

31st Annual

New York ReLeaf Conference

July 24–26, 2024

Hilton Albany

Albany, NY



**New York
ReLeaf**



Department of
Environmental
Conservation



Welcome to the 2024 ReLeaf Conference!

Urban Forestry: Trees Where You Are!

Urban forests are the trees where people work, live, and play. From federal Inflation Reduction Act funding for urban forestry initiatives to Governor Kathy Hochul's 25-million trees initiative, now is the time for urban forestry in New York State! We are pleased to welcome you to the annual conference, where attendees will hear from speakers on equity, inclusion, urban forestry research, grant writing, Tree City USA, and more. Attendees will 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 for use during the conference. Water stations are available to refill your bottle. 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 buses or walk when attending the tours and picnic.

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 DEC Pesticide Applicators, as noted in this program. Additional credits for American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP) may be available. 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

- Hilton Albany's address is:
40 Lodge Street, Albany NY 12207.
- Parking is available in the garage attached to the hotel for an event rate of \$10 per day. See the conference check-in desk to get the event-rate sticker.

Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with Federal law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, age, disability, and reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.)

Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication for program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotape, American Sign Language, etc.) should contact the responsible State or local agency that administers the program, or USDA's TARGET Center at 202-720-2600 (voice and TTY), or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at 800-877-8339. Additionally, program information is also available in languages other than English.

This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

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2024 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 Hilton Albany.

Wednesday, July 24	
1:00–3:00 p.m.	Sponsor and vendor exhibit setup (<i>East Gallery Event Room</i>)
1:00–3:30 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council board meeting (<i>Empire AB</i>)
3:00–5:30 p.m.	Attendee check-in opens (<i>East Gallery</i>)
4:00–5:30 p.m.	Preconference activity
6:00–7:00 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council member meeting (<i>Empire AB</i>)
7:00–9:00 p.m.	NYS Urban Forestry Council member reception (<i>East Gallery</i>)
Thursday, July 25 – Morning	
7:30 a.m.	Attendee check-in opens (<i>East Gallery</i>)
7:00–8:30 a.m.	Light breakfast for attendees (<i>East Gallery</i>)
8:30– 9:15 a.m.	Welcome to ReLeaf 2024! Opening remarks (<i>Governor A</i>) • DEC Urban and Community Forestry (UCF) Program Coordinator Gloria Van Duyne • NYS Urban Forestry Council President Phil Healey • NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Interim Commissioner Sean Mahar • City of Albany Mayor Kathy Sheehan • State Forester and DEC Division of Lands and Forests Director Fiona Watt
9:15–10:00 a.m.	Keynote Address: “Urban Foresters: Stories From the Front Lines,” (<i>Governor A</i>) Leslie Berckes – Executive Director, Urban and Community Forestry Society
10:00–10:05 a.m.	Exhibitor introductions (<i>Governor A</i>)
10:05–10:45 a.m.	Break – please visit our exhibitors and sponsors (<i>East Gallery</i>)

2024 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Concurrent sessions Session A: (<i>Anteroom</i>) “Monitoring Urban Tree Life and Death,” Deb Hilbert, PhD – Owner, Many Trees Consulting, and Assistant Professor, State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) “A Century of Change in an Urban Forest,” Eliot Nagele – New Jersey Director of Lands, The Nature Conservancy Session B: (<i>Governor B</i>) “Mastering Grant Writing for Urban Forestry and Ecological Projects,” Josh Behounek – Business Development Manager, Davey Resource Group “NY UCF Program Grants: Project Successes,” panel discussion with Robert Leslie – Director of Planning, Town of Bethlehem; Jay Lavigne – Arborist, City of Albany; and Paul Fahr – Tree Committee Member, City of Watervliet Session C: (<i>Chambers</i>) “Lessons Learned Planting Trees in Environmental Justice Neighborhoods,” panel discussion with representatives from Community Fathers Inc. (Schenectady), Environmental Justice Fellowship (Newburgh), and Onondaga Earth Corps (Syracuse) “Creating Sustainable Tree Equity Initiatives,” panel discussion with Kathy Lawrence – Board Chair, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy; Scott Kellogg, PhD – Educational Director, Radix Ecological Sustainability Center (Radix Center); a representative from Onondaga Earth Corps; and Kenneth Brooks – Assistant Director, Community Fathers Inc.
12:00 p.m.	Lunch (<i>Governor A</i>) Attendee check-in closes
Thursday, July 25 – Afternoon	
1:30 p.m.	Board buses/vans for local tours at the front of the hotel. Buses/vans will leave promptly at 1:45 p.m. For those providing their own transportation or walking to the local sites for Tours 2 and 3, please arrive by 2 p.m.

2024 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

2:00–4:30 p.m.	Concurrent local tours Tour 1: Albany Pine Bush Preserve Tour 2: Washington Park Tour 3: Radix Center For those not interested in going on the tours, there will be a viewing of <i>Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species</i> at DEC’s Central Office, 625 Broadway. Meet at the registration table to sign up for a shuttle.
4:30–5:15 p.m.	Return from tours and break
5:30–8:00 p.m.	Dinner for all attendees at Common Roots Albany Outpost, 19 Quackenbush Square, Albany, NY 12207. Walk to dinner or take a shuttle bus. Buses will run from the hotel to the restaurant from 5:15 to 6:00 p.m., and make return trips from 7 to 8 p.m. Stop by the Albany Visitor Center next door at 25 Quackenbush Square, open 5–6 p.m. (special hours) for the conference.
Friday, July 26 – Morning	
8:00–9:00 a.m.	Breakfast for overnight guests (<i>SC West Multipurpose Room</i>)
9:00–9:45 a.m.	Concurrent sessions Session D: (<i>Anteroom</i>) “Forests in Cities: Challenges and Opportunities to Achieving Healthy Forests in the Urban Context,” Clara Pregitzer, PhD – Deputy Director of Conservation Science, The Natural Areas Conservancy Session E: (<i>Governor B</i>) “Models of Urban Forestry in the Capital District,” panel discussion with Steve Lashomb – Arborist, City of Saratoga Springs; Jonathon Marr – Tree Council Member, Town of Niskayuna; and Mark Marion – Village of Round Lake Session F: (<i>Chambers</i>) “Analyzing Street Tree Diversity Over Redlining Districts in Schenectady, NY,” Allison Malatesta – Student, Union College, and Jeff Corbin, PhD – Professor, Union College “Redlining and the Impacts of Environmental Racism in Syracuse,” Lemir Teron, PhD – Associate Professor, Howard University
9:45–10:15 a.m.	Break – please visit our exhibitors and sponsors (<i>East Gallery</i>)

2024 ReLeaf Conference Agenda at a Glance

10:15–11:00 a.m.	Concurrent sessions Session G: <i>(Anteroom)</i> “Research Update From NYS DEC’s Forest Health Research Lab,” Amanda Dillon – Lab Manager, DEC Session H: <i>(Governor B)</i> “Tree City USA – A Field Manual,” – Leanna Nugent, Community Forestry Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County Session I: <i>(Chambers)</i> “Overcoming Obstacles to Equitable Tree Planting,” panel discussion with Lemir Teron, PhD – Associate Professor, Howard University; Betsy Henry, PhD – President, ReTree Schenectady; Kate Littlefield – Program Manager, Onondaga Earth Corps; and Kathryn McKenzie – Former Newburgh Environmental Justice Fellow and Board Member, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy
11:05 a.m.–12:00 p.m.	Closing session <i>(Governor A)</i> “Women in Urban Forestry: Today and Tomorrow,” panel discussion with Fiona Watt – Division of Lands and Forests Director and State Forester, DEC; Danielle Gift – Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager, Northeast, USDA Forest Service; Lori Brockelbank – Area Manager, Davey Resource Group; and Jeanne Grace – City Forester, City of Ithaca
12:00 p.m.	Grab-and-go lunch available <i>(East Gallery)</i>
1:00 p.m.	Conference ends

Presentation and Tour Details

Wednesday, July 24

4:00–5:30 p.m.

Preconference activity

- **TBD** – Details will be available at the registration table.

Thursday, July 25

KEYNOTES

9:15–10:00 a.m. | Keynote Address (*Governor A*)

“Urban Foresters: Stories from the Front Lines”

Leslie Berckes – *Executive Director, Urban and Community Forestry Society (UCFS)*

Urban Forestry is a growing profession of people who make daily tree stewardship decisions. These are the frontline folks who make trees happen, the people without whom our collective tree goals will not be met! We need our urban foresters to feel confident and fully competent in their tree-care decisions. However, it’s a tough job! Extreme weather, wearing too many hats, municipal politics—it can be a lot.

In this presentation, Executive Director of UCFS Leslie Berckes will share stories from members who are creatively meeting these challenges and positioning themselves to take advantage of new opportunities.

UCFS is the professional membership home for urban foresters and gives a voice to their concerns, challenges, and triumphs. Leslie will share case studies that reveal the novel solutions and innovative practices that UCFS members from across the country are putting into practice. What is the urban forestry “multiverse”? How can we best support New York State urban forestry professionals, like many of you, through the current urban forestry inflection point?

Keynote credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 0.75; ISA BCMA – Management: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

CONCURRENT SESSIONS A, B, AND C

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Session A (Antechamber)

“Monitoring Urban Tree Life and Death”

Deb Hilbert, PhD – *Owner, Many Trees Consulting, and Assistant Professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry, SUNY ESF*

This talk summarizes recent scientific research on urban tree mortality and growth. The audience will learn strategies for improving the growth and longevity of the trees they manage. They will also learn about monitoring programs that can help them assess tree mortality and evaluate planting initiative success.

“A Century of Change in an Urban Forest”

Eliot Nagele – *New Jersey Director of Lands, The Nature Conservancy*

Urban forests have long been understudied, resulting in a scarcity of long-term data to guide future management. The New York Botanical Garden in New York City (NYC) has been stewarding the 20-hectare Thain Family Forest since 1895. Using inventory data from between 1937 and 2021, we document how structure, diversity, and composition of the forest have changed over the past century.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 1.25; ISA BCMA – Practice: 0.25; ISA BCMA-Science and BCMA – Management 0.5; SAF: 1.0

10:45 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Session B (Governor B)

“Mastering Grant Writing for Urban Forestry and Ecological Projects”

Josh Behounek – *Business Development Manager, Davey Resource Group*

This presentation is designed specifically for urban forestry and ecological improvement projects. In this informative session, you’ll learn the essential strategies and best practices to successfully secure funding for your important projects and initiatives. Whether you’re new to grant writing or looking to refine your skills, this presentation will equip you with the knowledge and tools needed to secure funding for your urban forestry and environmental projects.

“NY UCF Program Grants: Project Successes”

Panel discussion with **Robert Leslie** – *Director of Planning, Town of Bethlehem*; **Jay Lavigne** – *Arborist, City of Albany*; and **Paul Fahr** – *Tree Committee Member, City of Watervliet*

Panelists will discuss their recent successes with projects funded through DEC’s UCF Program Grants for tree planting, tree maintenance, and inventory and management plans.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1.25; SAF: 1.0

Presentation and Tour Details

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

“Lessons Learned Planting Trees in Environmental Justice Neighborhoods”

Panel discussion with representatives from *Community Fathers Inc. – Summer Tree Planting Collaborative*, *Newburgh Environmental Justice Fellowship*, and *Onondaga Earth Corps*

Panelists will discuss their experiences planting trees in environmental justice areas, including successes, challenges, and advice for other communities.

“Creating Sustainable Tree Equity Initiatives”

Panel discussion with **Kathy Lawrence** – *Board Chair, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy*; **Scott Kellogg, PhD** – *Educational Director, Radix Center*; **Representative** – *Onondaga Earth Corps*; and **Kenneth Brooks** – *Assistant Director, Community Fathers Inc.*

Panelists will discuss the evolution of their respective organizations: what has worked, what hasn't worked, and ideas for continuing and expanding their organization's impact.

Credits available CNLP: 1.25; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1.25; SAF: 1.0

AFTERNOON TOURS

Buses/vans will leave the hotel promptly at 1:45 p.m. If providing your own transportation or walking, please arrive by 2:00 p.m.

All tours are outdoors. We recommend attendees bring a full water bottle, sunscreen, and other comfort items for being outside for two hours.

2:00–4:30 p.m. | Tour 1: Albany Pine Bush Preserve

Tyler Briggs – *Fire Manager, Albany Pine Bush Preserve*, and **Neil Gifford** – *Conservation Director, Albany Pine Bush Preserve*

Meet at: Albany Pine Bush Preserve Discovery Center, 195 New Karner Road, Albany, NY 12205

The Albany Pine Bush Preserve is home to a unique variety of rare plants and animals—including the federally endangered Karner blue butterfly—and relies on prescribed fires to manage the ecosystem and its restoration. The Pine Bush is also a suburban nature preserve, surrounded by residential and commercial neighbors. This tour will focus on how and why the Pine Bush burns and the preserve's communications with neighbors about prescribed fires.

Tour involves walking approximately 2.7 miles on well-maintained hiking trails, with some elevation changes and hills. The loop starts and ends at the Discovery Center, which has restrooms available.

Credits available: CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 2.0; ISA BCMA – Science and BCMA – Management: 1.0; SAF: 2.5

Presentation and Tour Details

2:00–4:30 p.m. | Tour 2: Washington Park

Tom Pfeiffer – Board Member, Washington Park Conservancy

Meet at: Henry John Boulevard and State Street entrance at the Soldiers and Sailors monument

In this walking tour of Washington Park, attendees will learn the history of the park and its tree species. Washington Park is home to Albany's annual Tulip Festival, summer theatre series, and many other events, and the park serves an outdoor gathering space for the city.

Tour involves walking on paved pathways for approximately one mile with minimal elevation changes.

Credits available: CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 2.0; ISA BCMA – Science and BCMA – Practice: 1.0; SAF: 2.5

2:00–4:30 p.m. | Tour 3: Radix Center

Scott Kellogg, PhD – Education Director, Radix Center

Meet at: Radix Ecological Sustainability Center, 153 Grand Street, Albany, NY 12202. For those who wish to walk (0.7 miles, mostly flat, approximately 15-minutes): from the hotel walk 1 block south on State Street, turn right onto South Pearl Street, walk 0.3 miles then turn right onto Madison Avenue, walk 1 block then turn left onto Grand Street, walk 0.2 miles to Radix Center on right.

The Radix Ecological Sustainability Center is a nonprofit organization that promotes ecological literacy and just sustainability in Albany's South End and the local region. Since 2021, Radix Center has conducted the South End Biocultural Diversity Forest program, encouraging urban agroforestry by planting 175 food-producing street trees in formerly redlined communities with the assistance of the Radix Center's Ecojustice Associate youth staff. This is a walking tour of the neighborhood to hear about successes and challenges of the project.

Tour involves walking on paved pathways for one mile with minimal elevation changes.

Credits available: CNLP: 2.5; ISA Certified Arborist and Municipal Specialist: 2.0; ISA BCMA – Science and BCMA – Management: 1.0 ; SAF: 2.5

3:00–4:00 p.m. | *Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species* viewing

Emma Antolos – Public Participation Specialist, DEC, and **Andrea Nieves** – Invasive Species Outreach and Education Coordinator, DEC

Meet at: 625 Broadway, Albany, NY in room PA129

Watch the Emmy Award-winning documentary *Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species*. *Uninvited* was released in 2021 and broadcast on PBS. The film was funded by the New York State Environmental Protection Fund and produced by DEC and West Field Production Co. After the film there will be time for questions with DEC staff.

Presentation and Tour Details

Friday, July 26

CONCURRENT SESSIONS D, E, AND F

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session D (Antechamber)

“Forests in Cities: Challenges and Opportunities to Achieving Healthy Forests in the Urban Context”
Clara Pregitzer, PhD – *Deputy Director of Conservation Science, The Natural Areas Conservancy*

This presentation will focus on quantifying and contextualizing urban natural area forests—specifically in NYC—and their need for management. We will describe current conditions, look at NYC’s natural area forests in the context of climate change, historical land use, and current policies and management priorities. We will draw connections to other less-urban forests across New York State and review several online tools and resources.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal specialist, and BCMA – Science: 0.75; SAF 0.5

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session E (Governor B)

“Models of Urban Forestry in the Capital District”

Panel discussion with **Steve Lashomb** – *Arborist, City of Saratoga Springs*; **Jonathon Marr** – *Tree Council member, Town of Niskayuna*; and **Mark Marion** – *Village of Round Lake*

Each panelist will discuss their community urban forestry program, how their program is structured, and the benefits of their community’s model.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

9:00–9:45 a.m. | Session F (Chambers)

“Analyzing Street Tree Diversity Over Redlining Districts in Schenectady, NY”

Allison Malatesta – *Union College, Class of 2024*, and **Jeff Corbin, PhD** – *Professor of Biological Sciences, Union College*

Street trees are an important part of an urban ecosystem and require meaningful investment by city governments. However, certain neighborhoods have historically received greater levels of investment due to a 1930s-era federal financial program, commonly called redlining, that was racially motivated and targeted people of color. We analyzed differences in street tree populations in Schenectady to document the effects of institutionalized racism on the ecology of urban forests and found that higher-rated neighborhoods have more trees and greater species diversity than redlined neighborhoods.

“Redlining and the Impacts of Environmental Racism in Syracuse”

Lemir Teron, PhD – *Associate Professor, Howard University*

Dr. Lemir Teron will present on redlining in Syracuse and the lasting impacts of environmental racism on the city’s communities. Twentieth-century urban planning and development was often at the expense of racially marginalized communities, with impacts particularly devastating for majority Black neighborhoods. Syracuse is no exception. Development policy including redlining—targeting neighborhoods for disinvestment and informed destructive land-use planning—unevenly exposed communities to a host of unwanted features and laid the policy foundation for interstate siting, which consequently informs contemporary environmental threats. As postindustrial Syracuse reimagines itself with the impending razing of Interstate 81, there is potential for the city’s ecological, economic, health, and moral rehabilitation—if environmental and restorative justice are centered.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

Presentation and Tour Details

CONCURRENT SESSIONS G, H, AND I

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session G (Anteroom)

“Research Updates from the Forest Health Research Lab”

Amanda Dillon – *Lab Manager, DEC*

The Forest Health Research Lab at DEC does research on forest health pests and pathogens, diagnostics and identification of specimens, and much more! Several published papers have come from the lab and its staff. New lab manager Amanda Dillon will present on the lab and its current research and news.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Science: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session H (Governor B)

“Tree City USA – A Field Manual”

Leanna Nugent – *Community Forestry Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension (CCE) of Onondaga County*

CCE’s Community Forestry Network aims to support communities as they create and grow their urban forestry programs, especially through gaining Tree City USA status. As part of a grant from DEC’s Urban Forestry Program, CCE Onondaga developed the Tree City USA field guide. In this presentation, Leanna Nugent will introduce the Tree City USA program, review the field guide, and provide ideas for helping your community start or grow an urban forestry program.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

10:15–11:00 a.m. | Session I (Chambers)

“Overcoming Obstacles to Equitable Tree Planting”

Panel discussion with **Lemir Teron, PhD** – *Associate Professor, Howard University*; **Betsy Henry, PhD** – *President, ReTree Schenectady*; **Kate Littlefield** – *Program Manager, Onondaga Earth Corps*; and **Kathryn McKenzie** – *Former Newburgh Environmental Justice Fellow and Board Member, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy*

Panelists will discuss challenges, including outreach, site identification, and infrastructure, that impact the success of tree planting initiatives in under-resourced neighborhoods, along with methods to improve infrastructure—such as site rehabilitation and remediation.

Credits available: CNLP: 0.75; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 0.75; SAF: 0.5

CLOSING SESSION

11:05 a.m.–12:00 p.m. | Governor A

“Women in Urban Forestry: Today and Tomorrow”

Panel discussion with **Fiona Watt** – *Division of Lands and Forests Director and State Forester, DEC*; **Danielle Gift** – *Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager, Northeast, USDA Forest Service*; **Lori Brockelbank** – *Area Manager, Davey Resource Group*; and **Jeanne Grace** – *City Forester, City of Ithaca*

Moderator: Gloria Van Duyne, *Program Coordinator – DEC UCF Program*

In this closing panel, we’ll highlight the careers of several prominent women in urban forestry and where urban forestry is going as it finally gains the spotlight for its role in climate mitigation and public health.

Credits available: CNLP: 1.0; ISA Certified Arborist, Municipal Specialist, and BCMA – Management: 1.0; SAF: 1.0

Speaker Bios

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

Keynote

Leslie Berckes – Executive Director, UCFS

Leslie Berckes is the Executive Director of UCFS, the professional membership home for people who make daily tree stewardship decisions in communities across the world. She previously served as the Director of Programs for Trees Forever, a Midwest-based nonprofit, and has extensive urban forestry experience that includes volunteer management, planting and tree care logistics, and municipal tree contract management. Leslie is an ISA Certified Arborist and holds a master's degree in public policy—with an Environmental Policy emphasis—and a bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Northern Iowa.

Closing Panelists

Lori Brockelbank – Area Manager, Davey Resource Group

Lori Brockelbank has been involved in the arboriculture industry for 17 years, previously working as a forester for 8 years. She is a Certified Arborist, a Municipal Specialist, is Tree Risk Assessment Qualified (TRAQ), and in the past year became a Registered Consulting Arborist.

Lori holds a bachelor's degree in natural resources from SUNY ESF and an associate's degree in social sciences from Jamestown Community College. She attended the Municipal Forestry Institute in 2008 and has attended ISA Leadership workshops.

Beyond her passion for trees and plants, Lori enjoys working on her 160-year-old cider mill estate, cooking, hiking, working out in her gym, travel, and spending time with her boys.

Danielle Gift – Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager, Northeast, USDA Forest Service

Danielle Gift is the USDA Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Program Manager for the northeastern U.S. (New York State plus New England). Prior to her role with the Forest Service, she was the NYC Area Manager for Davey Resource Group and served in several roles in the Central Forestry division of the NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, where she started her career. She earned a Bachelor of Science in Forestry from Northern Arizona University and her Master of Science in Forestry and Forest Products, with an interest area in urban forestry, from Virginia Tech. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking, hiking, traveling, and choral singing. Since moving to New England from Queens, she has taken up bird watching (hard to miss the 20 turkeys who live in the back 40 and red-winged blackbirds who swoop about the trees) and cold-water dipping (it's not swimming and it's not plunging— it's dipping!) in the Atlantic Ocean.

Jeanne Grace – City Forester, City of Ithaca

Jeanne Grace has worked as City Forester for the City of Ithaca for 14 years. She previously worked on the Asian Longhorned Beetle Eradication Program in NYC. She holds a Bachelor of Science from SUNY ESF and a Master of Science in Horticulture from Cornell University. She is a certified Arborist, a Tree Risk Assessment Qualified (TRAQ) Arborist, and a DEC-licensed pesticide applicator.

Fiona Watt – Division Director, Lands and Forests, DEC

Fiona Watt is the New York State Forester and the Director of DEC's Division of Lands and Forests. Prior to joining DEC, Fiona served in various leadership positions at NYC Parks and Recreation including Assistant Commissioner of Forestry, Horticulture, and Natural Resources, and Senior Advisor to the Deputy Commissioner for the Environment. With more than two decades of experience as a leader in urban forestry and natural resource



management, Fiona has been on the forefront of urban conservation, stewardship engagement, and nature-based sustainability projects. At DEC, Fiona is responsible for the protection and management of approximately 5 million acres of State-owned lands and private land conservation easements, in addition to programs that address private forest owner assistance, urban and community forestry, forest health and stewardship, wood utilization and marketing, climate forestry, and open space land acquisition.

Speakers

Josh Behounek – Business Development Manager, Davey Resource Group

Josh Behounek is a Business Development Manager for the Davey Resource Group's Environmental Consulting division, although a better title might be "Theoretical Arborist." Josh has worked for Davey for more than 20 years and currently focuses on providing innovative and technical solutions for communities, nonprofits, commercial clients, and state agencies, throughout the US and internationally, to proactively and sustainably manage their trees and other natural resources. He has worked as a traveling inventory arborist, climbing arborist, an adjunct professor, and has held numerous volunteer positions in local, regional, state, and national nonprofit organizations.

Josh graduated from Southern Illinois University Carbondale with a Bachelor of Science in Forestry Resource Management, is a Certified Arborist Municipal Specialist with Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ), a graduate of the Society of Municipal Arborist's Municipal Forestry Institute, and has hugged dozens of national champion trees.

Kenneth Brooks – Assistant Director, Community Fathers Inc.

Kenneth Brooks leads Schenectady's Summer Tree Planting Collaborative, which employs and trains youth in tree planting, tree stewardship, and community engagement. The Collaborative includes the City of Schenectady, ReTree Schenectady, and Schenectady County Connects (the county's job training agency). Under Kenneth's leadership, the Schenectady youth have planted 250 trees in the past three years in Schenectady neighborhoods with low tree diversity and abundance. The plantings include shade and fruit trees in parks, tree lawns, and backyards.

Jeff Corbin, PhD – Professor of Biological Sciences, Union College

Jeff Corbin is a Professor of Biological Sciences at Union College. His research focuses on the ecological impacts of invasive plants and how we can restore habitats that have been degraded by human activities. He is President of the Board of the Friends of the Albany Pine Bush, and a member of the Town of Niskayuna's Tree Council.



Amanda Dillon – Lab Manager, DEC

Amanda Dillon recently joined DEC as a Research Scientist in the Division of Lands and Forests. Dillon earned her Bachelor of Science in Natural History and Interpretation and Master of Science in Environmental Forest Biology with a focus in entomology from SUNY ESF. She worked 12 years as the Field Ecologist and Entomologist at the Albany Pine Bush Preserve before joining DEC as the Lab Manager at the Forest Health Diagnostics Lab. She is looking forward to continuing ecological research across New York State and learning how an ecosystem approach to forest health can help us build resilience to threats like climate change and novel species invasions.

Speaker Bios

Paul Fahr – Secretary, City of Watervliet Tree Committee

Paul Fahr first got involved with landscaping and plants as a building and grounds committee member at the Immaculate Heart of Mary Church and Parish Center in 2010. He joined the City of Watervliet's Tree Committee in 2018 as the secretary, and opened his own landscaping and lawn care company in 2018.

Betsy Henry, PhD – President, ReTree Schenectady

Betsy Henry has led ReTree Schenectady for 25-plus years. The nonprofit, all-volunteer organization has planted over 3,000 trees during that time with the help of hundreds of volunteers and financial support from DEC, the City of Schenectady, National Grid, and private donations. More recently, Betsy has focused on the Schenectady Summer Tree Planting Collaborative with Community Fathers and other agencies (250 trees planted in environmental justice areas in the past three years) and on working with the City of Schenectady to implement its 2022 Community Forest Management Plan. Betsy has a Bachelor of Science in Agronomy from Colorado State University and a PhD in Environmental Engineering from Harvard University. She is a Principal Scientist at Anchor QEA, a national environmental consulting firm specializing in remediation, restoration, resilience, and revitalization.



Deb Hilbert, PhD – Owner, Many Trees Consulting, and Assistant Professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry, SUNY ESF

Dr. Deborah “Deb” Hilbert is an urban tree scientist, strategist, and educator. She is the owner of Many Trees Consulting, a collaborator at the University of Florida's Urban Tree and Landscape Management Lab, and the new Assistant Professor of Arboriculture and Urban Forestry at SUNY ESF (beginning in August). She conducts research on many topics, including urban forest tree diversity, urban tree establishment and survival, tree planting space recommendations, and urban forest canopy assessments. She is the past president of the Arboricultural Research and Education Academy, and is an ISA Certified Arborist, is Tree Risk Assessment Qualified (TRAQ), and is trained in the Quantified Tree Risk Assessment system. If she is not thinking about trees, she is probably reading science fiction, gardening, or trying out a new cuisine.

Scott Kellogg, PhD – Educational Director, Radix Center

Scott Kellogg is the Educational Director at the Radix Ecological Sustainability Center, an urban ecological literacy and just sustainability advocacy organization in Albany (www.radixcenter.org). The Radix Center operates a one-acre demonstration site of sustainable tools and technologies including bioshelters, aquaponics, community composting, honeybees, microlivestock, and urban agroforestry in conjunction with its youth Ecojustice Associate team. Scott has a PhD in Science and Technology Studies from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (RPI), and a Master of Science in Environmental Science from Johns Hopkins University. He teaches at Bard College in the Master's in Environmental Education program. Scott is Chair of Urban Agriculture in Albany's Sustainability Advisory Committee. He is author of the books *Toolbox for Sustainable City Living: A Do-It-Ourselves Guide* (South End Press, 2008) and *Urban Ecosystem Justice: Strategies for Ecological Literacy and Equitable Sustainability in the City* (Routledge, 2021).



Speaker Bios

Kathy Lawrence – Board Chair, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy

Kathy is the founding Board Chair of the Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy and runs Newburgh's Environmental Justice Fellowship Program. A leader in the fields of sustainable agriculture and food justice for over 30 years, she advises the Antibiotic Resistance Action Center at the George Washington on Accountability in Antibiotics and national multi-sector collaboration to combat antibiotic resistance in animal agriculture. Kathy was Co-founder and Senior Director for School Food Focus, a national collaborative that leveraged the knowledge and procurement power of large districts to make school meals across the country more healthful, regionally sourced, and sustainably produced. Prior, she initiated and taught students in the Chinese language program at the Storm King School, after serving for five years as Executive Director of the National Campaign for Sustainable Agriculture. Kathy is leading the Conservancy's efforts to prioritize equity, enhance parks and replace the 4,000 trees Newburgh has lost in recent decades.

Kathy holds a BA in East Asian Languages and Culture from the University of Kansas and a Master of International Affairs, Economic and Political Development, from Columbia University.

Kate Littlefield – Program Manager, Onondaga Earth Corps

Kate Littlefield is currently Project Manager at Onondaga Earth Corps (a not-for-profit Urban Conservation Corps located in Syracuse). They have a background in Forestry, Arboriculture, Natural Resources Management, Landscape Architecture, and Engineering, and have been in the environmental field for 13 years.

Kate passionately believes that everyone should get to experience nature in a way that is comfortable, comprehensible, and exciting. While the combination of skills and knowledge they



have developed set them up for large-scale land management, they enjoy focusing that energy into caring for the mosaic of parks and green spaces throughout Syracuse with people and nature in mind.

Allison Malatesta – Union College, Class of 2024

Allison is a recent graduate of Union College in Schenectady with a bachelor's degree in biological sciences. She took an Urban Ecology course during a term abroad in Brisbane, Australia, that sparked her interest in the interaction of people's socioeconomic status and their surrounding urban ecosystem. That experience led to her senior thesis research about the ecological impacts of redlining on the street-tree population in Schenectady. This project was of personal interest as she grew up in Niskayuna, a suburb of Schenectady that was mostly born in the 1940s as a "white" community, set apart from the more diverse city of Schenectady. Allison plans to continue work in the field of ecology.



Jonathon Marr – Union College, Niskayuna Tree Board

Jonathon Marr is a Union College Professor of Physics and Astronomy with a great interest in preserving trees. He joined the Niskayuna Tree Council in 2020 and became chair in 2023.



Speaker Bios

Kathryn McKenzie – Former Environmental Justice Fellow and Board Member, Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy

Kathryn McKenzie is a dancer turned environmentalist and researcher who grew up in the City of Newburgh.

After rediscovering her love of nature through her dad's garden, she followed her passion for plants and her community into the Newburgh Environmental Justice Fellowship Program in 2021. Kathryn currently serves on the Greater Newburgh Parks Conservancy Board of Directors and the Newburgh Arts and Cultural Commission and is pursuing an M.P.S. in Environmental Leadership, Justice, and Communication at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. She holds a B.A. in Dance from Hunter College.



Eliot Nagele – New Jersey Director of Lands, The Nature Conservancy

Eliot currently serves as the Director of Lands for The Nature Conservancy's (TNC) New Jersey Chapter, where he oversees Land Protection and Preserve Stewardship, working to ensure the protection of climate resilient lands and the development of safe, accessible, and biodiverse preserves. Prior to joining TNC, Eliot oversaw the management of the Thain Family Forest in the Bronx and led regional coalitions focused on invasive species management and forest monitoring. He has also worked with the U.S. Forest Service, NYC Department of Environmental Protection, and Rutgers University's New Jersey Agriculture Experiment Station Cooperative Extension. Eliot holds a Master of Forestry degree from Yale University and a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Planning and Design from Rutgers.



Leanna Nugent – Community Forestry Educator, Cornell Cooperative Extension Onondaga County

Leanna Nugent is the Community Forestry Educator for CCE of Onondaga County. She is ISA Certified and Tree Risk Assessment Qualified (TRAQ). Leanna started her urban forestry career as a forester for NYC Department of Parks & Recreation, and she now teaches tree planting and maintenance classes through CCE Onondaga and assists local municipalities in their community forestry programs.

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

Dr. Clara Pregitzer is the Deputy Director of Conservation Science at The Natural Areas Conservancy. She has over a decade of ecological research experience in New York City, including leading field surveys in over 10,000 acres of natural areas and spearheading efforts to understand the impacts of climate change on urban natural areas. She works closely with 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.



Lemir Teron, PhD – Associate Professor, Howard University

Lemir Teron is an associate professor at Howard University in the Department of Earth, Environment and Equity. He holds a PhD in Energy and Environmental Policy from the University of Delaware. His work is committed to advancing public science and environmental justice, with research interests focused on energy policy, urban and community forestry, and community health.

Dr. Teron serves on the NYS Climate Impacts Assessment Energy Workgroup and is a Member Scholar at the Center for Progressive Reform. You can learn more about his work at UnlearnPower.org.

Conference Coordinator

Christina McLaughlin is the DEC UCF Program's Partnership Coordinator and in this role oversees the New York ReLeaf Program. She coordinates the annual conference and outreach and education efforts for urban forestry. She started with DEC in 2016 as an environmental educator and joined the agency's UCF Program in 2019. Prior to joining DEC, Christina was an Analytical Chemist in Pharmaceutical Research and then Education and Outreach Coordinator for the Huyck Preserve and Biological Research Station in Rensselaerville, where she started as a Student Conservation Association intern. She has a Bachelor of Science in Zoology from SUNY Oswego and a Master of Science in Biodiversity Conservation and Policy from the University at Albany, where her thesis was on public knowledge of invasive species. She is a 2024 graduate of the Green Communities Leadership Institute.



Be in the Know!

- Be the first to hear about upcoming events, subscribe to the DEC monthly newsletter by visiting <https://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 the NYS Urban Forestry Council’s monthly newsletter, “Taking Root,” by clicking the subscribe link on the right-hand side at www.nysufc.org.
- Learn more about urban forestry in New York State by visiting <https://on.ny.gov/DECurbanforestry>.



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