CONNECTICUT
Tree Warden Practices

Results of the 1991 Survey

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Robert M. Ricard
Associate Extension Educator
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Connecticut Tree Warden Practices: Results of the 1991 Survey

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Cover photo: Members of the Tree Wardens' Association of Connecticut, Inc., during a workshop on hazard tree assessment.

Photo credit: Linda K. Kehoe
BACKGROUND

In 1988, three cooperating agencies - the University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System (CES), the University of Connecticut Department of Natural Resources Management and Engineering, and the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection Division of Forestry (DEP) - surveyed 63 Connecticut communities that had 500 and 4,000 people per square mile. A letter and/or phone call went to "...the individual in town who is responsible for shade and street trees."

The 1988 survey demonstrated what many believed: Few towns possessed the financial and technical resources to properly replant, care, and manage their community forest resource. This survey illustrated the extent to which Connecticut's urban and community forests were undermanaged, if managed at all, and that there was a critical need to educate those who are responsible.

Based, in part, on these results, the Connecticut Urban Forest Council (hereafter referred to as the Council) was formed, an urban forester position was created within the DEP, and CES committed itself to urban and community forestry education. In addition, an annual state urban and community forest conference and tree warden workshops were instituted.

NEEDS ASSESSMENT OF TREE WARDENS

To provide the support and educational opportunities appropriate and needed by Connecticut's tree wardens, board members of the Connecticut Urban Forest Council advised the CES urban and community forester to conduct a needs assessment survey prior to any further program developments. As a result, the CES urban and community forester developed a set of survey goals as follows:

• Establish a broad base of information on skill and interest level for managing their community forests by tree wardens.

• Gather information that will help guide urban and community forestry educators in developing training programs and print material for tree wardens.

• Act on recommendations specified in the survey not previously anticipated by urban forestry educators.
METHODS

A survey was sent to all tree wardens on the 1990 mailing list. CES personnel telephoned all town offices to verify the name and address of tree wardens for each specific location. A cover letter (Appendix A) was sent to each tree warden along with one four page survey form (Appendix B). The surveys were returned to the Haddam Cooperative Extension Office and compiled.

All questions resulted in categorical data and required only simple descriptive statistical analysis. Data was entered in ASCII code and statistical analysis was performed using SYSTAT, a statistical software program for personal computers.

The survey was developed, disseminated, compiled, and analyzed by the CES urban and community forester. Date collection began in November 1991. Analysis was completed by spring of 1992.
RESULTS

Tree Warden Profile

Survey results demonstrate that Connecticut's tree wardens are a diverse mix of professionals and volunteers from all walks of life. Out of the 178 surveys mailed out, 76 were returned (42%). Of these 66% of the tree wardens indicated that they were municipal employees. For those people listing themselves as municipal employees, 10 job titles were listed (figure 1). Public works directors make up the majority (41%) of municipal job titles followed by first selectmen (15%) and Parks Superintendents (13%)

Figure 1. Positions listed by responding tree wardens who indicated that they were municipal employees.
Connecticut tree wardens have resided, on the average, for 41 years (range 1 to 89 years) in the state. The majority of respondents poses a college degree or degrees (67%). Of these one had an associate degree, 25 had a bachelor's degree, and 9 had master’s degrees. Of the 30 people responding, disciplines included the following (number reporting in brackets):

- Engineering (11)
- Horticulture (3)
- Business administration (2)
- Environmental biology (2)
- Agricultural economics (1)
- Recreation (1)
- Forestry (3)
- Public administration (3)
- Plant science (2)
- Education (1)
- Public health (1)

**Tree Warden Work**

Clearly most tree wardens responding consider tree maintenance and/or removal as their most important function. The task considered most important by 29% of the tree wardens responding was tree removal, while 27% stated that hazard tree evaluation was the most important function. The seven other most important tasks are included in figure 2 and the second most important tasks performed are illustrated in figure 3.

![Pie chart showing tree warden duties](image)

**Figure 2.** Percentages of the most important duties reported by responding tree wardens.
Figure 3. Percentages of the second most important duties reported by tree wardens.

Similarly to what tree wardens consider to be their most important responsibilities, hazard tree assessment was the task 33% of the respondents spend most of their time on while tree removal occupies the most time for 22% of the respondents. 20% of the respondents indicated matters pertaining to utility tree work was most important (figure 4).

Figure 4. Percentages of the tasks tree wardens spend the most time on.
Community Tree Programs

It is evident that few municipalities in Connecticut have well funded and equipped urban and community forestry programs. The respondents indicated that tree ordinances were in place in the communities in 23% of the respondents, 26% have municipally funded tree replacement programs (average total spent for these towns was $2,140), 12% had any form of a tree inventory, and town maintenance crews were trained in tree care in 28% of the communities represented in this survey.

A major task of Connecticut's tree wardens is the interaction of municipal government and the public utilities regarding tree maintenance and electrical supply along municipal roads. The majority of respondents (81%) indicated they were satisfied with the utility line tree maintenance performed in their community. Slightly more than half (58%) issue a "blank" permit for utility line tree maintenance and the majority of respondents do actively supervise and/or inspect the work of utility line maintenance crews; 35% of the respondents, however, indicated that they do not inspect and/or supervise such practices.

Less than half (40%) of the respondents indicated that there are volunteer tree groups in their community. Of this 40%, 83% indicated that they work closely with these groups. In addition slightly more than half (53%) of the respondents indicated that local businesses had funded tree planting and/or maintenance projects during the past 10 years.

The majority of respondents (76%) indicated that it was not a conflict of interest if a tree warden works for a municipal department.

Continuing Education

Almost half (47%) of the responding tree wardens attended at least one tree warden workshop in the three years prior to the survey. Of those attending 85% indicated that the workshops helped increase their tree warden skills and knowledge.

More than half (60%) belonged to associations or organizations that help them in their capacity as tree wardens. Most, however, do not belong to groups that provided tree related educational programs and/or publications. Only 20% of those who belong to such organizations indicated they belong to the Connecticut Tree Protective Association, 5% belong to the International Society of Arboriculture, and 7% belong to the Society of American Foresters.

Certificates and/or licenses were in the possession of 49% of the respondents. Of these, 45% (25% of respondents) indicated they possessed a Connecticut arborist license.
Connecticut Tree Law

When asked if they believed existing state laws (Appendix C) were adequate in helping tree wardens protect, care for, and maintain the trees in their communities, 77% of the respondents answered yes.

However, when asked if they would like to see the state statutes changed to require continuing education and training of tree wardens, 72% of the respondents indicated that they agreed. Only half of the respondents indicated they wanted the statutes to be changed to require the licensing and/or professional accreditation of tree wardens. A little more than half (58%) wanted to see the state statutes changed to require municipalities to adopt specific ordinances for tree protection.

State Tree Warden Organization

The importance and acceptability of a state-wide tree warden association was clearly evident. A majority (87%) of respondents indicated they would join a Connecticut tree wardens association if one was established. 84% indicated that such an organization would help them carry out their tree warden responsibilities. Respondents indicated that if a state tree warden organization was created, tree warden and community education should be the organization’s primary mission. Social interaction was also considered to be an important function for such an organization by 61% of the respondents.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that there is commitment on the part of Connecticut’s tree wardens to act on behalf of their community trees and to serve the public. It is also clear that Connecticut’s tree wardens have, to date, lacked available educational opportunities to improve their job performance as they pertain to tree care and public policy. Whereas some tree wardens have forestry, horticulture and/or arboricultural training, many do not. In addition, most work in isolation from tree wardens in other municipalities and are unaware of the existence of professionals and volunteers, experiencing similar problems and successes.

Therefore, based on this survey and analysis, it is recommended that the following be instituted:

1. Create a tree wardens association to provide educational and social opportunities to and a voice on behalf of Connecticut’s tree wardens.

2. Conduct at least two tree warden educational seminars per year.
3. Integrate tree wardens into other urban and community forestry organizations, ventures, and programs, such as the Connecticut Urban Forest Council, the Meskwaka Tree Project, and the annual state conference.

4. Increase public awareness of the roles and responsibilities of Connecticut's tree wardens to the general public.

5. Increase communication and cooperation between the public utilities, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, and municipal tree wardens on a local and state-wide basis.
APPENDIX A
SURVEY COVER LETTER TO TREE WARDENS
December 1991

Dear tree warden,

Enclosed please find a new fact sheet entitled Appointment, Powers And Duties of Connecticut's Tree Wardens. This fact sheet was written to help you better perform your duties as tree warden.

You will also find enclosed the 1991 Tree Warden Questionnaire. Please take a moment and complete this and return it in the self-addressed envelope enclosed. This information will help urban and community forestry educators provide you with essential tree maintenance educational workshops, programs, and materials.

The University of Connecticut Cooperative Extension System in cooperation with the Connecticut Urban Forest Council is also assisting interested tree wardens in organizing and establishing the Connecticut Tree Warden Association. If you would like to participate in and/or stay informed of this historical event, you should complete this questionnaire.

Your cooperation and assistance is essential. In Connecticut, tree wardens are often the most knowledgeable and interested urban and community forestry participants. And in recent years interest in urban and community forestry has significantly increased. Across the country government, corporations and private citizens have joined to reforest our communities and care for trees along our streets, in our parks, and around our homes, schools, and buildings.

I hope you will do your part and complete the 1991 Tree Warden Questionnaire and also become an active participant in establishing the Connecticut Tree Warden Association.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Robert M. Ricard
Cooperative Extension Educator in Residence
Urban and Community Forestry

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APPENDIX B
THE 1991 CONNECTICUT TREE WARDEN QUESTIONNAIRE
The 1991 CONNECTICUT TREE WARDEN QUESTIONNAIRE

PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF...

Your name______________________________________
Work address____________________________________
Town or city______________________________________ Zip________________

Home address____________________________________
Town or city______________________________________ Zip________________
Home phone______________ Work phone____________________

1. In what city or town do you serve as tree warden?____________________________________

2. In what year were you appointed tree warden in your community?________________________

3. Are you a town or city employee (circle one)?
   YES  NO
   If yes, what is your position?________________________
   If no, what is your profession?_______________________

4. What is your most important duty as tree warden?_____________________________________

5. What is your second most important duty as tree warden?______________________________

6. What task do you spend most of your time on?________________________________________

7. How many years have you resided in Connecticut?____________________________________

8. How many years have you resided in the town you serve?______________________________

9. Have you attended any tree warden workshops during the past three years (circle one) YES  NO
   If yes, how many?______________

10. Have these tree warden workshops helped increase your skills and knowledge (circle one)?  YES  NO
PLEASE TELL US ABOUT YOUR COMMUNITIES’ TREE CARE EFFORTS...

1. Does your town or city have a street tree ordinance (circle one)?
   YES   NO

2. Does your town have a tree replacement program (circle one)?
   YES   NO
   If yes, what is the annual budget? $________________
   How many trees were planted in 1990?______________

3. Does your town have a tree inventory (circle one)?
   YES   NO
   If yes, how is it maintained (circle choice(s)):
   computer card file map other____________________

4. How much money from the annual municipal budget is devoted to tree care? $__________

5. Are town maintenance crews trained in tree care (circle one)?
   YES   NO

6. Are you satisfied with the utility line tree maintenance performed
   in your community (circle one)?
   YES   NO
   Please elaborate_________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________
   _________________________________________________________

7. Do you issue a "blank" permit for utility line
   tree maintenance (circle one)?
   YES   NO

8. Do you supervise and/or inspect utility line maintenance crews when
   they perform work in your community (circle one)?
   YES   NO

9. Is there a volunteer citizen tree group in your city or town that is active in
   tree planting and maintenance (circle one)?
   YES   NO
   If yes, what is the organization?
   Who is the chief contact for this organization (name)?
   What is their address?
   What is their phone number?
   Do you work closely with this group (circle one)?
   YES   NO
   Why or why not?_________________________________________
10. Have local businesses or corporations funded tree planting and/or maintenance projects during the past ten years (circle one)?
   YES    NO
   If yes, provide company names and explain what they did:______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

**PLEASE COMMENT ON THE CONNECTICUT STATUTES RELATED TO TREE WARDEN DUTIES...**


1. Do you believe existing state laws are adequate in helping you protect, care for and maintain the trees in your community (circle one)?
   YES    NO

2. Would you like to see the state statutes changed to require:
   a. the continuing education and training of tree wardens (circle one)?
      YES    NO
   b. professional accreditation for and/or licensure of tree wardens (circle one)?
      YES    NO
   c. municipalities to adopt specific ordinances for tree protection (circle one)?
      YES    NO

3. Is it a conflict of interest if the tree warden works for a municipal department (circle one)?
   YES    NO
   Please elaborate:______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

**THE CONNECTICUT TREE WARDEN ASSOCIATION...**

1. If developed, would you join the Connecticut Tree Warden Association (circle one)?
   YES    NO

2. Do you believe a Connecticut Tree Warden Association (CTWA) would help you carry out your tree warden responsibilities (circle one)?
   YES    NO
3. What would you like a CTWA to do:
   Tree warden education (circle one)? YES NO
   Community education (circle one)? YES NO
   Provide opportunities for Connecticut tree wardens to meet regularly (circle one)? YES NO
   Other

4. Would you be willing to help to organize the
   CTWA beginning in early 1992 (circle one)? YES NO
   If yes, would you be willing to serve as an
   officer or board director (circle one)? YES NO

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

1. Do you possess a college degree or degrees (circle one)? YES NO
   If yes, what are your degrees and in what disciplines?

2. Do you possess professional certificates
   and/or licenses (circle one)? YES NO
   If yes, what are they for?

3. Do you belong to any associations or organizations that help you
   in your capacity as tree warden (circle one)? YES NO
   If yes, what are they?

Please add any additional comments on the back of this sheet. Thank you.

* * *

This survey was developed by:
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APPENDIX C
TREE WARDEN STATE STATUTES
Sec. 23-58. Tree wardens; appointment; compensation; supervision. The selectmen of each town, except those having cities with coextensive boundaries within their limits, which cities have an officer with similar duties to those of a tree warden who in fact assumes control of all the territory embraced within their limits, and the warden or burgesses of each borough shall, within thirty days of their election, appoint a town or borough tree warden, as the case may be. Such tree wardens shall be appointed for the term of one year and until their successors are appointed and have qualified. Any tree warden may appoint such number of deputy tree wardens as he deems expedient and he may, at any time, remove them from office. A town or borough tree warden and his deputies shall receive for their services such reasonable compensation, from the town or borough, as the town or borough may determine or, in default of such determination, as the selectmen or borough warden prescribes.

History: 1965 act deleted provisions requiring report to state park and forest commission upon selection of tree warden by selectmen or burgesses or, alternatively, requiring report to town or borough if commission makes appointment upon town or borough's failure to do so, deleted provisions re compensation of tree wardens, their supervision by the commission, etc.

Law applied to city whose limits are not coextensive with those of town. 85 C. 133. A tree warden is a public officer; but if he does manual labor on trees at a separate charge, he does not then act as a public officer and if injured, comes under the workmen's compensation act. 102 C. 572.

Sec. 23-59. Powers and duties of wardens. The town or borough tree warden shall have the care and control of all trees and shrubs in whole or in part within the limits of any public road or grounds and within the limits of his town or borough, except those along state highways under the control of the commissioner of transportation and except those in public parks or grounds which are under the jurisdiction of park commissioners, and of these he shall take the care and control if so requested in writing by the park commissioners. Such care and control shall extend to such limbs, roots or parts of trees and shrubs as extend or overhang the limits of any such public road or grounds. He shall expend all funds appropriated for the setting out, care and maintenance of such trees and shrubs. He shall enforce all provisions of law for the preservation of such trees and shrubs and of roadway beauty. He shall remove or cause to be removed all illegally erected signs or advertisements, placed upon poles, trees or other objects within any public road or place under his jurisdiction. He may prescribe such regulations for the care and preservation of such trees and shrubs as he deems expedient and may provide therein for a fine not exceeding ninety dollars in any one case for the violation of such regulations; and such regulations, when approved by the selectmen or borough warden and posted on a public signpost in the town or borough, if any, or at some other exterior place near the office of the town or borough clerk, shall have the force and effect of town or borough ordinances. Whenever, in the opinion of the tree warden, the public safety demands the removal or pruning of any tree or shrub under his control, he may cause such tree or shrub to be removed or pruned at the expense of the town or borough and the selectmen or borough warden shall order paid to the person performing such work such reasonable compensation therefor as may be determined and approved in writing by the tree warden. Unless the condition of such tree or shrub constitutes an immediate public hazard, he shall, at least five days before such removal or pruning, post thereon a suitable notice stating his intention to remove or prune such tree or shrub. If any person, firm or corporation objects to such removal or pruning, he or it may appeal to the tree warden in writing, who shall hold a public hearing at some suitable time and place after giving reasonable notice of such hearing to all persons known to be interested therein and posting a notice thereof on such tree or shrub. Within three days after such hearing, the tree warden shall render his decision granting or denying the application, and the party aggrieved by such decision may, within ten days, appeal therefrom to the superior court for the judicial district within which such town or borough is located. The tree warden may, with the approval of the selectmen or borough warden, remove any trees or other plants within the limits of public highways or grounds under his jurisdiction, which are particularly obnoxious as hosts of insect or fungus pests.

History: 1965 act deleted provision that cost of hearing "shall be taxed ... as provided in section 13-12" and required that appeals be made to court of common pleas rather than to state park and forest commission; 1965 act replaced state highway commissioner with commissioner of transportation; P.A. 76-436 replaced court of common pleas with superior court and added reference to judicial districts; P.A. 78-280 deleted reference to counties; P.A. 84-146 included a reference to posting of notice on a place other than a signpost; P.A. 85-216 increased the maximum fine from twenty to ninety dollars.

Tree wardens doing this work himself, for pay, comes under workman's compensation act. 102 C. 573. Exclusive control in wardens over trees within highway, or parts thereof even though trees themselves stand on private grounds. 128 C. 674.

Cited. 26 CA 599, 600.

Exclusive control of all trees standing in whole or in part within limits of a highway is vested in town or borough tree wardens even though trees stand on private grounds. 17 CS 108.
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