

# Dept. of Natural Resources: 2026 Wisconsin Urban Forestry Award winners announced

Posted on Thursday, Feb 26, 2026

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**MADISON, Wis.** – The Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council recently announced its annual awards honoring those dedicated to protecting, preserving and increasing the number of trees that line city streets, fill community parks and beautify neighborhoods throughout the state.

The [Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council](#) advises the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) on managing urban and community forest resources.

“Those who advocate for and work toward improving Wisconsin’s urban forests can often go overlooked,” said Linda Cadotte, Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council Chair. “With these awards, we aim to highlight just a few of the dedicated leaders who have made an outstanding contribution to urban forestry today to help ensure a healthy and resilient tree canopy tomorrow.”

This year’s recipients were announced at the 2026 Wisconsin Arborist Association – DNR Urban Forestry Conference and will be recognized at an event of their choosing in their community. This year, there were five winners in four categories.

## Leadership Award

*The Leadership Award recognizes an individual or elected official at the county or local level of government who has made an outstanding recent contribution to urban forestry in Wisconsin.*

- **Tom Jerow** has served as the Rhinelander City Forester for several years.

Among his many accomplishments, highlights include establishing and chairing an Urban Forestry Tree Board, securing over \$300,000 in urban forestry grants and donations, establishing a cost-sharing program for private property plantings and leading numerous education and outreach events. These accomplishments would be impressive for any full-time employee, but Tom has done all of this as an unpaid volunteer.

- **Jeremy Kane** has taken the Urban Tree Alliance from a small nonprofit to a recognized leader in nonprofit urban forestry efforts over the last decade. Through projects like the Madison Tree Canopy project, Community Housing canopy partnerships and, most recently, the Neighborhood Forests project, where he has teamed up with community groups such as EcoLatinos to plant trees in low-canopy neighborhoods, with over 1,000 trees planted and growing! He has presented innumerable tree workshops for schools and community organizations and actively shares his perspective as a member of Dane County's Tree Canopy Collaborative.

## **Next Gen Award**

*The Next Gen Award recognizes an organization or individual working to inspire and educate the next generation of citizens engaged with their urban forests through projects, activities and a variety of additional contributions.*

- **David Miller**, botany teacher and high school Rotary Club advisor, spearheaded a school district reforestation initiative in Sheboygan after losing over 300 ash trees to emerald ash borer. He actively engaged high school students to complete a comprehensive tree inventory across all school campuses, identify optimal planting sites, collaborate with other organizations and lead volunteer events. To date, these efforts have resulted in planting and support for approximately 300 trees on six campuses with a focus on diversity and sustainability. One noteworthy outcome has been to offer students a direct personal role in combating climate change and global warming through community urban reforestation.

## **Project Partnership Award**

*The Project Partnership Award recognizes outstanding projects that utilize partnerships as a means of providing services or benefits to the urban forest.*

- **Sweet Water (Southeastern Wisconsin Watersheds Trust Inc.),**

**Mequon Nature Preserve, Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District and Molson Coors** engaged more than 180 corporate volunteers to plant over 1,000 native trees in just two hours. This single-day effort will capture an estimated 600,000 gallons of stormwater annually, reduce localized flooding and improve downstream water quality. The event also served as an outdoor classroom by educating participants about sustainable planting, soil health and the interconnectedness of corporate responsibility and watershed health. Through this initiative, and numerous other projects, Sweet Water continues to demonstrate how science, partnership and shared stewardship can produce tangible, lasting results for both people and the environment.

## **Innovation Award**

*The Innovation Award recognizes the creativity, commitment and success of urban forestry efforts.*

- **The Lake Michigan Bird Observatory** has partnered with several municipalities on a unique biochar project. Thanks to the work led by Joanna Demas and Mabel Kirst, over 4,000 pounds of biochar have been produced. Biochar is a type of charcoal that acts like a sponge to hold water and can be enriched with nutrients. When used as a soil amendment, it slowly releases water and nutrients that can be taken up by the tree and potentially improve its health. Nearly 300 treatment trees have been planted with biochar, and over 100 control trees have been planted without biochar. Ongoing monitoring will determine the effect biochar has on these trees and will provide valuable information that could be used to improve the canopy throughout the state.

Learn more about the Wisconsin Urban Forestry Council annual awards, see previous winners and nominate your community tree champion on the [DNR website](#). The deadline for 2027 nominees is Oct. 31, 2026.