



How to Manage Community Natural Areas

TREE CITY USA®
BULLETIN

No. 27

Editor: Dr. James R. Fazio • \$3.00



Managing natural areas may sound like a contradiction of terms. But your help is needed if remnants of woodlands are to survive in the nooks and crannies of our cities and towns. These unique communities of life need protection from the inroads of development. Even more, they need active management to prevent deterioration from abuse and neglect.

Henry David Thoreau once wrote, “A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it. A township where one primitive forest waves above while another primitive forest rots below — such a town is fitted to raise not only corn and potatoes, but poets and philosophers for the coming ages.”

Philosophy aside, wooded areas in and around our communities offer practical benefits as well. They prevent soil erosion, cleanse the air, buffer noise, counter the heat-absorbing effect of buildings and pavement, and offer the kind of recreational opportunities that new industries and savvy home buyers look for in selecting a new location. They also provide a home for wildlife and can be a lifesaver for migrating birds. Woodlands are clearly an attribute, but as part of an urban forestry program, they also present a number of challenges.

One challenge is the need to gain broader public appreciation for these little strips and odd lots of nature among the concrete and asphalt of our busy society.

Another — and closely related to the first — is to ward off the invasion of development. Parcels of woods on public property are often the first to be eyed for building affordable housing, expanded parking lots, or other often-praiseworthy projects. “Underutilized land” is the term sometimes used by decision makers.

Finally, there is the question of keeping natural areas truly natural. All wooded areas offer educational, recreational, and environmental benefits to some degree. But to the ecology-minded, there is the beauty and value of fine art in seeing a forest of native vegetation function on its own through successive generations of trees and understory. This challenges the manager to first understand the ecology of the site, then root out weedy invaders, and finally, to provide a helping hand to restore the native system.



Arbor Day Foundation®

100 Arbor Avenue • Nebraska City, NE 68410