuous feedback loops to create lasting, positive environmental and social impacts. He is a member of the Campus Sustainability Committee, the Sustainable Communities Transdisciplinary Area of Excellence steering committee, and various New York State and SUNY sustainability working groups. He is a guest lecturer for the Binghamton University Environmental Studies program, focusing on campus sustainability and establishing metrics necessary for advancing sustainability programs and social changes needed to further environmentally sustainable mindsets at the university. He graduated Binghamton with a BS in Environmental Studies: Ecosystems and a master's degree in Public Administration with a certificate in Local Government Management.



Speaker Bios

Emily Nobel Maxwell – Principal, Nobel Cause Consulting

Emily Nobel Maxwell leads Nobel Cause Consulting, helping organizations and leaders meaningfully advance social and environmental justice for a greener, more just world. In addition to her consulting practice, Emily recently served as Senior Advisor at City Parks Foundation, where she served as a subject and strategy expert for NYC's first citywide *Urban Forest Plan*. With 25 years of on-the-ground and thought leadership experience, Emily has designed and led numerous successful environmental initiatives that harmonize social justice and urban sustainability, from campaigns to organizations. From her start as the founder of a grassroots advocacy organization, to launching successful programs at national and global environmental organizations, her leadership has resulted in the protection of community gardens; equitable incentives for green roofs; effective broad-based coalitions; novel urban forest policy; lasting organizational change; and greener cities. Emily is a lead author of NYC's first *Urban Forest Plan*, *The State of the Urban Forest in NYC*, *NYC Urban Forest Agenda*, and *Urban Coastal Resilience: Valuing Nature's Role*. Emily has a BA in Urban Studies from The New School and an MS in Natural Resource Policy and Behavior with a specialization in Environmental Justice from University of Michigan.



Jude May – Master's Student, Natural Resources Management, SUNY ESF

Jude May is a graduate student in their final year at SUNY ESF studying natural resource management, with a focus on urban forestry and arboriculture. Jude holds a BS in Industrial Labor Relations from Cornell University and previously worked in the field of sustainable food systems and



agriculture, holding multiple positions with not-for-profit organizations before beginning their master's work at SUNY ESF. They also worked seasonally with the City of Syracuse Forestry Division, performing young tree care and quality control checks on subcontracted tree work, and completed the Summer Program with the SUNY ESF Ranger School. Jude is grateful to have had the opportunity to work together with the Syracuse Forestry Division and their advisor, Dr. Deborah Hilbert, to analyze public tree data from the City of Syracuse. In their free time, Jude also loves to garden, forage, and share the spoils of their farming pursuits with friends.

Christina McLaughlin – Director, Northeast Urban Forestry at American Forests

Christina McLaughlin works across the region to improve Tree Equity at the community, city, county, and state levels.



Ducep Moreno – Climber Pruner Training Program Manager, NYC Parks

Ducep Moreno manages the Climber Pruner Training Program at NYC Parks. He joined the NYC Parks Forestry Division in 2015 and started out as a climber and pruner before moving up to supervise several crews. Before his time with NYC Parks, Ducep worked as an arborist for Bartlett Tree Experts, Davey Tree, and Greenwood Tree and Lawn, where he also advanced to supervisory roles.



He is an ISA Certified Arborist, holds Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), and is a TCIA Certified Treecare Safety Professional (CTSP). Ducep is also a member of the New York State Arborist Association and helps organize the NYS Tree Climbing Championship.

Speaker Bios

Ducep grew up in Venezuela, where he developed a love for trees early on. After years of hands-on experience, he now shares his skills with others interested in becoming arborists. Seeing a need for more climbers and pruners at NYC Parks, he worked with the Workforce Development team to create the Climber Pruner Training Program, a 15-month course for qualified and motivated individuals.

Ben Osborne – Assistant Commissioner of Forestry and Horticulture, NYC Parks

Ben Osborne oversees tree planting and preservation, tree care operations, and related safety and training programs at NYC Parks.

Ben has worked at NYC Parks since 2007 as a Forester, Capital Projects Arborist, and manager of multiple teams. Ben has bachelor's degrees in Biology and Spanish from New York University and a master's degree in Botany from the University of Vermont. He is an ISA Board-Certified Master Arborist and Qualified Tree Risk Assessor and a DEC-licensed pesticide applicator technician.



Shravya Peddigari – General Manager/Market Leader, SavATree

Shravya Peddigari leads urban tree care and plant health care operations across the New Jersey and New York metropolitan region. With a background in plant science and turfgrass management, her work centers on delivering practical, field-ready approaches to managing trees in urban environments and leading sales arborists, operations, and administrations at the branch level.



In addition to her operational leadership, Shravya is known for her independent work exploring how emerging technologies, data, and new decision-making tools can support arborist expertise and improve urban forestry outcomes. She is an active speaker and thought leader in the green industry, focused on workforce readiness and operational efficiency. She also works to prepare urban forestry professionals for the next generation of challenges facing cities, helping them navigate the evolving demands of modern cities.

Clara Pregitzer – Deputy Director of Conservation Science, Natural Areas Conservancy

Dr. Pregitzer has over 15 years of ecological research experience in NYC, including leading field surveys in over 10,000 acres of natural areas,

writing management plans, and spearheading efforts to understand the impacts of climate change on urban natural areas. She founded the Forests in Cities Network, a national network dedicated to promoting and advancing healthy forested natural areas in cities across the U.S. through science-practice partnerships.



Speaker Bios

Mayra Rodríguez González – Extension Urban Forester, University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension

Dr. Mayra Rodríguez González specializes in translating complex science into community action, advancing equitable, place-based solutions through participatory research, geospatial analysis, and culturally responsive outreach. With an interdisciplinary background in Urban Ecology and Socio-Ecological Systems, Mayra bridges the gap between scientific inquiry and practical resource access. In her role at the University of Connecticut, she has established an extensive Urban and Community Forestry program since 2022, partnering with over 40 organizations, leading climate resilience planning across 12 cities, and advising 162 decision-makers. Her commitment to education is reflected in the training of 2,600 practitioners and the engagement of over 2,200 community members and youth. Through a dedicated focus on conservation education and co-governance, she strives to cultivate sustainable, climate-resilient urban landscapes throughout Connecticut.



Neha Savant – Wildlife and Fisheries Ecologist, NYC Parks

Neha Savant conducts interdisciplinary research and monitoring to protect, advocate for, and maintain wildlife populations taking refuge on NYC Parks land. She also supports NYC Parks's invasive species communication strategies and tribal nation collaborations. Neha has a bachelor's in Biology from Pomona College and a master's in Ecology, Evolution, and Conservation Biology from Columbia University. She has worked on natural resource management in academic, nonprofit, and government sectors for the past decade and is a core member of Just Language for Ecology Education. She enjoys writing, dancing, and learning with neighbors—human or otherwise.



Becky Schwartz – Director, Tools and Resources, Urban Forestry at American Forests

Becky Schwartz works across the U.S. on integrating American Forests' Tree Equity tools and resources into full-cycle urban forestry. During her free time, she enjoys playing taiko (Japanese drums) and giving impromptu tree tours to her wife and dog.



Jason Smith – Director of Northern Manhattan Parks, NYRP

Jason Smith manages the stewardship of parklands and implements projects that enhance the resilience of northern Manhattan. Jason's interests include climate adaptation, conservation, gardening, and painting. Prior to working at NYRP, Jason taught art and design at SUNY Buffalo and Canisius College. Jason is motivated to find creative and collaborative approaches to improving the sustainability, beauty, and equity of the urban commons.

Lea Thali – Deputy Director of Natural Resources Training, NYC Parks

Lea Thali is the Deputy Director of the NYC Parks Natural Resources Training Program, a five-year grant-funded program focused on workforce development and improving forest health in parks in disadvantaged communities. She is an ISA-Certified Arborist with a master's degree in Environmental Policy and Sustainability Management from The New School. She began her career with NYC Parks almost nine years ago serving as an AmeriCorps member with the NYC Parks Stewardship team and fell in love with engaging the public and caring for the urban forest.



Speaker Bios

Helen Thurston – Institutional Advancement Consultant, Evergreens Cemetery Preservation Foundation

Helen Thurston has been involved with the Urban and Community Forest program at the historic Evergreens Cemetery in Bushwick, Brooklyn, for more than a decade. Through her supportive efforts, the Evergreens is now a registered Level II Arboretum and has had long-standing collaborations with local green community organizations, including an agricultural high school.

During her career, Helen has analyzed the broader landscape while paying attention to detail, a combined focus that helps to ensure that strategic projects are implemented on a timely basis. She has worked for local government, Wall Street financial corporations, universities and primary education institutions, and not-for-profits in the NYC region. Since 2008, she has advised a variety of nonprofits by supporting the CEO to achieve institutional growth.

Ariane Trani – Deputy Director for the Permits and Plan Review Team, NYC Parks

Ariane Trani is the Deputy Director for the Permits and Plan Review team at NYC Parks housed under the Division of Environment and Planning, Forestry and Horticulture. For the last 10 years, Ariane has worked within the urban forestry sphere at NYC Parks as Forester, Senior Forester, and Deputy Director of the Permits and Plan Review program. In her current role, she manages a team of foresters and administrators who review tree preservation and tree planting plans, ensure trees are properly protected during private and public construction projects, issue tree work permits (including all planting permits issued citywide), and enforce street tree zoning requirements and tree replacement requirements citywide. She holds a Bachelor of Science from Virginia Tech in Forestry (concentration in Urban Forestry) and is an ISA Certified Arborist, Urban Forest Professional, and Qualified Tree Risk Assessor.



Meg Ventrudo – Executive Director, Woodlawn Conservancy

In March 2020, Meg joined the staff of the Woodlawn Conservancy at the Historic Woodlawn Cemetery, Bronx, where she combines her love of art, history, and architecture to advance the mission of the conservancy. At Woodlawn, Meg is responsible for public and educational programming, fundraising, grants management, and institutional development. As Woodlawn is a Level II Arboretum, Meg has learned a lot about arbor care, urban forest management, and environmental justice.



Tim Wenskus – Regional Forester, DEC

Tim Wenskus is most recently DEC's Regional Forestry Manager for Region 2, managing the State Land, Urban Forestry, Forest Health, and Real Property programs for the region. He previously held the titles of Senior Forester, Special Projects Manager, and Deputy Director in the Natural Resources Group (NRG) of NYC Parks. He received a BS in Forest Resource Management from SUNY ESF. He is a founding father of the NYC Parks Forest Restoration Program, and has 30 years of experience successfully managing tens of millions of dollars of woodland restoration projects, including reforestation, invasive species control, and slope stabilization, as well as NRG's portion of the MillionTreesNYC initiative. He is a regional expert on invasive plant management and has lectured at Rutgers University, Columbia University, and the University of Pennsylvania.



Speaker Bios

John Zeiger – Manager, Thain Family Forest

John Zeiger is the manager of the Thain Family Forest at the New York Botanical Garden. He holds a master's degree in Conservation Biology from SUNY ESF and a bachelor's in Natural Resources from Cornell University. Prior to his current position, he managed 1,000 acres of forest and other natural areas for the Westchester Land Trust. His previous work also included wildlife monitoring and habitat restoration in Arizona, California, Wisconsin, and Jamaica.



Liz Zink – Creative Director, Tri-Lox

Liz Zink is the Creative Director of Tri-Lox, a Brooklyn-based company that makes architectural surfaces and fabricated elements from locally sourced wood. Tri-Lox sources wood in ways that support forest health, conducting applied research with experts in the fields of forestry, conservation, and building technology. As Creative Director, Liz is focused on research, content and brand strategy, and communications. Since she joined Tri-Lox in 2019, Liz has spent much of her time focused on the company's NYC Tree Salvage and Wood Reuse program—the first step toward a permanent infrastructure that keeps trees from our urban forest out of the waste stream and gives them renewed purpose at the end of their life cycle.



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- Be the first to hear about upcoming events! Subscribe to DEC's monthly newsletter by visiting on.ny.gov/urbanforestrynews, or scan the QR code and sign up for the "Forests, Plants, and Land Conservation" topic. Look for the "Urban Forestry Corner" of the newsletter to learn about events near you.
- Sign up for NYSUFC's monthly newsletter, *Taking Root*, by clicking the subscribe link on the right-hand side at nysufc.org.
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