

State, Private & Tribal Forestry | Connecting People to Conserve Forests

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From Gray to Green: Growing Engagement Roots into the Future

After three years of meeting virtually, the [Los Angeles Urban Center for Natural Resources Sustainability](#) (LA Urban Center) and its partners convened for the Annual Partners Meeting themed “From Gray to Green: Growing Engagement Roots into the Future.” On June 14, over 100 partner attendees were welcomed at the Angeles National Forest Training Center in Arcadia – an urban oasis of biodiverse native and climate adapted trees and plants.

Emina Darakjy of Street Tree Seminar, Inc. described the Training Center as “the perfect venue to highlight the power and importance of the urban forest to mitigate the urban heat island effect!” According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency, the urban heat island effect “occurs when cities replace natural land cover with dense concentrations of pavement, buildings, and other surfaces that absorb and retain heat. This effect increases energy costs (e.g., for air conditioning), air pollution levels, and heat-related illness and mortality.”



Partners gathered at the rear entrance of the Angeles National Forest Supervisor Office in Arcadia at the closing of the Annual Partners Meeting. Photo courtesy of Angel Osorio.

The Forest Service Pacific Southwest Region Deputy Regional Forester, Kara Chadwick, gave opening remarks, stating, “the work we do together helps bridge gaps between equity and inclusion.”

This message was echoed by Talia Dotson, Urban Greening Community Organizer at TreePeople, during her keynote presentation titled “Community as the Final Frontier of Socio-Ecological Processes.” Dotson explored different approaches to environmental justice through the social, cultural, and economic realities of superheroes within the Marvel Universe. Shedding light onto the most scientifically and technologically advanced country in the Marvel Universe, Wakanda, Dotson noted how privilege, diversity, equity, and inclusion are at the roots of the disparity between these fictional cities. Dotson related these comic book examples to her work in southern Los Angeles, Watts, and the reality of building sustainable communities.

Later, partners engaged in different sessions with topics ranging from Next Generation Workforce, presented by Los Angeles Conservation Corps Compton Site Manager, Carlos Campero, to Funding Opportunities, presented by CAL FIRE and the Forest Service. Two sessions focused on Greening Schools, highlighting “the importance of creating green schoolyards and schoolyard forests to improve children’s well-being, learning, and playing while contributing to their communities' ecological health and climate resilience.” These sessions were led by Claire Robinson, Amigos de los Rios Executive Director and a research team from Green Schoolyards of America, Sharon Danks, Founder and CEO; Alejandra Chiesa, California State Director; and Marci Raney, Senior Program Manager in the Office of Well-Being at Children's Hospital Los Angeles.

“The Forest Service is committed to increasing our shared awareness and understanding of nature in the city,” shared Phillip Rodbell, the Urban Sustainability Research National Program Lead. The LA Urban Center’s mission is “to serve as an information and research destination hub that fosters collaboration, generates new science, delivers information and technology to aid application, and engages diverse communities and knowledge bases through shared learning.” Therefore, a listening session sought partners’ input on engaging the next generation on our work, messaging tiered to tree planting and maintenance considering extreme events (i.e. drought, floods, wildfires) and what topic areas the LA Urban Center should focus on next year.

“The Forest Service is increasing the pace and scale of work being completed through Partnerships,” stated Fabian Garcia, Angeles National Forest Partnership Coordinator. “The LA Urban Center provides the perfect venue to unite urban forestry efforts, research, and national forest restoration for the benefit and to engage the people of Los Angeles.”

To stay connected and view the recorded sessions of the 2023 LA Urban Center’s Partners Meeting, please visit the [LA Urban Center’s website](#) and subscribe to our [newsletter](#).