

Branching Out Together: Partnerships in Urban and Community Forestry

Cummings Art Center, Conn College

Wednesday, March 18, 2026

8:00a – 8:30a Registration, Continental breakfast and visit with exhibitors

8:30a Introduction and Welcome, Annie Mixsell

8:40a – 9:20a Panel Discussion: Where Communities and Canopies Connect

Urban forestry in Connecticut is supported by a broad network of professional organizations, nonprofits, and the state Urban and Community Forestry Program, each playing distinct but complementary roles. This panel convenes leaders from across that network to examine where their missions align, how their efforts intersect, and how clearer coordination can improve outcomes statewide. Attendees will leave with a practical understanding of the urban forestry landscape in Connecticut and greater confidence in knowing who to contact for technical assistance, professional development, funding, training, or programmatic support.

Carter Peck - CT Tree Protective Association

Kelly Kerrigan - Tree Warden Association of CT

Arcadia Davies - The Nature Conservancy (CT)

Danica Doroski – CT DEEP Urban and Community Forestry

Annie Mixsell - Connecticut Urban Forest Council

Les Welker - Panel Moderator (CT DEEP Urban and Community Forestry)

9:20a – 10:50a Plenary Speaker: Trees and Law, John O'Neill

This presentation will cover a number of legal issues faced by those tasked with enforcing tree preservation laws, with a focus on the tension that arises from inarticulate or incomplete legal language. These challenges include how to define key words like "remove" and "imminent", how to manage conflicts that arise from boundary trees, and how to navigate the gap between the law and one's duty of care. This presentation will explore these concepts through an examination of case studies arising in Washington, D.C., and elsewhere.

John O'Neill has worked for the District of Columbia's Urban Forestry Division for fifteen years, where he enforces the city's tree preservation laws,

writes grants, and trains the city's staff of urban foresters. He obtained a law degree in 2019 from Georgetown University Law Center. Since 2024, he has been an instructor at the Urban and Community Forestry Society's Municipal Forestry Institute.

10:50a – 11a BREAK and visit with exhibitors

11:00a – 12:00p Rooted in Trust: Building a Resilient Workforce and Quality Canopies Together, Kayla Stuart

Building a sustainable urban forest requires more than just planting trees; it requires rooting individuals from all walks of life to be involved in the workforce. From addressing transportation hurdles to creating mentorship loops, this session challenges the myth that underserved communities lack environmental interest by highlighting the critical role of engagement, trust, and accessibility and how these can be barriers and bridges. We will also examine what constitutes a "trusted companion" to bridge the gap between intrinsic motivation and stable employment. Together, we'll look at workforce pipelines and how we can shift from a "finding labor" mentality to a "building pathways" mindset to create an industry that is as interconnected as the trees we care for.

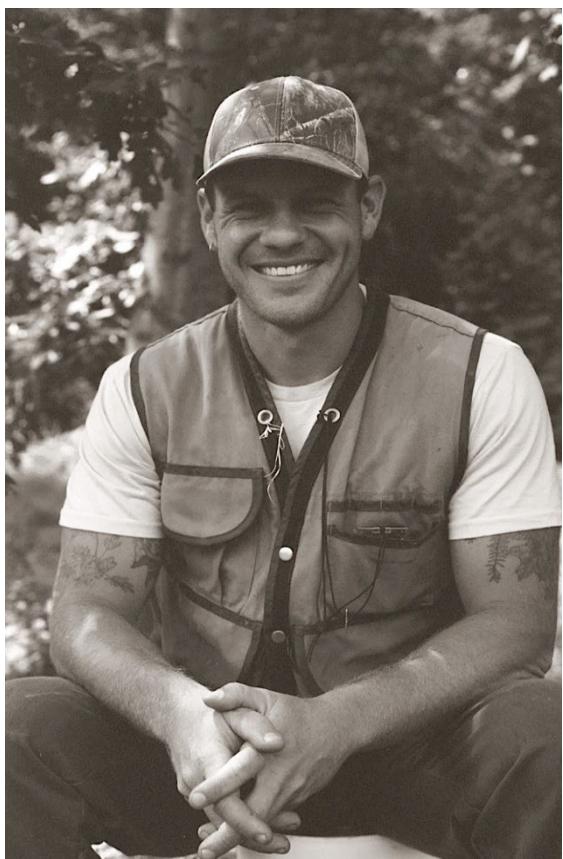
Kayla Stuart holds a Master of Science in Forestry from the University of Tennessee and is a licensed ISA Certified Arborist with a unique background in practical nursing. As the Program Director for Tree CPR and the Tennessee Champion Tree Program, she specializes in bridging the gap between urban forestry and workforce development for historically underserved communities. Her research investigates the barriers and motivations within natural resource job-readiness programs, directly informing her work to create equitable, supportive career pathways. Kayla is dedicated to building a resilient and representative workforce that can steward quality tree canopy for generations to come.

12:00p – 1:00p Lunch at Harris Dining Hall. See included map for location or follow the crowd. Students will be guiding the way along the walk.

Thank you to our Sponsors!

1:00p – 2:15p

Keynote Speaker, Ethan Tapper



Ethan Tapper is a forester, digital storyteller, and the bestselling author of [How to Love a Forest: The Bittersweet Work of Tending a Changing World](#). For more than a decade, Ethan has been recognized as a thought-leader in the world of ecosystem stewardship, winning numerous regional and national awards for his work. More recently, he has been recognized as a writer – since its publication in 2024, [How to Love a Forest](#) has been named the winner of the 2025 New England Book Award for nonfiction, and received international acclaim.

Ethan's message of relationship, responsibility and hope reaches millions of people each year through his writing, social media channels with hundreds of thousands of followers, and the hundreds of walks, talks and keynotes that he delivers across North America each year.

Ethan works, writes, hunts, birds and runs a small consulting forestry business from his home at Bear Island – his 175-acre working forest, homestead, orchard and sugarbush in Vermont – and plays in his punk band, The Bubs.

2:15p – 2:30p

Mobilize into Breakout Sessions

2:30p – 4:00p

Concurrent Sessions

Session A

Ethan Tapper Field Walk

Attendance is limited to the first 40 attendees that signed up during registration. Session A attendees have a tree sticker on their name tags. Meet outside the door to Cummings Art Center.

Session B

Decay and Level 3 Tree Risk Assessment

Assessing decay is a key component of a Level 3 Risk Assessment. During this session, Dr. Bob Marra will discuss how fungi cause decay, types of

decay, which fungi causes decay and how to identify them, and how to detect it. The second half of this session will be presented by John Wickes.

John will explore the primary types of level 3 risk assessment, including sonic tomography, resistance drilling and root collar excavation. John will discuss some background on the technology and practices, when and how they might be implemented, what data and conclusions can be derived from their use and the best practices (or in some cases, a lack thereof) associated with these tools. John will also provide a live demo of the use of the Sonic Tomograph.

Dr. Marra has expertise in plant pathology, mycology, fungal genetics, population biology, evolution, and molecular biology. While forest pathology is his principle research interest, Dr. Marra studies a range of plant pathosystems from various perspectives, including population biology, ecology, and mating system evolution. In collaboration with Dr. Wade Elmer, Dr. Marra identified a new fungal species, *Fusarium palustre*, a pathogen of the salt marsh grass, *Spartina alterniflora*, and implicated in salt marsh decline, known as Sudden Vegetation Dieback. Dr. Marra has also developed interest and expertise in the use of sonic and electrical impedance tomography to assess the internal condition of trees.

John has been continuously engaged in his field of expertise since 1980. Starting at Wickes Arborists, his family's business, as a tree climber and general tree work foreman, John gained additional experience as a plant healthcare technician and horticultural consultant. John currently serves and supports tree care operations in New York and Vermont for The Davey Tree Expert Company, as well as the Davey Institute. John is an ISA-certified arborist, certified pesticide applicator in New York and New Jersey, certified nursery professional, registered consulting arborist, has his Tree Risk Assessment Qualification, is a New Jersey-licensed tree expert, and is a Certified Tree Care Safety Professional.

4:00p – 4:15p BREAK and visit with exhibitors

4:15p – 4:45p Connecticut Notable Tree Project, Frank Kaputa

A presentation on the Connecticut Notable Project and how attendees can become involved.

4:45p Adjournment and CEUs

4:45p – 6:00p **Social Hour and Book Signing with Ethan Tapper – ALL ARE WELCOME!**

Please complete our survey!

Survey QR Code

Presented by:

